

Open Door
NATO and Euro-Atlantic Security
After the Cold War

Daniel S. Hamilton and Kristina Spohr
Editors

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Acknowledgments

NATO's decision to open its doors to new members after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union was one of the most momentous—and controversial—choices in recent history. It was rooted in efforts by the North Atlantic Alliance to revise its missions for a new era of challenges and to respond to Eastern European desires to join the “institutional West.” More generally, NATO's enlargement grew from the process of an overall reshaping of the “architecture” of institutions and mechanisms binding North America and Europe for the post-Cold War world. The causes and consequences of these decisions have been the subject of intense scrutiny and fierce debate.

In this book, senior officials and opinion leaders from the United States, Russia, Western and Eastern Europe who were directly involved in the decisions of that time describe their considerations, concerns, and pressures. They are joined by scholars who have been able to draw on newly declassified archival sources to revisit NATO's evolving role in the 1990s. All were able to exchange perspectives and offer comments at an authors' workshop at Johns Hopkins SAIS on March 12, 2019—the 20th anniversary of Czech, Hungarian and Polish accession to the Alliance.

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Daniel S. Hamilton

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Introduction

Daniel S. Hamilton and Kristina Spobr

This book is a highly unusual blend of memoir and scholarship that takes us back to the decade when “post-Wall Europe” was made. Drawing on newly-released archival material, each scholar offers his interpretations. Drawing on memory, experience, and personal notes, each protagonist retraces his or her original impressions, choices and contributions to how NATO, in its exit from the Cold War, came to reaffirm its purpose while revising its missions, opening its door to new members, building new relations with other institutions and partner countries, and attempting cooperation with Russia.

On April 4, 2019 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) celebrated its 70th anniversary. Few would have expected this when the Alliance was born. In 1951, when General Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed command of NATO forces in Europe as the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), he mused that “if in 10 years, all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole project will have failed.” The U.S. commitment was intended to get war-torn Western Europe on its feet and off America’s back. But the Allies hung together, for fear that otherwise they might hang separately.

NATO saw off the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. Yet when the East-West conflict ended, the United States did not reduce its commitment to Europe, it extended it. 40 years after Eisenhower’s prophecy, some 150,000 American troops remained in Europe.¹ On NATO’s 50th birthday in 1999, its leaders not only welcomed three new members (Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic), they approved the blueprint for a larger, more flexible Alliance that would remain committed to collective defense but be capable of meeting a wider range of threats to common Alliance interests.²

This mixture of solidarity and flexibility proved to be an essential combination in helping NATO see out the Cold War. There were times

when the Alliance had seemed under impossible strains, for instance when trying to respond to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles. But the Alliance managed to craft the so-called ‘Dual Track’ policy in 1979 that ultimately led to the withdrawal of all intermediate-range missiles in Europe. NATO was also an essential factor in the process of German unification. The insistence by U.S. President George H.W. Bush and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl that unified Germany must remain a member of the Alliance assured Moscow against German revanchism and also justified the continuing presence of U.S. military forces in post-Cold War Europe.³

But what would NATO look like in post-Wall Europe? In their London Declaration of July 6, 1990 NATO leaders stressed their intent to “remain a defensive alliance” while espousing the goal of becoming a more “political” community, so that members of the disintegrating Warsaw Pact could “establish regular diplomatic liaison with NATO.” The aim was to “work with all the countries of Europe” in order “to create enduring peace” on the continent.⁴ In the fall of 1991 they created the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). NACC was intended to represent the Euro-Atlantic Community at large—from Vancouver to Vladivostok—and symbolize NATO’s stretched-out “hand of friendship” to the formerly antagonistic East—the Warsaw Pact states including the USSR.⁵

Ironically, however, the Cooperation Council’s very first meeting on December 20, 1991 coincided with the Soviet Union’s dissolution into “sovereign states.” NACC suddenly found itself dealing with a multitude of separate entities in the post-Soviet space. The question quickly became whether NACC would “remain the embodiment of the liaison program” or become “a way station on the road to Alliance membership.”⁶ How should NATO differentiate between the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe eagerly looking to join the West and former Soviet states still in the orbit of Moscow’s “Near Abroad”?⁷

As America and its Allies worked to design and build a post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security architecture, their biggest challenge in this chaotic situation was forging a partnership with the new post-Soviet Russia and President Boris Yeltsin. How would such a partnership look? How could Russia’s transformation be supported—both economically and politically? Could that now highly volatile country be engaged in a

cooperative relationship? How could stability and security be secured in Central Europe after the Balkan powderkeg exploded anew with the disintegration of Yugoslavia?

Various options for the new architecture were gradually ruled out. French President François Mitterrand's vague model of a "European Confederation"⁸ (excluding the United States) quickly fell by the wayside because American power clearly remained a crucial element in the security equation. The eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU) was still far off, and it lacked a hard security component. It was increasingly clear why Eastern European eyes, including those of the Baltic trio—at the interface of Europe and Russia—turned towards NATO and the United States.⁹ George H. W. Bush could not solve that conundrum in 1992. It was left to the Clinton Administration from 1993 to move from loose ideas about "liaison" to offer a concrete response to the growing desire of Eastern Europe to formally join the Western Alliance.

