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A lasting alliance? On the creation, evolution, and future of NATO

Alfred van Staden¹

1. Introduction

This article serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, an attempt is made to ascertain the main determinants accounting for the birth of the Atlantic Alliance in the late 1940s as well as for the subsequent functioning of this organisation until the end of the Cold War 40 years later. What patterns of behaviour and events have favoured the cohesion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and what have undermined it? Secondly, an explanation is sought for the alleged anomaly of the Alliance's continued existence in view of the disappearance of its original *raison d'être*, i.e., the perceived threat posed by the Soviet Union. The main thrust of the argument is that the established literature on alliances (whether historical-inductive or based on rational choice assumptions) is little helpful to understand the unique character of the Western Alliance. Other theoretical perspectives such as neoliberal institutionalism, which conceives NATO as an international regime, may offer a better vantage point to analyse the Alliance's future. Indeed NATO differs from pre-World War II alliances by having built at peacetime an elaborate and complex structure of common institutions, rules and procedures tying a wide family of nations together. For that reason, to vary Mark Twain's famous words, the numerous reports on its forthcoming death may be grossly exaggerated.

Alliances can be loosely defined as co-operative arrangements in the field of military security obliging the member states to assist each other under certain circumstances. In contrast to systems of collective security the membership of alliances is limited by definition while common action is foreseen towards outside powers rather than towards one of the members. In reality, however, the difference between the two kinds of security systems may be smaller because alliances, too, can fulfil internal functions, like the peaceful settlement of disputes among member states. NATO's repeated efforts in the past to reduce the tensions between Greece and Turkey (two western allies) are a case in point. Conversely, regional systems of collective security (such

as the Organization of American States) may partly take the shape of an alliance if they also allow for action against extra-regional powers.

Since alliances deal with questions of life and death, their constitutive treaties are often the result of lengthy and difficult negotiations. K.J. Holsti (1995, p. 90) points out that negotiators of an alliance treaty are usually very cautious in defining the *casus foederis*, i.e., the situation in which mutual commitments are to become operational. The nature of the underlying political objectives are very important. Thus, treaties that have been used for offensive purposes often contained a very vague definition of the situation that would bring the alliance into operation. Other prominent issues that have to be resolved in negotiations are (1) the type of commitments to be undertaken by the future alliance partners and (2) the geographical scope of the treaty (see further below).

2. The creation of NATO

The events leading up to the outbreak of World War II illustrate the point that common perceptions of a military threat are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the making of defensive alliances. In the late 1930s the European democracies were not able to establish a credible alliance against Germany, even when the aggressive intentions of the Nazi regime had become clear. Why did they fail to do so? After the First World War alliances had lost their reputation for deterring aggression. Many politicians were firmly convinced that commitments for automatic assistance to other nations had precipitated the escalation of the 1914 crisis rather than stopped it. Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder (1990, p. 148), also referring to the previous war experience, contend that the policymakers and strategists who had lived through the trench warfare stalemates of 1914-18 believed that also new territorial conquests would be difficult and slow. Consequently, the architects of national security policy thought that they could safely stand aside at the outset of a conflict, 'waiting to intervene only if and when the initial belligerents showed signs of having exhausted themselves'.

At any rate, the calculations of Germany's major antagonists reflected a weak awareness of security interdependence. This also explains why both Britain and France made only halfhearted and disastrously ineffective attempts to form an alliance with the Soviet Union, whilst the latter country tried to have a lucky escape from the imminent confrontation by concluding a separate nonaggression treaty with Germany. The policy of appeasement, as pursued by the West European democracies, may be seen as a middle course between a policy of balancing on the one hand and a policy of bandwagoning on the other (cf. Walt 1987).

The most conspicuous feature of the postwar international system is, of course, the bipolar power structure with two rivaling superpowers in control of a large part of the military resources available in the world and uniting many nations in separate blocs under their leadership. Contrary to conventional political wisdom, the superpowers' need for allies among the lesser breeds in the international family of states is not self-evident. Thus, in making his well-known case for bipolar against multipolar systems Kenneth Waltz (1979, p. 168) postulates that in bipolar configurations the great powers balance each other by 'internal' instead of 'external' means, thus relying on their own capabilities rather than on those of allies like in multipolar systems. 'External balancing' is assumed to be less reliable and accurate than 'internal balancing' because of the inherent uncertainty about countries' willingness and ability to stick to their treaty obligations when wars break out. For this reason (and other reasons as well) a bipolar system is, according to Waltz, likely to breed more stability than a multipolar one.

