

Chapter 24

NATO Enlargement and Russia: A Military Perspective

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While the work on NATO enlargement was rightly the business of policymakers and diplomats, the military was also involved, but always subordinate to civilian authority. And because the military goes into and out of policy positions, most officers have only an episodic understanding of the policy issues. That was certainly the case with me.

When I served at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) from February 1978 through June 1979 as Assistant Executive Officer to NATO Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR) General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., I did have visibility into some of the most sensitive and pressing policy matters. I helped write much of his correspondence and speeches and traveled often with him. But it wasn't until 1994, fifteen years later, that I worked NATO policy in the Pentagon as the Director for Strategic Plans and Policy, J-5. What follows are my impressions of NATO enlargement and our relationship with Russia.

When I served at SHAPE in the late 1970s there was talk that at some point, NATO would perhaps take on new members. After West Germany had come Greece and Turkey. Spain was possible, also Sweden perhaps, or even Austria. Spain did in fact join NATO in 1982. Our primary focus, however, was on the problem of the new Soviet missile, the SS20, which was challenging NATO's deterrent, and the NATO strategy of flexible response.

For the bulk of the U.S. Army, even the so-called "heavy force," which consisted of tanks, mechanized infantry, and self-propelled artillery, and was in fact oriented to the NATO mission of deterring—or, if deterrence failed, defending—in assigned sectors in southern Germany, NATO and its issues were specialized problems that we occasionally studied in school. The U.S. Army was fully occupied recovering from the Vietnam War experience. We had become an Army of volunteers—no draftees. We were constantly upgrading outdated equipment, ex-

changing old tanks for new models, new trucks, new radios, and so on. We also brought in new training methods—everything from laser devices to explicit soldiering tasks to be tested by the units themselves. Though patriotic, we were non-ideological and non-political.

From the mid-1970s through the late 1980s, the U.S. Army slowly upgraded our deployments, our doctrine and our equipment to respond to what we viewed as the growing Soviet threat. We stationed a new, separate armored brigade in Northern Germany near Hamburg and prepositioned several brigades worth of ready-to-go equipment in Belgium so that reinforcements could be airlifted in and used to augment what was believed to be the sectors most vulnerable to a Soviet attack. We replaced our old doctrine of an active (elastic) defense with a concept of fighting in-depth to disrupt the second echelon of the enemy's attacking forces. We brought in the new Black Hawk and Apache Helicopters, M1 tanks, and M2 Infantry Fighting Vehicles. We struggled to provide the military backing for deterrence, and should that fail, to offer flexible defense in accordance with NATO doctrine. Never did I see any plan to initiate an attack, nor even, in the defense, to counterattack with ground forces into East Germany or Czechoslovakia. The Army was prepared for the Cold War to last indefinitely, with soldiers and their families rotating into Germany from assignments in the United States and back every two to three years.

By late 1987, however, even the officers in far-away Fort Carson, Colorado—where I was serving as Commander, 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division—could sense strategic change. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had visited Washington, DC, and while he was being driven in a motorcade from Congress to the White House, he got out of his car, and, walking among the bystanders, was greeted with warm applause. Observing this on the evening news, I was unsettled—here we were, training to go to war in case deterrence failed, while in Washington it seemed that Gorbachev was greeted as a kind of hero. We were training in a generations-long effort to fight a country whose leader was welcomed by our own citizens as a hero?

The American military was never anti-Soviet. Curious, respectful, in awe of the World War II experience would be the best way to describe our perspective. We studied what Soviet writings we could, historical and current, to understand Soviet military doctrine, and decision-mak-

ing. We worried about Soviet technology—air-to-air missiles that could launch backwards, the incredibly maneuverable MiG 29, explosive reactive armor on tanks, with automatic loaders, tanks that could “squat” and dig themselves in to lower their silhouettes, and so on. We trained against what we believed to be their tactics, constituting “aggressor squadrons” for the Air Force at Red Flag, and a Soviet-styled “OpFor” at the Army’s National Training Center in the Mojave Desert.

