

Chapter 13

Redrawing the Maps: Rethinking Atlantic Security in the 1990s

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How best to focus Western security institutions has been a never-ending task for Alliance nations since 1949. The Atlantic community in its present form emerged from widespread concern about the Soviet threat. Its reach expanded during the 1950s when NATO provided a foundation for the first steps towards European integration. With this new task added, NATO emerged as the most important transatlantic link, whose importance surpassed the original focus on the Soviet Union. These mutually supporting goals defined the Atlantic community for forty years. This evolution was much on the mind of many European and American officials as the post-Cold War era began to unfold.

Ironically, NATO was originally a European project to keep the Americans engaged on the continent, while European unity was originally an American effort to disengage itself from a permanent presence on the continent. After the project for a European Defense Force failed in 1954, however, NATO assumed a more central role and the American umbrella became more permanent.

NATO's guarantee of European stability and democracy played a central role in support of the first steps towards European unity. Failing a common European defense structure, NATO was needed as a means of reassuring Europeans that Germany would not reassert its power against them. Embedding a rearmed Federal Republic within NATO was the best solution. Germany entered the Alliance in 1955.

Throughout this era, NATO also served increasingly as a bulwark against the reemergence of isolationist tendencies in the United States, such as the efforts by Montana Senator Mike Mansfield to pull American troops from Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Continued Congressional recommitment to NATO in the face of Donald Trump's isolationism is an important demonstration of how central the Alliance remains to maintaining Atlantic unity

The Core of the Post-Cold War Debate

In short, the security debate in the 1990s was about much more than strategies for dealing with post-Soviet Russia. As a result of the dramatic changes of the past thirty years, NATO's post-Cold War role has in fact become even more complex. Defense against Russia has evolved into efforts to maintain both dialogue and deterrence in Russia and in the countries it borders, especially those in Central Europe who ultimately have joined NATO. Germany is now a central member of the Atlantic community, but its firm anchor within NATO ensures that it will not be unsettled by instability emanating from Russia or elsewhere. And, as the current U.S. Administration demonstrates, isolationist tendencies remain strong in America. Without NATO and the military security link, it is unlikely that the American commitment to an Atlantic partnership would continue.

Add to this NATO's key role in "out of area" crisis such as the Balkans and Afghanistan, and the fundamental strategic importance of NATO to both sides of the Atlantic becomes clear.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke focused the American position on these basics in a much-commented article in *Foreign Affairs* in the Spring of 1995, in which he declared that as a consequence of its Cold War engagement, American had become a European power. But even today, neither Americans nor Europeans have fully comprehended NATO's role as a geopolitical fulcrum for the Atlantic world.

Since 1990 Europeans seem to have forgotten the fact that NATO is essential to progress in European integration. Especially after the debacle in the Balkans, EU leaders seriously misread their strategic situation. Rather than understanding the importance of maintaining the strategic link with Washington, they were convinced that European defense should be sought primarily through stronger European institutions outside the Alliance. In so doing, they effectively removed NATO from their vision for a European future.

The low point occurred at the Berlin NATO Ministerial meeting in June, 1996, when French President Jacques Chirac, mostly for domestic political reasons, torpedoed a plan to join the conventional capabilities of Europe and the United States into an integrated structure within NATO. From that point on, Europe and America travelled in opposite

strategic directions. One result is that the American public, whether Democrat or Republican, is returning to more traditional American nativism and is becoming restive over what is seen as an inadequate European contribution to the common defense.

This growing transatlantic gap represents the most important threat to NATO's future and thus to the security of the Atlantic Community. American demands for higher defense contributions, or more economic access or political support in third countries, were once tempered by the sense of mutual support embodied in Atlantic ties. No longer. Younger elites from both parties no longer have a sense of the strategic dilemmas for American interests presented by the complexities of Europe. Now America decides on whatever goals seem to be attractive at the moment. This tendency towards "transactional diplomacy" was as active during the Obama administration as it is now under Trump.

The Road to NATO Enlargement

The roots of the negative American reaction to European strategic reluctance could already been seen in the debate over NATO enlargement after 1990. In the United States, differences arose between those who might be called the geostrategic lobby, who argued that Europeans could take care of themselves, and that eliminating the danger of nuclear war, if necessary over the heads of the European allies, was America's main goal in a post-Cold War world.