If Waltz' view is correct that alliances are not essential in preserving the balance in bipolar systems, why, then, did the Truman administration decide to join the West European governments in creating the Atlantic Alliance in 1949?² Buzan (1991, pp. 281-83) offers a cogent explanation. He rightly argues that the United States, despite its initial hesitancy about getting involved in the defence of Europe, needed to defend the Old World in order to defend itself. In the American perspective the new trans-atlantic alliance was to become an instrument for the forward defence of the United States. This view also was the result of an important learning process. The Second World War had demonstrated that America's ocean buffers no longer sufficed to keep overseas enemies at bay. During the war the United States paid a high price for having adopted in the 1920s and 1930s a national defence strategy which was based on a passive, self-protecting outlook and had allowed massive threats to build up in both Europe and Asia. Consequently, the country was forced to make a huge military effort while at a dangerously disadvantageous starting-point. The lesson here was, in Buzan's words, that 'security policy needed to be outward- and forward-looking, with the United States playing an active global role to ensure that no such unfavourable conditions would arise again' (p. 281-82). A similar argument is levelled by Gaddis (1982) who holds that the American architects of the postwar policy of containment realized that the costs of military intervention after the outbreak of war were much higher than the efforts to prevent it by maintaining a military presence along the periphery of the Soviet empire. It was also recognized that attempts by the Soviet leaders to control the vast economic and human resources of Western Europe would mean a direct challenge to the position of the United States as a global power.

Whereas the principal problem for American national security in the post-

war era was to ensure that war, if it occurred, should not touch upon the home territory of the United States, the overriding interest of the West European countries was to prevent war altogether. Not only were those countries, far more than the United States, vulnerable to armed conflicts because of their close proximity to each other, but also their limited territorial size and economic strength made them subject to devastation and depletion on a large scale in case of war even before the advent of nuclear weapons (cf. Howard 1964, p. 403). Despite this marked contrast in their geostrategic position, the countries on both sides of the Atlantic were united in their common perception of the Soviet Union as the prime threat to the security of Europe. What especially tied the European countries to the United States was the idea of the American nuclear monopoly (or at least superiority) offering a deterrent capability of such magnitude as to reduce the probability of war to almost zero level.

In addition to the obvious long-term interest of both the United States and Western Europe to contain Soviet expansionism, the predictability of postwar patterns of international relations in general as well as the preponderance of power enjoyed by the United States with regard to all other Western nations are to be conceived as crucial factors contributing to the formation of NATO. The ideological rift between the democratic and communist world was of such a fundamental nature that it provided a fertile ground for the development of strong bonds of mutual allegiance and solidarity between groups of states. What is more, the prospect of American leadership raised expectations about the feasibility of effectively organizing co-operation in a political setting of sovereign states with different national outlooks and with suspicions, especially among the larger West European states, about each other's ulterior motives. As a power much greater than Britain, France, and Germany only the United States was able to pull the existential sting of their previous rivalry and to allow them to clasp hands in community (cf. Joffe 1995, p. 110). Because of the sheer weight of the United States it was almost automatically taken for granted that this country was to bear the primary responsibility for taking initiatives and for enforcing joint policies.

This is not to suggest, however, that the negotiations on the drafting of the Washington Treaty, the legal basis of the Atlantic Alliance, had been easy (cf. Ireland 1981; Kaplan 1984; Wiebes and Zeeman 1993). Two issues already referred to in the introduction required a lot of diplomatic wisdom and patience to deal with, namely the definition of the obligation for military assistance and the definition of the treaty area. The United States hesitated to include automatic commitments into the North Atlantic Treaty as it demanded some leeway to decide what to do in the case of an armed attack. It also wanted the geographical scope of the treaty area to be limited to the Eu-

ropean territories of the participating states. By contrast, the European countries pushed for accepting a so-called 'hair-trigger' clause committing the signatories to give immediate military and other help by all means at their disposal if any of them would be subject to an armed attack.³ Furthermore, the colonial powers among the allies insisted that alliance commitments extend to at least some of their overseas colonies or territories. This controversy is hardly surprising because it can be derived from the familiar discussion in the scholarly literature on the risks of respectively 'abandonment' and 'entrapment' emanating from alignments in particularly strong and weak power configurations (cf. Snyder 1984).