On a personal level, I had studied Russian at West Point and become somewhat fluent, read translations of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Sholokhov, listened to Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Mussorgsky, and even travelled as a tourist in the summer of 1964 to the Soviet Union, along with three other West Point cadets. We met young Soviet officers, and verbally jostled over the Olympics, the space program and other matters. We spent hours visiting Kazanskiy Cathedral, the Hermitage, Red Square, and debating Communism with our Intourist guide and with the curator of the Lenin Museum in Kiev. We left impressed and concerned, but mostly with a warm feeling for the historic hardships and suffering of the people there.

The U.S. Army wasn’t “politicized” in the way that, for example, the Soviet and Chinese armies were. There were no commissars governing our appreciation of world politics. We considered ourselves “professional,” aiming for expertise in the use of weapons and forces, at the direction of the political leaders elected and appointed over us.

By the late 1980s the Cold War was clearly ending. Gorbachev was struggling to reform the entrenched Soviet bureaucracy, and the Communist idealism I had heard first hand in 1964 was long gone. The U.S. military was delighted with the end of the Cold War—we immediately got rid of the U.S. Army’s tactical nuclear weapons. We respected Soviet Marshal Akhromeyev and his personal relationship with our chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe and later General Colin Powell, and were saddened to learn that he had committed suicide. There was no sense of triumph expressed.

We were also distracted by the invasion of Panama, and subsequent actions in Kuwait and Iraq. In a personal meeting on a Friday afternoon in May, 1991, discussing Operation Desert Storm, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy explained it to me this way: “...we learned we can intervene militarily in the Mideast with impunity—the Soviets won’t

do a thing to stop us.” This wasn’t anti-Soviet, but rather a recognition that the Soviet threat was a fading concern.

When I arrived in Washington to become the J-5 in April 1994, the United States was engaged in multiple crises—a total embargo of Haiti, a crisis with North Korea about their possible reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel, NATO operations Deny Flight and Display Determination in the Balkans, which were designed to smother the conflict in former Yugoslavia, an unfolding humanitarian crisis and genocide in Rwanda, a continuing commitment to the Kurds in Iraq, an airlift to Beirut from Cyprus, as well as a dozen other pressing issues. Worse, there was no prepared national security strategy. Without a Soviet force to face, what was the purpose of the U.S. Armed Forces, and how should they be sized and equipped, and with what level of resourcing?

In the midst of wrestling with these issues I was also charged with leading the first U.S.-Russian staff talks; someone previously had determined that they would be held in Moscow, in early August, 1994. There was no agenda, and no precedent.

Our Russian hosts from the Main Operations Directorate of the Russian General Staff were gracious but reserved. I met my counterpart, Colonel-General Barynkin, the Chief of the Main Operations Directorate, and his boss, General Kolesnikov, the Chief of the Russian General Staff. The Defense Ministry was less impressive on the inside than its façade would have implied—large, high-ceilinged offices, but sparsely furnished, with threadbare carpeting.

General Barynkin spoke no English, and my Russian had faded to little more than introductions and niceties. As we conversed through an interpreter, he stood by a five-foot-high globe in his office and slowly spun it around. “I can put my hand on any spot,” he said, “and I will know what is happening there. Can you?” It was a boast and a challenge, I sensed born more of insecurity rather than curiosity. Not much different than listening in 1964 as Soviet lieutenants over a lunch table boasted that they had the first astronaut and the best astronauts.

On a warm afternoon in early August 1994, sitting across the conference table and assisted by our defense attaché, we followed a loose agenda in the Staff talks, more of a get-acquainted than an effort directed at specific accomplishments. NATO was discussed, because NATO

was seeking to engage all the former members of the Warsaw Pact in a Partnership for Peace, and of course, the Russians were curious about NATO operations to support the U.N. in the Balkans.