This group focused more on military-security considerations than on NATO's importance to solidifying civil society in Europe and the Atlantic world. They believed urgent defense needs required the West to focus primarily on building new sorts of security cooperation with our former foe, Russia, and above all not "threatening" Russia with an expansion of Western security structures. This group believed America's sole task in Europe had been to hold back or defeat Russia—nothing more.

Such thinking in fact harkened back to President Truman, who put it most directly as he signed the NATO treaty in 1949. The United States had no intention to remain a protecting power for Europe. We expected rapid moves towards unity and to the formation of a European Defense Force which would be an equal partner of the United States.

Numerous well-known security experts, analysts of Russian behavior and those who wished to limit American foreign commitments argued strongly against any changes, including NATO enlargement, which could stoke new sorts of conflict with Russia.

Those who focused on civil society, on the other hand, argued that to flourish, the West should expand its vision beyond traditional military security strategies and focus also on building a unified, democratic community of those who wished to be part of it, including of course Russia. They did not reject efforts at a new security dialogue with Russia, but argued that failure to build civil society in the newly liberated countries of the Warsaw Pact could undermine any progress made on military-security issues.

Countries just emerging from Communism needed protection that only membership in NATO (and the EU) could afford them. History would reassert itself and the road to unity would be difficult. The Atlantic community had evolved into a partnership of democratic countries. An equally important Western goal should be to steady this partnership and help the countries of Eastern and Central Europe join the family of democratic nations.

This group argued that a strategy focused primarily building a new security arrangement with Russia, even if it had newly become non-Communist, would have been a bet against history. Democracy was our strongest suit. Modernizing and expanding our own institutions was the only logical way of supporting democracy in Russia as well.

Practical political arguments also played a role. Large numbers of Americans traced their origins to Eastern and Central Europe. The West had not always stood up for the freedom of these countries during the Cold War. Both Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush felt a moral responsibility for these interests as well.

Thirty years later, these debates have been reignited by the many new challenges presented by aggressive Russian behavior. The debates have evolved into an even more fundamental rethinking of the goals and identity which should be defined for the West in a new age of global digital integration.

Focus on building stability for the newly democratic nations has proven to be correct. But many new challenges such as technology, refugees, and above all national identity have overwhelmed many existing assumptions. New forms of conflict, such as cyber warfare, outside challenges such as terrorism and refugees and a general drop in awareness of the importance of the Atlantic community require new impulses, in particular where Russia is concerned.

The complexities are endless and right now we haven't yet even developed a vocabulary to help us define what needs to be done. But we can be sure of one thing—modern civil society has been strengthened by extension of Western institutions into Central and Eastern Europe. This democratic foundation will remain the West's most important advantage in dealing with competitive visions for the digital future from Russia and elsewhere.

How Enlargement Came About

Many persons and institutions played a role in defining a new strategy in the 1990s. This is an account from the viewpoint of one whose professional role during the 1990s, as described below, touched on all of the issues involved. My task at the State Department, beginning in 1994, was to implement what the President and others had decided—which was the enlargement of NATO.

The critical phase which led to the decision to enlarge NATO in 1997 was guided primarily from the Bureau of European Affairs in the State Department, where I was senior deputy and then Assistant Secretary of State. The key State Department personality was Assistant Secretary Richard Holbrooke, who had a mandate from the President to make enlargement a reality. He often worked independently of other agencies, including the National Security Council.

Defining a Strategy

The foundation of the Holbrooke strategy was to fit NATO into a longer-term vision of the Atlantic, which included a permanent American presence, and in fact defined the United States as a European power. This was the philosophy which Holbrooke and we on his team had

grown up with, but as the following years would show, it was counter-intuitive for much of the American political establishment.

We were aware, however, that regardless of the fundamental changes already imposed on the strategic map of Europe, much more was to come. Our goal was not to draw up a perfect strategy for the 1990s. Rather, we hoped that by strengthening and modifying existing institutions, we could provide a firm foundation for protecting Western interests during the many upheavals ahead of us.

Nothing has turned out perfectly. Russia remains a disruptive force in Europe and the world. Western Europeans have essentially abandoned military security as a central task of their governments. But when we see the way in which Europe has unified into a democratic community, when we note the progress toward freedom in several former Soviet dependent states, we can be proud to register that the West's ability to reorient and expand its goals and institutions nearly three decades ago represents one of the most successful diplomatic and political achievements of our era.