Being consumers rather than producers of security, weak and dependent states tend to ask for absolute security guarantees. They fear to be abandoned by their more powerful protectors when a conflict is likely to escalate and the costs of military assistance in terms of human lives and retaliatory attacks on civil targets become too high. Equally understandable, as the present discussion about the enlargement of NATO with countries from Central and Eastern Europe clearly illustrates, strong and protecting states fear to be drawn automatically into conflicts implicating one or more of the smaller powers when the supreme interests of the former may not be at stake or indeed the costs of protection outweigh the advantages. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, defining the commitments to be undertaken, is the expression of a political compromise between the American and European positions. The wording of the assistance clause is a masterpiece of calculated ambiguity since on the one hand there is an obligation to render assistance to the treaty partner (or partners) subject to an armed attack but on the other hand the type of response is at the discretion of the helping countries.⁴

The negotiations record of the North Atlantic Treaty further lends no support to corroborate one of the central propositions in coalition theory, i.e. the famous size principle. According to Riker (1962, pp. 32-33), in social situations meeting certain assumptions 'participants create coalitions just as large as they believe will ensure winning and no larger'. Following the logic of game theory he predicts that the pattern of alliances in the international system will result from two contradictory drives of states: (1) to join a winning coalition and (2) to win as much as possible. Obviously, the first aim will lead each state to prefer large alliances because they can ensure victory, whereas the second leads each state to prefer small alliances because they can provide the biggest share of whatever there is to win. The result of such contradictory aims will be the formation of alliances that are just as large as they must be to win but no larger. While his work on alliances is rooted in concrete historical observations rather than in abstract game theory, Liska (1962, p. 27) arrives at a similar conclusion. He claims that in forming alliances rational actors are likely to take into account 'the marginal utility of the last

unit of commitment to a particular ally and the last cost in implementing commitments'.

However, on the eve of its creation, circumstance rather than deliberate calculations did underly decisionmaking on the size of the Atlantic Alliance. The participation of the United States, Canada and the five signatories of the Brussels Treaty was taken for granted right from the start of the negotiations. Those countries may be regarded as the 'minimal contributing set' of the alliance (cf. Hardin 1982). But, for a long time, there was a lot of uncertainty about the participation of Portugal, Denmark, Norway and even Italy. Their eventual accession to the North Atlantic Treaty was not the result of estimates of their marginal benefits and costs but of a general political judgment about their international and domestic situation. The entry of Greece and Turkey into NATO (in 1952) did prompt some discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of the membership of the two southern flank countries. The admission of the Federal Republic of Germany (in 1955) can be partly related to defining the minimum requirements for success of the alliance. Without its participation NATO was supposed to be unable to build up an effective conventional defence.

The point at issue, though, is that Riker's notion of 'winning' or dividing the 'spoils' is fatally flawed in the context of postwar military alliances. Indeed, the stated aim of NATO was to prevent the outbreak of war by maintaining a credible deterrence. As will be discussed in the next section this objective implied a political debate about the level of burden sharing, not about the level of profit sharing.

3. Performance during the Cold War

How did the Atlantic Alliance, over the past decades, succeed in delivering security to the member states or at least in giving them a sense of being reasonably well protected? Conventional wisdom has it that the quality of the Alliance's performance is closely related to its internal cohesion, the latter being almost exclusively determined by the threat posed by an adversary. To be sure, in the past the Soviet military threat provided the correcting mechanism that could be used to persuade the allies to bury their intra-mural differences. But, as Thomas Rissen-Kappen (1994, p. 54) points out, the actual Cold War record of events bearing on the relationship between alliance cohesion and East-West tensions is more mixed than many people tend to assume. Thus, for example, whereas NATO's unity was relatively strong during the Berlin crisis of 1958 and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, deep rifts among the allies arose at the time of the Korean War (1950-53) and in the aftermath of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan (late 1979).