Opening the Alliance's door and enlarging its territory were crucial for the "new" NATO. But more was at stake. In the post-Wall world, NATO needed to redefine its mission if it wanted to stay in business.¹⁰ Although it remained the politico-military institution that integrated the armed forces of much of Europe and provided the United States and its Allies with a unique capacity to influence each other's policies, the NATO Alliance would have to modify its *modus operandi*. That meant being able to engage militarily "out of area," manage crises, consider peace enforcement missions and even undertake humanitarian interventions. Through all of this America remained the leading "ordering power."

* * *

NATO's decision to open itself to new members and new missions is one of the most contentious and least understood issues of the post-Wall world. It has now been twenty years since the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland entered the Alliance in 1999, yet controversy surrounding the motives and choices of that time continues to accompany contemporary debates about the bonds between Europe and the United States, the future of East Central Europe, and relations between Russia and the West. Seen from our point of view—one of us a protagonist and the other an historian of that period—many of those debates

have become narrow, one-dimensional caricatures of a more complex story. In this volume we have sought to present that story in a richer, multi-dimensional perspective—not least to counter the abuses of this history that are increasingly undertaken by politicians as they seek to “rewrite” the past to serve their current political purposes.

Rashomon (羅生門 *Rashōmon*), the classic Japanese film directed by Akira Kurosawa, has become synonymous with the struggle to uncover “objective” truth. The film is known for a plot device that involves various characters providing substantially different yet equally plausible accounts of the same incident. The film shows how the same events can be viewed in completely different ways by different people with different backgrounds, expectations, and experiences. The “Rashomon effect” is a term used by scholars, journalists and film critics to refer to contradictory interpretations of the same events by different persons. It highlights the subjective effect of perception on recollection.¹¹

A number of the officials who participated in this project, including at our Washington workshop, told us they felt like a character from *Rashomon*. The analogy is helpful yet somewhat dangerous, because at the end of *Rashomon* it actually turns out each of the characters was lying, and the film intentionally fails to offer any accompanying evidence to elevate or disqualify any version of the truth.

Nonetheless, *Rashomon* underscores how individual interpretations of events can be deeply intertwined with subjective personal memories and perceptions at the time. It also highlights the need to supplement personal narrative with evidence, as we have done by including contributions drawing on newly-released archival materials.

A related guide is the ancient fable of the blind men who each feels a different part of an elephant:

My friends and I can't seem to figure out what this thing in front of us is. One of us thinks it's a wall; one thinks it's a snake; one thinks it's a rope, and one thinks it's four tree trunks. How can one thing seem so different to five different people?"

"Well," said the zoo-keeper. "You are all right. This elephant seems like something different to each one of you. And the only way to know what this thing really is, is to do exactly what you have

done. Only by sharing what each of you knows can you possibly reach a true understanding.¹²

The fable teaches a lesson about the limits of individual perspective. One person's view of an ultimate truth may not tell the whole story. Perception is influenced by the truth each individual is able to touch. Each protagonist creates his own version of reality from a limited personal perspective. He may be tempted to believe he has a better handle on the truth than others. Yet only when each protagonist shares his individual perspective does a fuller picture come into view.

The problem, of course, is that the men in the fable were blind. Our authors, in contrast, were key decision makers at the time. Each saw a part of the elephant—their personal role and that of their country/government—and can tell that part of the story. By asking them to share their observations with each other and us in our intense one-day parley and then combining them in essay form into one volume, we are able to offer a fuller view of the whole elephant. This is important because NATO's post-Wall enlargement and the decisions of the 1990s are still the elephant in the room when it comes to current debates about the future of NATO and relations with Russia.¹³

The final context for our collection of articles is what cinematographers call the Reveal Shot. When a camera focuses narrowly on a particular actor or actors, viewers can't see the whole set. When the camera pans out, or cuts to a wider view, the audience can see other aspects that can entirely change their understanding of the story. By delineating specific details and documents while putting them in larger context, our authors offer the broader perspective that is necessary to a clearer understanding of the security dynamics of post-Wall Europe.

Perhaps the most useful contribution this book can make is as a cautionary tale for those who seek to promote absolute truth, ascribe malevolent intent to others, or overreach in their interpretations. Different actors have different impressions of the same issue, depending on their individual mental maps, vantage points and national interests. As a result, their outlooks and goals, perceptions and experiences differ. By seeing through their eyes, looking over their shoulders, and studying meticulously the contemporary written and spoken record, we are able to re-examine and explore:

- how leaders and their administrations across the Euro-Atlantic space reacted to the upheavals of 1989–1991;
- how they imagined the future and what realities they were up against—in the domestic arena and international politics at large;
- why NATO survived the Cold War;
- why its strength—collective defense, rather CSCE-style collective security—mattered to members and aspirant countries;
- why and how the Alliance was revived and reinvented as a central pillar of the Euro-Atlantic security framework; and
- how key protagonists sought to find a place for Russia.