Background for the Debate

As the Soviet Union entered its final days, Western leaders were faced with several fundamental questions:

- How should we maintain military and political security? What changes were necessary and how far should they go? How should the role of institutions, especially NATO, be defined? I took part in many discussions of this issue at NATO headquarters after 1989 and helped formulate the program set forth in the London Communiqué in 1990, parts of which are quoted below.
- What was the role of post-Soviet Russia? Which tools would best suit our needs in dealing with it? How could we best integrate this new Russia into the modern post-Cold War world?
- And above all: How could our community of democratic Atlantic nations ensure that former Warsaw Pact countries, which had suffered for decades under authoritarian rule, would not again threaten Western security by drifting into dictatorship and decay? This

point was stressed repeatedly by European Allies and by the nations of Central Europe themselves.

The Question of Russia

Since much of postwar Atlantic and European cooperation was aimed at reducing a perceived threat from the Soviet Union Russia, decisions of how to deal with the post-Soviet Russian rump state were central to the process. Many of them remain controversial, and the current situation is in no way satisfactory. After an initial period of cooperation in the very early 1990s, Russia has soon began to revert to a self-centered, hostile approach to its immediate neighbors and to the West. In response, the West has responded by reducing the level of cooperation and moved to sanctioning Russian behavior.

In particular, most recently Russia has even invaded neighboring countries and threatened to expand both conventional and nuclear capacity. Hence, much of the framework for future cooperation worked out with Russia in parallel with NATO enlargement has stopped functioning, although many of the institutions are still intact.

Some blame Western behavior in the 1990s for today's situation in Russia—some twenty years on. To me, that contention is ludicrous. Not building a security foundation for democracy in Europe would have been a concession which probably would have emboldened Russia to mix in the affairs of its weak neighbors.

Not to have built this democratic community would have risked our security much more than any event in Russia could have done. Choosing Russia over Europe would have been an historic blunder of epic proportions.

We need only imagine a situation in which Poland or Hungary were struggling to maintain a democratic system—something we are witnessing in fact right now in 2019—while Russia taunted them from the sidelines. We need only ask if Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would have remained attack-free and independent without joining NATO and the EU. We need only to observe remind ourselves of Russia's earliest pressures on Georgia and Armenia, which much predated NATO enlargement, or its invasion of Ukraine virtually without pretext.

And to be totally honest, we need only to recall the strong words of then German Defense Minister Volker Rühle in 1993 warning of the consequences of allowing Germany to sit alone on NATO's eastern border.

Over the past fifteen years, new threats from Russia, such as cyber warfare and aggressive use of natural resources, have complicated the debate. None of them are related to NATO. Other new elements are the growing strength and ambition of China (including its dealings with Russia as regards the Arctic Sea route and raw materials mining/exploration) and its consequences for the global balance of power, major instability in South Asia and the Middle East, and the security challenges created by massive movements of refugees into both Europe and the United States.

As a result, the original security equation for Russia and the independent nations of the former Soviet Union has expanded significantly beyond its 1990s definition. Thirty years later, we are again at a major point of redefinition. Russia is now only one of many complex new challenges—albeit a significant factor of course.

As in the past, Russia's power to disrupt is greater than its ability (or desire) to cooperate. As a participant in the 1990s exercise, I believe that we can be grateful that our institutions successfully met the challenge to change. But it is also clear that both the United States and Europe are now in the midst of a new era of fundamental upheavals which go far beyond question of military security in Europe.

New technologies are likely to change both the practice of diplomacy and the definition of security in fundamental ways. As in the past, the West is the leader of this new era, but success is far from certain. The transatlantic format of NATO, the EU and the OSCE, which we established in the 1990s, is more important than ever.

Western democracy continues to offer the best operating system for the new digital world. Initial arguments about expansion of Western institutions have in many ways been overtaken by events. Our focus on Russia must now be built into a much broader strategy which includes China, India and several other important/pivotal regions of the world.