The special problems that usually emerge when states seek to achieve collective goals are another reason why the mere reference to the menace from the East apparently does not suffice to account for NATO's ability to deliver security. Security and particularly deterrence, being its most important requirement, can be conceived as a public good in the sense that it is supplied to all members of the group and that none can be excluded from consumption, not even non-members. The two essential characteristics of public goods, i.e., jointness or non-rivalry of supply (which means that when new members are added to the group, the other members who also consume the good will not receive a diminished amount) and non-exclusiveness, permeate the logic of collective action and create the famous free-rider dilemma. On the one hand, all members of the group are tempted to pass the buck to the others because there is no direct connection between their individual sacrifices and their share of the common benefits; on the other, as rational actors, they realize that the collective good cannot be made available if buck-passing would be the prevailing attitude among the members of the group. The theory of collective action predicts that, especially in a political setting lacking central authority, public goods (like security) will only be achieved at a sub-optimal level of utility and that the larger the number of actors who belong to the group, the more difficult it becomes to supply the public good at all (Olson 1971).

Two conditions have enabled NATO to curb free-riding and to produce the collective good of security in such an amount that it satisfied the member states: 1. the leadership provided by the United States and 2. the development of military integration. As to the American role, it is obvious that in spite of NATO being an organization formally based on the principle of equality of all member states the USA has played a crucial role in almost all major alliance decisions. The USA enjoyed such preponderance of power that it may be called a hegemon. The notion of hegemony has often been associated with negative phenomena like conquest, suppression or war but this picture is one-sided. History demonstrates that there are both malign and benign hegemons, and that it is hard to achieve stability without controlling force.

It would appear that the theory of hegemonic stability, which has been developed in the context of the international political economy (cf. Kindleberger 1981; Gilpin 1987; Van Ham 1992), also applies to international security organizations like NATO. According to this theory the stability of an international order or a particular international co-operative arrangement is to be explained by the presence of a predominant power (i.e., the hegemon) who is able to enforce rules and norms unilaterally, and who is willing to take a disproportionate share of the joint costs. Exactly this was done by the USA in the Western Alliance. The Americans occasionally brought pressure

to bear on allies who defied the common rules of the game. Not only was the absolute level of American military expenditure highest among all NATO members, but so was the relative level of that expenditure, that is to say the percentage of GNP successive US administrations spent on defence (Oneal 1990; Palmer 1990). The large size of the American military budget reflected the overriding interest of Washington in maintaining peace in the North Atlantic area by deterring the Soviet Union.

In addition to the pivotal role of the United States the development of the integrated military structure with its joint command, planning and logistic units has been very essential to the Alliance's performance. While NATO is not a supranational organization because decisions by the Alliance depend on the consent of the member states, there are elements of supranational power in the Alliance's intricate web of institutional structures. Apart from the rules and procedures for the co-ordination of defence policies and the assignment of forces to the integrated military command, elaborate norms of policy co-ordination have also grown. NATO's extensive civilian and military bureaucracy has contributed to a denationalization of the mental outlook of the political and military elites involved. Stable expectations and habits of co-operation have developed among the member states so as to affect the usual balancing of benefits and costs, especially as far as free riding is concerned (Duffield 1992).

Since the level of interactions between national representatives of NATO countries was very high, these representatives were likely to be confronted almost instantaneously with negative reactions to defecting strategies. In fact the decision making situation in the alliance represented a hyper-iterative setting with institutionalized forms of social control. Thus, for example, all countries participating in the military organization were required to submit themselves to the so-called annual review procedure aimed at determining to what extent member states had kept their promises in terms of financial commitments and military missions. Disclosures by NATO officials involved in this procedure would suggest that national diplomats and military officials were embarrassed when their country received low marks and, metaphorically speaking, were put on the alliance's black list.