The United States had made no decision on NATO enlargement at that point, but all matters associated with NATO were met by the Russians with skepticism, resentment, and concern. In particular, I was asked, "When will your NATO ships be in our port of Riga?" I answered, "I don't know, but the more you ask that question, the sooner they will come." (I had already heard from East European attaches in Washington their concerns about the Russians.) I left Moscow with the impression that whatever the friendliness between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, these Russian military leaders would be difficult. But I would try to work it.

I invited Colonel-General Barynkin to visit me in Washington, and upon returning to DC, worked hard through the Russian Defense attaché to have him actually make the trip. He arrived in May 1995, protesting, "I have never been west of East Berlin." This, I thought, was precisely why it was important for him to visit us.

We hosted a dinner for him, inviting several of the staff from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the State Department, and the National Security Council (NSC) who worked Russian issues. We saw the sights in Washington DC, visited the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, got a briefing in Russian and a demonstration of several aircraft from the Air Combat Command at Langley Air Force Base, and overflowed the Atlantic Fleet at Norfolk on the way back to Washington. Barynkin looked enviously at the carriers and amphibies docked at the Navy base. Through the interpreter, he said, "I am in charge of nuclear weapons. Are you?" It was about insecurity, I felt. He departed with the Russian attaché to go to Brooklyn for a couple of days with the Russian community there. I later learned that he had been quite uncomfortable, even alleging that we had tried to entrap him with a beautiful Russian-speaking woman, OSD Russian expert Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall.

I was invited back to Russia by another Russian, the deputy Chief of Defense, Colonel General Bogdonov. It was a reciprocal visit—a welcoming dinner, a sauna, a tennis game, a chance to test weapons, and various discussions. All good natured. General Bogdonov explained

that as a youngster he had almost starved in the postwar Soviet Union. At one point as a four year old they lived for a few weeks largely on green apples. We discussed a battle in Grozny, where he had played a part in the Russians' unsuccessful push into the city in 1994. We talked about families and life. It was the kind of relationship with the Russians that most American officers had always sought—military leaders serving great countries, sharing the special bonds and common interests of the military profession, despite our separate loyalties.

In October 1995, after the first few weeks of shuttle diplomacy with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to end the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, I traveled with Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott to Moscow to share with Russia details of our negotiations, and to pave the way for Russian participation in the NATO peacekeeping force. While Secretary Talbott visited the Foreign Ministry and Presidency, I went to my counterpart, Colonel General Barynkin. After I briefed the U.S. seven-point peace plan, Barynkin observed, "You Americans are coming into our part of Europe, and you say you will be gone in a year, but you will not be." I protested. "The Administration has testified before Congress that the troop presence will last only one year," I said, "and we intend to stick with that." Barynkin wasn't at all persuaded; he replied, "Please, we are Russians, we understand you." Then he added, "but if we were in your position, we would do the same thing." Nevertheless, we didn't get a "no" from the Russian military—just their continuing sense of ownership and privilege in Eastern Europe.

General George Joulwan, the NATO Supreme Allied Commander at the time, working under Secretary of Defense William Perry, finalized the details of Russian military participation within the peacekeeping force planned to enforce Dayton peace agreement. The Russians refused to serve under NATO—NATO was the old enemy, the survivor of the Cold War struggle, and the threat to Russia's future. In a meeting with Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev and Secretary Perry, Joulwan persuaded the Russians to serve only under U.S. command—exercised through Joulwan and by virtue of his dual responsibilities as U.S. Commander in Europe as well as NATO Supreme Allied Commander. It fit together nicely with other efforts of President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev to have Russia more engaged in Europe, while respecting the Russian institutional distaste for NATO.