Back to the Roots

My judgments on these issues were based to considerable extent on my good fortune of having taken part in the structural reordering from five vantage points:

- As U.S. Minister and Deputy Commandant of Forces in divided Berlin in the 1980s, I was able to watch the steady decline of East Germany and absorb the political consequences of what was happening. When German Defense Minister Volker R uhe warned that Germany could not be left on NATO's eastern border, I recalled that President Reagan's famous Brandenburg Gate speech had been aimed not at Gorbachev, but at Bonn. The goal was to stifle growing tendencies in the Federal Republic to favor a deal with Gorbachev, which would have cemented the division of Europe.
- I was Deputy U.S. Representative to NATO from 1987–1991. As such I directed the American role in negotiation of several important NATO positions, including the Conventional Forces in Europe negotiations, the CSCE Charter of Paris and the two declarations issued at meetings of NATO Foreign Ministers and at the Summit in 1990.
- I was Ambassador and head of the American delegation to the CSCE from 1991–1994. In this role, I chaired the American delegation to the Helsinki review conference in 1992 and opened the first U.S. Mission to the CSCE in Vienna in that same year. I also played a major role in redefining the CSCE in Helsinki and in transforming it into the OSCE at the Budapest summit in 1994. My experience with what became the OSCE in 1994 went back to the drafting of the Helsinki Final Act in the mid-1970s. Over the years, I became a strong believer that more active use of the tools of civil society could play an important role in building security in Europe.

The Helsinki preparatory conference in 1992 was fascinating for another reason. This gathering of senior officials (from all over Europe, America, Canada, including Russia and the other post-Soviet republics as well as Yugoslavia's successor states) was the only existing relevant forum for discussion of the Balkan wars as they unfolded in 1992. We spent many dozens of hours discussing events and recommending pol-

icy options for the international community. We notably welcomed Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania as new CSCE participating states. In July of 1992, we suspended Serbia's seat in reaction to its aggression in Bosnia.

- From 1994–1997 I was Principal Deputy and then Assistant Secretary for European Affairs in the Department of State. In this role, my task was to implement strategies defined by the President and others. This included American strategy on important aspects of NATO enlargement and other institutional changes taking place during the 1990s. I personally negotiated several of the arrangements, including the NATO-Russian Founding Act. In addition, I was deputy head of delegation to the Dayton Balkan negotiations and later American special envoy to the Balkans. I also authored much of NATO's Berlin decision in 1996 which created a framework for closer NATO-EU military cooperation.
- Finally, from 1997–2001 I was American Ambassador to Germany, in both Bonn and Berlin. In this function, I worked closely with the German government on Balkan issues, including refugees from Kosovo and NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999, and conducted a continuing dialogue with the new SPD/Green government (from 1998).

Having the advantage of viewing the world from these much differing perspectives led me to become a strong supporter of an integrated approach to security. This was the approach I adopted when I arrived in Washington in 1994.

Eventful Years

NATO's first official reaction to demise of the Warsaw Pact came at the Summit meeting held in London, July 5-6, 1990. Secretary General Manfred Wörner set the tone in his opening remarks: "The Cold War belongs to history. Our Alliance is moving from confrontation to cooperation. [...] Never before has Europe had such a tangible opportunity to overcome the cycle of war and peace that has so bedeviled its past."

The Summit Communique continued in the same spirit:

Our Alliance must be even more an agent of change. It can help build the structures of a more united continent, supporting security and stability with the strength of our shared faith in democracy, the rights of the individual, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Significantly, the London Communique did not foresee enlargement of the Alliance. It went only as far to extend a “hand of friendship” across the old East-West divide and proposed a new cooperative relationship with all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. But the London Declaration and other statements of that era left no doubt that most Allies believed that NATO should evolve beyond its defensive role and put more stress on building a more far-reaching structure of peace. Despite the ensuing debate among various experts in Washington, by 1990 the die had already been cast. Article 2, the passage of the NATO Treaty which provided for consultation and support of freedom along all allies, was to many, the future of the Alliance.

NATO sought to give substance to this concept with establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) on December 20, 1991. The NACC was explicitly created as a forum for dialogue and cooperation with NATO’s former Warsaw Pact adversaries—not as a stepping stone for enlargement.

It was an irony of history that as the final communiqué of the inaugural NACC meeting was being agreed, the Soviet ambassador announced that the Soviet Union had dissolved during the meeting and that he now only represented the Russian Federation. Multilateral political consultation and cooperation helped build confidence and paved the way for the launch of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994, which established concrete programs of cooperation with non-NATO members, primarily in the East.

Interesting was the fact that at that January 1994 PfP summit, U.S. President Bill Clinton characterized the Partnership for Peace as a “track that will lead to NATO membership” and that “does not draw another line dividing Europe a few hundred miles to the east.”