In order to curb free riding NATO has also employed positive rather than negative sanctions by coupling 'private benefits' (i.e., specific rewards for individual member states) to relatively large national contributions to the military strength of the alliance. Examples of those individual benefits for countries with a good alliance record are: 1. economic assistance, 2. the appointment of nationals at key positions in the allied organization, 3. the location of military infrastructure with employment opportunities.

From the same analytical perspective, i.e., the logic of collective action, it is also possible to analyze the factors that have been detrimental to NATO's

performance, or even have threatened its continued existence. First and foremost, the dilemmas of NATO's nuclear strategy spring to mind. At the root of those dilemmas lay the question of the indivisibility of trans-Atlantic security. The notion of nuclear deterrence as a public good suggests the strategic unity of the alliance and particularly the linkage between North America and Western Europe. If the Soviet Union were to be deterred from an attack on the American homeland, it was also supposed to be deterred from an attack on Western Germany or the Netherlands and vice versa. But was the premise correct that the Americans would not differentiate between their own security interests and those of their overseas allies?

In the past decades a very fundamental and to some extent quasi-theological debate was conducted on the reliability and credibility of the so-called American nuclear guarantees for Europe in view of the increased vulnerability of the American territory to strategic surprise attacks by the Soviet Union. This debate often triggered the rhetorical question of whether the United States could be counted on to risk the destruction of Philadelphia or Boston for the sake of protecting Hamburg or Amsterdam. As early as the 1960s president De Gaulle concluded that in the nuclear era military alliances had outlived their usefulness. He refused to believe that nuclear powers would be willing to assist other countries if this would entail the risk of self-destruction. Whatever the validity of this view, it is a fact that from the early 1960s onward the US administration increasingly deployed theater-nuclear weapons in Europe and expanded American capabilities for limited nuclear strikes. Whereas the American interest required the postponement of the threat of an all-out nuclear retaliation as long as possible, it was in the interest of the European allies to narrow the escalation spectrum by conveying to the Soviets the risk of nuclear retaliation at an early stage of the military conflict. What the Americans could define as a limited war, namely a war geographically confined to European territory without the use of strategic nuclear weapons, definitely would mean a total war in European eyes given the destructive power of all nuclear weapons (cf. Schwartz 1983).

The strategy of flexible response (officially: 'flexibility in response'), which was adopted as NATO's new strategy in 1967, could be explained as a delicate compromise between the American and the European security interest (De Wijk 1989; Daalder 1991). Most European governments clung to the idea that the strategy was viable since the Soviet leaders had to take into account at least the possibility of escalation to the level of central nuclear weapons, even though American leaders sometimes raised doubts as to their readiness in holding the American people hostage to a war in Europe.

It makes sense to draw a parallel between the nuclear debate and the discussion in the Alliance about East-West détente since the late 1960s. Likewise the problems involved in this discussion caused strains between the

American and the European allies. According to David Calleo (1987) the Europeans played an anti-cyclical role with regard to American oscillations from reconciliation to confrontation as far as the relationship with the Soviet Union was concerned. On the one hand, in the early 1970s the Europeans criticized Washington for engaging in so-called superpower bilateralism by making separate arms control deals with Moscow allegedly without taking into full account the interests of its European allies. On the other, ten years later president Reagan was under scrutiny by European leaders who felt that the United States was on a collision course by launching a new ideological crusade against the Soviet Union. The country was branded by the American president as an 'evil empire' and the Soviet leadership was accused by him of expanding Soviet influence in several third world regions, e.g., South-West Asia, the Horn of Africa and Central America (Garthoff 1985). A bone of contention among the Western allies was the geographical divisibility or indivisibility of East-West détente. Whilst the European countries, first and foremost Western Germany, sought to protect the achievements of the Helsinki process in Europe against superpower confrontations elsewhere in the world, the United States took the view that greater stability in Europe should not enable the Soviet Union to have a free hand outside the European continent. The conflicting views of the Europeans and the Americans could be related partly to differences between the perspectives of regional and of world powers. The coming to power of Gorbachev in 1985 and his policy of 'perestroika' did prevent the tensions among the Western countries from becoming a deep rift in NATO.