Together, these essays help us understand the origins of today's transatlantic relationship and can inform debates about its future.

Notes

1. Eugene Carroll and Pat Schroeder, “The Soviet Union dissolved and common concern at getting that transition right,” *Chicago Tribune* September 2, 1994.

2. “The Washington Declaration”—signed and issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. on April 23–24, 1999, <https://clintonwhitehouse2.archives.gov/WH/New/NATO/statement2.html>. See also Wade Boese, “NATO Unveils ‘Strategic Concept’ at 50th Anniversary Summit,” April 1, 1999, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999_04-05/natam99. Cf. “NATO takes measures to reinforce collective defence, agrees on support for Ukraine,” April 1, 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108508.htm.

3. This is discussed more fully in Kristina Spohr, *Post Wall, Post Square. Rebuilding the World after 1989* (London: HarperCollins, 2019; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), Chapters 3 and 4.

4. The London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, July 6, 1990, https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/the_london_declaration_on_a_transformed_north_atlantic_alliance_6_july_1990-en-9c5fa86b-12a0-4f59-ad90-e69503ef6036.html.

5. Thomas L. Friedman, “Soviet Disarray: Yeltsin Says Russia Seeks to Join NATO,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1991; North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69344.htm.

6. George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, College Station, TX (*hereafter* GHWBPL), NSC, Barry Lowenkron Files, European Strategy Steering Group (ESSG): ESSG Meeting—February 3, 1992, NATO and the East: Key Issues, no author (likely NSC) undated. See also The National Archives UK, Kew Surrey (*hereafter* TNA UK), PREM 19/4329, Memo, Weston to Goulden (confidential)—The Future of NATO—The Question of Enlargement, 3 March 1992, pp. 1–7. On the NACC meeting and Soviet disintegration, see Friedman, *op cit*.

7. GHWBPL, NSC David Gompert Files, ESSG (CF01301), U.S. Security and Institutional Interests in Europe and Eurasia in the Post-Cold War Era, undated, enclosed with David Gompert to Robert Zoellick et al., “February 21, 1992 ESSG Meeting, Situation Room, 10:00–11:00 A.M. February 19, 1992. “Given the large number of NACC members, how do we implement a policy of differentiation toward the new democracies in Eastern and Central Europe? What steps can we take bilaterally to reinforce our desire to have these countries drawn closer to NATO? How do we respond to requests from these, and other NACC members, for NATO membership?” p. 3.

8. Jean Musitelli, “François Mitterrand, architecte de la Grande Europe: Le projet de Confédération européenne (1990–1991),” *Revue Internationale et*

Stratégique no. 82 (2011/2), pp.18-28. Frédéric Bozo, “The Failure of a Grand Design: Mitterrand’s European Confederation, 1989–1991,” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 3 (2008), pp. 391-412. Cf. Julie M. Newton, *Russia, France, and the Idea of Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). See also Benoît d’Aboville’s chapter in this volume.

9. Kristina Spohr, *Germany and the Baltic Problem after the Cold War: The Development of a New Ostpolitik 1989–2000* (London/New York: Routledge 2004), Chapters 3 and 5. Note: In late fall 1991, ahead of the first NACC meeting, NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner highlighted that at this “decisive moment in European history” it was the United States which found itself “in a position to lead in this endeavor” of forging a new, post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic Community around NATO. GHWBPL, NSC, Barry Lowenkron Files, NATO: Wörner (CF01526-021), Memo by Scowcroft for Bush—re: President’s 11 Oct. Meeting with Wörner, Oct. 9, 1991, p. 2. Cf. in the same file, Memcon of Bush-Wörner talks, Oct. 11, 1991, 11:30am-12:00noon, The Oval Office, pp. 1-5.

10. See endnote 6 and 7 above: “Nato and the East” as well as “U.S. Security and Institutional Interests in Europe and Eurasia in the Post-Cold War Era.”

11. The 1950 film was based on Ryūnosuke Akutagawa’s 1922 short story “In a Grove.” For more on the Rashomon effect, see Robert Anderson, “The Rashomon Effect and Communication,” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 41 (2016), pp. 249–269. An earlier example of such a plot device is Robert Browning’s long poem, originally published in 1868, *The ring and the book* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001). The 1999 film *Run Lola Run* also offers alternate narratives and outcomes, but as Anderson notes, *Lola* is not, like *Rashomon*, about distinct versions of the same incident, but three similar but slightly different sequences, each with different outcomes.

12. “The Story of the Six Blind Men,” <https://www.his.com/~pshapiro/elephant.story.html>.

13. For a related approach, see Hans Binnendijk and Richard L. Kugler, *Seeing the Elephant: The U.S. Role in Global Security* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press and Potomac Books, 2006), p. xi. On the “NATO enlargement question” and subsequent political controversy, see Christopher Clark and Kristina Spohr, “Moscow’s account of Nato expansion is a case of false memory syndrome,” *The Guardian*, May 24, 2015; Kristina Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The ‘NATO Enlargement Question’ in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990–1991,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012), pp. 4-54.