While the issue of enlargement had not yet been addressed, these first reactions and NATO’s 1991 revised strategic concept began a re-statement of NATO’s goals from that of a defense Alliance to an institution for dialogue and change.

The 1991 document gave prominence to economic, social and environmental issues as a means of promoting stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole. Dialogue and cooperation would be essential to managing the diversity of challenges facing the Alliance.

Parallel to the NATO transformation was a joint East-West effort to add new commitments to the Helsinki Process and to transform the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe into a more formal organization.

The Charter of Paris, signed at a Summit of CSCE participating States in November, 1990 followed NATO's example by reaffirming and deepening the original principles of the CSCE, establishing new mechanisms for consultation and cooperation and agreeing to work further in conjunction with a CSCE Summit scheduled to be held in Helsinki in 1992.

I should stress that this was a thorough reordering of broader European security cooperation. As head of the American delegation to this meeting, I spent six months in Helsinki preparing the program approved at the summit.

Our goal was to establish the CSCE as a functioning pan-European framework for day-to-day work on areas of possible tension. Both military confrontations and human rights violations were areas the CSCE should tackle and were thereby included in our final report.

During the preparatory phase, we agreed a comprehensive reorganization of the CSCE process and added substance to commitments made in Paris. The Document compiled in Helsinki remains the operating manual for the OSCE. While recent confrontations, especially with Russia, have hindered some OSCE operations, it remains a key institution for human rights, civil society and conflict prevention in Europe. By 1992 it had evolved into a pan-Eurasian format that would ultimately include over fifty members.

Equally important was the debate surrounding the extension of European Union membership to the countries of the former Warsaw Pact (especially after the Cold War neutrals Finland, Sweden and Austria had joined in 1995; and the GDR, as a special case, had effectively been absorbed into the West German state structures through unification in 1990 and thereby automatically become part of the EC/EU).

A consensus grew in support of using EU membership as a tool to push democratic development in these countries. With a current membership of 28, there is a wide feeling in the EU, that the promise of membership is still one of Europe's most important foreign policy tools. EU enlargement was also an important element of our (American) comprehensive security strategy. NATO could provide the protection but not the political and economic foundation for a wider community of democratic states.

Parallel to these events, the United States, both in official and private capacities, worked hard to promote establishment of the free market economies in the former Comecon countries, including Russia. Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage played an important role during the George H.W. Bush Administration in supplying humanitarian aid (and financial assistance, mostly via the IMF) to Russia.

But EU membership would be long-term goal, as the criteria of the *acquis communautaire* post-Maastricht posed significant hurdles for the transforming states that were undergoing serious electoral revolutions and economic shock therapy. Seeking stability and security Eastern Europeans increasingly looked to NATO and the United States.

Movement Towards Enlargement

By early 1994 arguments in favor of NATO enlargement were growing in both Europe and the United States. Central European countries were especially vocal in their call for NATO membership. German Defense Minister Volker R uhe was an early supporter of an "open door policy," noting that in a reunified Europe, Germany should not be left alone on NATO's eastern border. But the United States government was far from unified on the strategy to be followed.

The arrival of Richard Holbrooke as Assistant Secretary for European Affairs in 1994 and the establishment of a separate Bureau for Russia and CIS affairs under Strobe Talbott in 1993 were important events. While the existence of two Bureaus did not survive beyond the Clinton Administration, it was useful at this critical point to have an independent focus on Russia. I arrived in the European Bureau as principal deputy in early June of 1994, coming directly from the CSCE Mission in Vienna.

By this time, the outlines of a broader, integrated approach to European security were becoming more evident. The fact was that events following the fall of the Soviet Union were so complicated and unmanageable, that any policy had to be one both of planning and of improvisation.

As a first step, we quickly adopted this three-pronged approach based on the key institutions of NATO, the EU, and the CSCE/OSCE as our basic framework for defining a sense of direction for Atlantic and European security cooperation.

Hopes for a democratic belt around Russia and the idea that the West would work first on that were unrealistic. But working closely with Russia to help define and meet its needs was an important part of our strategy. President Clinton's decisions to build close ties to Yeltsin have been criticized in various quarters. I strongly doubt, however, that without Clinton's strong bond with Yeltsin that Russian acceptance of enlargement would have been possible at all.