4. Images of NATO's future

Is the Atlantic Alliance doomed now that the Cold War is over, in spite of the attempts by Central and Eastern European countries to join the club? Are organizational inertia and vested bureaucratic interests the only forces that hold the Alliance together nowadays? Looking at the historical record, it is indeed hard to avoid the conclusion that the days of an alliance are numbered once the common enemy has disappeared. Understandably many authors have referred to the spectacular dissolution of the anti-fascist Grand Alliance just after the defeat of Hitler. Much quoted have been the words of George Liska (1962, p. 6) that alliances 'are against, and only derivatively, for someone or something'.

Still, a compelling case could be made that those observations are not quite conclusive as to NATO's future because the Western alliance has moved far beyond the format of a classical alliance whose main function is to uphold (or to restore) the balance of power. As NATO has functioned as the

major institutional framework for the co-ordination of security policies of its sixteen members it may be conceived as an international regime or an institution defined as a 'persistent and connected set of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations' (Keohane 1989, p. 163). Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf (1993) have made the important point that one's view of NATO's future and the expectations one has about its continued existence are very much shaped by the theoretical perspectives one chooses. They argue that the two schools of international relations that currently predominate the theoretical debate at the systemic level, i.e., neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism (cf. Baldwin 1993), provide a good base for deducing predictions about the future of NATO (p. 4). Neorealists such as Walt (1987), Grieco (1990) and Mearsheimer (1994/95) start from the assumption that states have to take care of their own security because there is no central authority to provide protection. They do recognize that even in a self-help system states sometimes operate through institutions. Thus, under conditions of anarchy states may decide to form alliances when they can expect the support of other states because of their partners' interest to defend each other against a common adversary. But, like other institutions, alliances reflect state calculations of self-interest based primarily on the international distribution of power. They are not believed to be an independent force which affects the behaviour of states more than marginally. In the neorealist view defensive alliances are only a means to security against adversaries. Without a common adversary allied states lack sufficient incentives to continue their co-operation, also because membership of an alliance entails constraints on the members' freedom of action. Consequently, the disintegration of an alliance begins as soon as the reasons which led to its formation no longer exist.

By contrast, neoliberal institutionalists like Keohane (1984), Young (1989) and Stein (1990) hold that states calculate their interests not only on the basis of the international distribution of capabilities but also by taking into account the benefits of international institutions. These institutions are supposed to influence a state's interests in two interrelated ways: they alter incentives and they influence expectations of other states' behaviour by making it less attractive to cheat and therefore less risky to co-operate. Thus, institutions do not merely reflect temporary interests of states but are also believed to shape those interests and, indirectly, the practices of states. It follows that the evolution of alliances is affected also by their institutional characteristics like organizational strength and the degree of integration.

Neoliberal institutionalists agree with neorealists that institutions are likely to collapse when these are no longer regarded as an effective instrument for the realization of state interests. They believe, however, that states have greater incentives to maintain institutions than neorealists would accept.

The central argument of the neoliberal institutionalists' line of thought is that governments realize that it is easier to maintain than recreate international institutions and that these institutions provide, by their very existence, useful channels of communication and a reduction of transaction costs. As to modern alliances in particular, the high costs of pursuing an independent national security policy in the present circumstances provide a powerful motive for governments to continue co-operation in alliances, whatever their original purpose, in order to take advantage of economies of scale. For these and other reasons, it is assumed that alliances will evolve rather than cease to exist.

It should be clear that, seen from the neorealist perspective, the only conceivable image of NATO's future is the scenario of *goal regeneration*. In this scenario NATO basically maintains its character as a defensive military alliance composed of a limited number of states, unified to protect their territories against a would-be aggressor. Its assumption is that, in spite of the end of the Cold War, Russia and the West remain divided by important geopolitical differences that may be managed to some extent by international institutions but will never completely disappear, even if Russia would succeed in developing into a stable democracy. Henry Kissinger may be considered a leading advocate of this line of thought. In his masterful work *Diplomacy* (Kissinger 1994) he points out that students of geopolitics and history (like himself) would argue that 'Russia, regardless of who governs it, sits astride the territory Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical heartland, and is the heir of the most potent imperial traditions' (p. 814). The logical implication is that for the time being NATO may enjoy an Indian Summer as Russia is temporarily paralyzed by internal strife and economic trouble; yet, as soon as the country manages to heal its wounds it will turn out to be the West's natural opponent again and pose a new threat to its interests. The plausibility of the 'goal regeneration scenario' does not merely depend on the intellectual validity of the assumption on the immutability of the long-range goals of Russian foreign policy. From a political point of view, it also depends on the ability of Western political leaders to convince the public at large of the necessity of holding NATO together under the justification of a threat which is remote and therefore hard to visualize. The search for new enemies like Muslim fundamentalism by senior NATO officials demonstrates the political difficulty of regenerating the original inspiration of the Western alliance.