Another factor was pressing in on our relationship with Russia, however—NATO enlargement. On Friday, before Labor Day weekend in 1994, a speech prepared for Vice President Gore to deliver on Sunday in Berlin came through my staff for clearance. As J-5, we acted on behalf of the Chairman, General Shalikashvili, in clearing and coordinating important statements and policies. In scanning the speech, I noted that it called for NATO to admit new member states from Eastern Europe. My staff had flagged this as a problem. While I had seen no interagency policy discussion of NATO enlargement, it was known that both Defense Secretary Perry and General Shalikashvili opposed such a policy. I lined out the offending sentences. That afternoon the speech came back through. Once again I struck the offending sentences. On Saturday morning the speech draft made a third trip through my office, and once more, the language on NATO enlargement had been reinserted. I struck it a third time and took the paper to General Shalikashvili. “I’ll take care of it,” he said. However, as delivered, the speech contained the offending commitment to expand NATO

Two weeks later incoming Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Richard Holbrooke assumed duties and called a meeting to announce the new U.S. policy. The United States would support NATO enlargement. It was a surprise to the Pentagon, and to me. Richard Holbrooke was at his dramatic best, explaining not only a strategic rationale but underscoring it this way: “After Yalta, Senator Barbara Mikulski’s grandmother turned over the picture of FDR on her dresser and never looked at it again for her whole life. Is there anyone here who doesn’t believe this is the policy of the United States?” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Joe Kruzel raised his hand, and attempted to discuss the premises, but Holbrooke brushed his question away. I raised my hand, and bluntly said, “No, I don’t think it is the policy...” I had expected some kind of a formal decision-making process, or at least a formal notification.

There was a moment of stunned silence.

“Anyone who questions this policy is disloyal to the President of the United States,” thundered Holbrooke, looking at me. He was accusing me of disloyalty? I felt my ears turning red. Reflexively, I moved to unzip my jacket, pushed back my chair, and replied something like, “How

dare you question my loyalty; this has nothing to do with loyalty to the President.”

For a moment it was heated and personal—he knew he had gone too far. But Holbrooke backed away, explained in a more conversational tone that in fact a policy decision had been made, and he had chosen this way, rather than a memo, to announce the decision.

I returned to the Pentagon and reported the confrontation to General Shalikashvili, with some trepidation. But he was totally amused and smiling. “Wes, I have already heard from Brussels; they say you are a hero...” (presumably for standing up to Holbrooke).

A few hours later Holbrooke asked me and my staff to prepare the briefings for Allies on the why, how, and who of enlargement from the military perspective.

No doubt my Russian hosts, from 1995 onwards, were well aware of the change in U.S. policy, but however much they might have resented NATO, and the humiliation of the Soviet Union’s demise, at the top, Russia’s leaders seemed to sing a different tune. President Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin seemed almost chummy. Overall, Russian policy simply didn’t reflect the attitudes of the state institutions and especially the power ministries, and especially the Ministry of Defense and intelligence agencies. While I continued to repeat the U.S. position that NATO enlargement would help stabilize Europe, was therefore in Russia’s interest, and in fact NATO hoped that someday Russia itself would join NATO, it was clear to me when I spoke with Russians—their military attaché in Washington, Generals Barynkin and Bogdonov—that this wasn’t selling to my counterparts in Russia.

Nevertheless, extending stability eastwards was precisely what NATO was doing in Bosnia. Without the NATO commitment, and U.S. forces on the ground, there would have been no Dayton peace agreement. Without NATO, the U.N. was simply incapable of ending the war, and stabilizing the region. And despite all the dire predictions, there had not been a single incident of resistance, nor a single NATO casualty. Here was the proof of the value of NATO’s expansion “out-of-area.”

When I assumed General Joulwan’s position as Supreme Allied Commander Europe in July 1997, the Russian peacekeeping mission

in Bosnia-Herzegovina was established and performing well. But they had begun downgrading the cooperation, replacing a prominent Russian three-star with a two-star, and reducing the level of forces. Russian General Anatoliy Krivalopov, formerly a leader of Russia's strategic rocket forces (which were now downsized), was newly assigned as Deputy Commander in charge of Russian Forces. The Russian forces consisted of a Russian motorized rifle battalion under the operational control of the U.S. division deployed across northern Bosnia-Herzegovina. It seemed a remarkable transformation from the hostility of the Cold War—but the honeymoon ended just as I arrived.