Also important were the views of the Federal Republic of Germany. Rühle's argument that Germany should not be left isolated in the East was of considerable influence, as were the strong desires of the Visegrád countries to find a home in the West. Germany was also crucial in sweetening the pill for Russia and for Yeltsin by financial means—and just like Bill cultivated his bond with Boris, Helmut Kohl worked his sauna friendship with the Russian also.

We should also not forget that the Balkan war was a major focus during all of this period. Our success in maintaining cooperation with Russia during the Balkan war and in using NATO as the foundation for the IFOR peacekeeping force added considerable credibility to a broader future role for NATO.

A final, important consideration was an assumption about the future, on which Richard Holbrooke and I agreed. Developments in Europe and with Russia would be unpredictable. A strong American role would be essential. But as events since 2000 have also demonstrated, isolationism was a deeply held emotion in the United States and we could not be certain that a continued strong American engagement in Europe could take taken for granted.

To us this meant that while the three existing security arrangements—NATO, EU and the newly upgraded OSCE—should be strengthened, the real bastion would in American eyes be NATO. It has a deeply rooted credibility in the United States, not possessed by anyone or anything else. Observing the many U.S. Senators and Congress members who demonstrably supported NATO at the 2019 Munich Security Conference more than proves the point.

We could at that time not foresee NATO's important role in Afghanistan or its stabilizing role in Central Europe, but generally these were the types of considerations we had in mind. If a new strategy were based on NATO, it would have a better chance of surviving, for example, than one built on cooperating with Russia. Again, recent events, including a more isolationist American administration, have demonstrated how important it will always be to keep American NATO membership functioning and up to date.

The *Foreign Affairs* Article

By the fall of 1994, Holbrooke had been given the task getting American preparations for enlargement going and to jump start the process in NATO. He turned in his usual superb performance. As a first step, the European Bureau prepared for Holbrooke's signature an article later published in the Spring 1995 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, which set forth the overall concept for the first time in a public document. In the article, Holbrooke argued that forty years of postwar engagement had cemented America's role as a European power. Neither the Europeans nor the United States could prosper if this American link were broken. The article set forth a building block approach to post-Cold War security, based on NATO, the EU and the OSCE.

Holbrooke welcomed an expanded role for NATO, including new members, but suggested that "NATO, the European Union (EU), and the other major institutions of the West are not clubs that one joins simply by filling out membership applications. Over time, each has evolved values and obligations that must be accepted by each new member."

This sentence was carefully chosen. It was meant to pave the way for organizing the American and NATO bureaucracies into a step-by-

step NATO enlargement process, which could be managed and defended with each forward step. First there would be consultations on the requirements of membership, then a judgment as to whether one or the other country was eligible and only then membership. And this is exactly the process which was followed. One country, Slovakia, actually did not meet the requirements and therefore did not join in the first group.

Getting the process started within the U.S. government was a different story. As noted above, entrenched communities such as arms control, Soviet specialists etc. continued to be vocal in their rejection of any enlargement of NATO. They either argued that any lasting peace in Europe must include a Russian role, or that adding new members would stretch Alliance resource too thin. Much of the Pentagon, and especially the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were also known to be against enlargement. Letters with many signatures were being sent to the newspapers and the Administration rejecting enlargement.

Despite this opposition, President Clinton himself was already making positive noises, including an important statement in Warsaw in July 1994. NSC chief Tony Lake was strongly in favor. But the all-important inter-agency consensus among all relevant players in the U.S. government had not yet been constructed. That was our job.

Gore Speech in Berlin

As a first step, we came up with a high level, direct means of getting the process moving. On September 9, 1994 Allied and Russian troops were completing their departure from Berlin. Vice President Gore was scheduled to deliver a speech on the occasion. A torn knee prevented him from going to Berlin, but he delivered the speech by satellite.

The text, which I had drafted, contained many positive sentiments and also announced the founding of an American Academy in Berlin, which would substitute cultural exchange for American military presence.

Gore was a strong advocate of enlargement and reacted with humor when I suggested that the Defense Department might come beating at his door if he included the language on NATO. In the speech, the Vice

President talked about the need for NATO and other organizations to adapt adjust to the new situation in Europe or they would stagnate. He added: “Everyone knows that the economic and political organizations tailored for a divided continent must now adapt to new circumstances—including acceptance of new members—or be exposed as mere bastions of privilege...Beyond Partnership for Peace, and the NACC, several countries have already expressed a desire to become members of the Alliance. We shall begin our discussion on this important question this fall.”