From the perspective of neoliberal institutionalism one may envisage two other images of NATO's future: 1. the scenario of *goal transformation* and 2. the scenario of *instrument sublimation*. The first scenario implies the transformation of NATO from an exclusive military alliance into a more inclusive security organization which seeks to project stability on regions outside the traditional treaty area. In so far as this transformation leads to a large expansion of the alliance with new member states NATO is to assume the appear-

ance of a collective security organization (Kupchan and Kupchan 1991). A merger with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe would be a logical development once Russia, too, would be allowed to join NATO. The argument can be made that NATO has already made some steps towards the creation of a new security system for Europe as a whole. Thus, for example, in late 1991 the Alliance decided to establish the North Atlantic Co-operation Council for conducting regular consultations with its former opponents. In 1992 NATO stated its willingness to carry out peace-keeping operations at the request of the United Nations or the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. In early 1994 NATO launched the so-called Partnership for Peace Programme giving non-members the opportunity to enter into close military co-operation with the Alliance. Yet, these new security arrangements fall far short of creating an all-European system of collective security (Van Staden 1994).

This fact is hardly surprising because a lot of skepticism exists in allied circles about the practical value of the concept of collective security. Few Western leaders believe that European countries of all sorts would be unanimous in distinguishing between the perpetrators and the victims of aggression and would be ready to make ultimate sacrifices in conflicts that do not touch upon their own vital interests. Joseph Joffe's (1992) severe criticism of the underlying presumption of the concept concerned seems to reflect the prevailing opinion in NATO: collective security can only work when it is not needed and it will be ineffective when it is necessary. Indeed it is hard to imagine the outbreak of any European conflict if all preconditions for the working of collective security are fulfilled. A fundamental weakness of large, inclusive security systems like collective security is the erosion of mutual responsibility; the alignment of many states with each other means that no state has a special relationship with another state.

The scenario of 'instrument sublimation', the third image of NATO's future, implies the elevation of the integrated military structure to a goal in its own right. Whilst this structure was developed in the past as a means for building a credible deterrence and defence against the Warsaw Pact, it has actually also functioned as an international regime which contributed considerably to the denationalization of Western defence policies and the integration of Germany into the Western security community in particular. If NATO's future *raison d'être* is not likely to be found in combating old or new enemies or, for that matter, in the quest for new goals like collective security, then the Alliance's continued existence might be justified by strengthening the function of military integration, also in view of the increased political weight of Germany after its reunification. Those who favour this option fear a revival of old inter-state rivalries in Western Europe in the case NATO would fall apart. Their implicit assumption is that independent defence capabilities

create security dilemmas, regardless of the nature of governments' intentions.

It is not difficult to find elements of each of the three scenarios in public statements of Western leaders. The juxtaposition of different conceptions reflects the state of confusion of NATO at present. The main source of the confusion is the fundamental uncertainty about the future course of action of Russia. Is Russia to be seen as a security partner or should it be regarded as a grave long-term security risk? Afraid that any choice may generate either self-fulfilling or self-denying prophecies Western diplomats are currently performing a delicate balancing act by neither including nor excluding Russia at the councils of allied consultations.

5. Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis strong arguments can be derived that NATO will manage to prolong its existence anyhow, with or without a common enemy. If the Alliance survives as an international security regime in a setting where a clear external threat is lacking, then neorealists would have a real problem to explain such an outcome. But, on the other hand, neoliberal institutionalists are well-advised to be careful in proclaiming victory if this scenario were to come true. The ultimate test of the strength of their claim in the debate on NATO's future lies, of course, in the effectiveness and also the practical relevance of the allied security regime. Indeed there is a world of difference between a token security organization mainly producing ritual gatherings and predictable communiqués, and an organization capable of effectively dealing with international conflicts like in the former Yugoslavia. Since a large part of NATO's effectiveness in the past resulted from the leadership of the United States and the preponderance of power this country enjoyed, the future vitality of the Western Alliance will very much depend on the scope of the American involvement with European security.

Under the double influence of the relative decline of US power on the one hand and the shift in American society to domestic priorities on the other, US engagement has already become more selective. The case of the former Yugoslavia shows that the US administration is reluctant to bear the brunt in European conflicts short of a major conflagration which affects the central balance of power. Like England in the 19th century the United States will be interested to throw its weight on the European scale in order to prevent or to combat bids for hegemony on the part of any of the larger European powers. But such a contingency is not very likely in the foreseeable future. The United States, therefore, will also be less motivated to provide leadership in the Western Alliance. In other words: unlike in the past, the Americans will not act as the great organizer, bearing a disproportionate

share of the costs. Nor will – for that matter – the Europeans, seeking to enhance their profile in world politics, defer as willingly to American management (cf. Joffe 1995, p. 112–13).

In the latter context, another crucial factor to be taken into account in assessing the future effectiveness of the Alliance are the new attempts to realize the ideal of Atlantic partnership by transforming NATO into a more even-handed alliance built on an American and a European pillar with equal responsibilities. The success of those attempts is closely related to the progress that can be made in developing a common European foreign and security policy as envisaged in the Treaty of Maastricht on the European Union. The combination of uncertainties – the Russian imbroglio, the faltering US leadership, and Europe's groping for political unity – gives little cause for believing that NATO, however strong its potential to survive as an organization, will be able to achieve the same level of effectiveness as it did during the Cold War era.

Notes

1. This article is the revised version of a paper delivered at the workshop on Alliances during the Annual Meeting of the Dutch Political Science Association (PoliticoGenet-maal) in Soesterberg, 26–27 May, 1994. The author wishes to thank the workshop directors, Wil Hout and Bob Lieshout, and Gerd Junne for their useful comments and valuable suggestions on the first version of this paper.

2. Strictly speaking it is not correct to say that NATO was founded in 1949, because the treaty *organization* came about only two years later.

3. As was laid down in the Treaty of Brussels (1948) uniting France, Great Britain and the Benelux countries.

4. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty reads as follows:

'The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, *such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force* (italics added), to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.' (...)

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1. Introduction

Debates about the alleged gap between people (i.e. voters) and politics (i.e. politicians in executive legislative bodies) have dominated the discussion about the voting turnout in recent Dutch elections. Relatively low turnout figures, especially in non-national elections, have caused concern about the level of political involvement of Dutch citizens and the legitimacy of contemporary democracy. Proponents and opponents of the idea of a widening divide between the two camps as theories and professional politicians have ventured their opinions on the theme on numerous occasions.

Remarkable about this discussion is the diversity of sources which practically involved people like politicians and journalists used to take the widening of the gap for granted, whereas the 'detached' academic community claims that there are no evident signs of a widening gap. The two sides hold different views on the basis of different sources. Politicians and journalists claim to 'feel' and 'see' everywhere around them that the interest in politics is decreasing. Political scientists base their scepticism in this regard mainly on the findings of the Dutch National Election Studies and the reports of the Social and Cultural Planning Agency (SCP), in which no indications of a decreasing political involvement of voters (i.e. people eligible to vote) seem evident.

Comparing these sources of 'evidence', political scientists apparently have the better case. Isn't the hallmark of science that knowledge is acquired in an objective and systematic way? On the other hand, opinions based on subjective and occasional observations are thought to do a much poorer job. However, scientific knowledge only deserves this supposed superiority over common sense knowledge if it is actually based on impartial and systematic observation. But instead of assessing critically the value of their findings, scientists often all too readily embrace the results of their research. It turns out that the crucial issue of the reliability and validity of survey research has been neglected by and large by the same scientific community. Survey findings