This simple sentence, “We shall begin our discussion on this important question this fall,” masked considerable debate in Washington and in the Administration. The Pentagon, including Secretary of Defense Bill Perry, was especially skeptical. Armed with a Vice Presidential statement signifying that a decision had been taken, Holbrooke skillfully pushed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to take the lead in the “process of examination.” There was some pushback from the Defense Department, but the White House backed up Holbrooke’s procedure. He was able to move the process forward. By December NATO Allies were also ready to move ahead. The Ministerial communique recorded the following agreement:

We expect and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe. Enlargement, when it comes, would be part of a broad European security architecture based on true cooperation throughout the whole of Europe....

Accordingly, we have decided to initiate a process of examination inside the Alliance to determine how NATO will enlarge, the principles to guide this process and the implications of membership. To that end, we have directed the Council in Permanent Session, with the advice of the Military Authorities, to begin an extensive study. This will include an examination of how the Partnership for Peace can contribute concretely to this process.

This examination was a serious one. Candidate countries were presented with catalogues of requirements and a list of individual implementing agreements (STANAGs) they would be expected to fulfill. Inside the U.S. Government, the State Department guided a complicated

process which consumed months of meetings. It would be more than two years before enlargement was settled. But after the Ministerial in December, 1994, there was little doubt that it would occur.

The other key was Russia. While perhaps not set down formally, it was generally accepted that the Alliance could not enlarge if Russia was opposed. President Clinton had been working on Yeltsin assiduously, but the Russians kept turning hot and cold. A very cold moment came in December 1994 at the OSCE Summit in Budapest when Yeltsin warned that NATO enlargement could lead to a “cold peace.” But Clinton agreed to attend Yeltsin’s celebration of the end of World War II in 1995 and held several other discussions which moved him forward.

Jim Collins, Strobe Talbott’s senior deputy, and I were given the task of designing agreements that would convince the Russians we were taking them seriously. The result was the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the NATO—Russia Partnership Council. We also agreed similar arrangements with Ukraine.

I took part in the closing negotiations in May, 1997 led by Secretary of State Madeline Albright. The details focused mostly on Russia’s desire to ensure that NATO did not expand militarily up to its border. After several near break downs of the discussions, language was found and Russia agreed.

I had great hopes for these agreements, but they turned out to be less successful than expected. One reason in my view was that NATO Headquarters itself did not implement them, especially the Partnership Council, sufficiently. Many Russian complaints about Western behavior after NATO enlargement are in my view not accurate, but this one is: Both the NATO staff and the member nations dropped the ball.

Our original idea had been that Russia would be treated as an honored partner. As has been reported elsewhere, both President Clinton and others offered the Russians the prospect of future membership in NATO. Yeltsin never took us up on the offer, and the Europeans rejected it anyway. But the spirit was a positive one.

Unfortunately, the Russians were soon complaining, rightly in my view, that they sat almost as if they were in Court, being grilled by the allies. I myself took the opportunity a few years later to complain to then NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer about the lack of

respect offered the Russians in Brussels. After scowling at me for a few minutes, Scheffer said I was right.

Of course, other major events intervened. A year after NATO enlargement was agreed, Russia suffered a near economic meltdown. Yeltsin was on the ropes, both politically and health wise and a new era was waiting in the wings. He chose Putin to make sure that his personal legacy would be honored.

Whatever the intervening events, few would argue that the basic goal of the 1990s had been achieved: to strengthen and update existing institutions as a means of maintaining security and democracy in Europe.

Since then, the nations of Europe have evolved beyond all expectations. Democracy is beginning to take hold in important parts of the former Soviet Union such as Georgia and Ukraine. The NATO of 2019 is a much different animal than the Alliance I knew in the late 1980s. So are the European Union and the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Many are knocking on our door, asking for entry. No one is crying to join Russia.

We can now be proud of a democratic community of nations, numbering nearly 1 billion inhabitants, which stretches from the Finnish and Estonian borders in the Northeast to the tip of Alaska in the far West. This complex community is not totally unified and not perfect. But all of its members are guided by the democratic principles of modern civic society.

This to me is the most important result of our efforts nearly thirty years ago. In my mind, there is no doubt that without enlargement of NATO and the EU, this community would today not exist, and several states in proximity to Russia would be hanging tenuously to their independence.