The day of my change of command, British forces in their sector of Bosnia had conducted the first arrest of indicted Serb war criminals Milan Kovačević and Simo Drljača. Kovačević had been the Mayor of Priedor and Drljača his police chief. Both were accused of imprisoning and abusing Bosniak civilians in concentration camps where many of them died. Drljača resisted arrest, shot at the British troops and was killed in an exchange of fire. Kovačević was detained. It was a deft military operation, executed by British SAS following careful reconnaissance. Kovačević was swiftly helicoptered out and flown to the Hague. For NATO, and for British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the operation was a great success. But it stepped over the line that Serb President Slobodan Milošević had warned us about at Dayton: "Serb people do not like occupying power; NATO must not become occupying power." It was more than a warning—it was a veiled threat. Now, NATO was behaving exactly like an "occupying power."

NATO's action in arresting indicted war criminals broke with the understanding that senior U.S. generals had extracted from our political leaders—namely, that NATO wouldn't undertake "police-type actions." We would simply enforce the Dayton Agreement uniformly on all parties, and we had full legal authority to do that. But with the new leadership in the UK came a new resolve to do the right thing in supporting the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia. President Clinton didn't disagree, and, over reservations by the military commanders, action began. At this point there was a secret list of twenty-odd persons indicted for war crimes—and they were all Serbs.

From the beginning, the Russian peacekeeping force had been cleanly tucked in under command of the U.S. 1st Armored Division,

and then, as units rotated, 1st Infantry Division. There was full transparency (so we believed) in all activities, with Russian liaison officers and the Russian commander attending all important meetings at the Division headquarters. The Russian battalion was located in the ethnically-cleansed Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where it forged a warm and reassuring relationship with the local Serb authorities and population and stayed away from potentially hostile Bosnian Muslims.

When NATO, a few months into the mission in 1996, conducted a special operation targeting Iranian extremists in the Federation entity, there had been no problem with the Russians. These Iranians were “foreign forces,” not permitted under the terms of the agreement. But now, the introduction of classified planning cells, secret reconnaissance, and “snatch operations” conducted by special forces and directed against indicted Serb war criminals—and carefully screened from the Russian forces—put the Russian mission under stress from the locals as well as from Moscow.

Within two days the Serbs struck back against NATO, with a series of less-than-lethal-force actions directed against NATO—broken windows, angry crowds, and so forth. It was clearly directed by Serb authorities.

A few weeks later there was a complete orchestrated, non-lethal attack—rocks, mobs, threats, beatings—on U.S. forces in the city of Brcko. This might have intimidated a U.N. force, operating under limited authorities, but the U.S. division commander, Major General Dave Grange, was ready. In a series of moves he disabled the Serb radio station that was instigating the action, blocked and dispersed the mob, rescued a cut-off U.S. unit, and occupied key terrain, including a hill-top on which a Serb microwave communications station was located. NATO proved it was not the U.N.—and this was a shot in the arm to the entire international community as they worked to implement the Dayton Agreement.

Then we received information that Milošević’s Serb intelligence agents were going to assassinate a somewhat progressive rival to Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, at an election rally in Banja Luka. Their plan was that Karadžić’s (and Milošević’s) group would bus in several hundred thugs to contest the rally, cause a riot, and in the

confusion gun-down Plavšić. U.S. and British forces set up a series of road blocks on the route to Banja Luka, repeatedly halting and searching the buses, until they arrived too late to impact the rally. Plavšić was saved, and Milošević and his Serb agents humiliated. A few weeks later, we confiscated the rifles and machine guns of the Bosnian Serb Special Police units and closed a few police stations, in a further demonstration of NATO power. The Russian battalion had no part to play in this.

In these ways, the NATO force in Bosnia became increasingly proactive in breaking the resistance to the implementation of the Dayton agreement. And as the alignment against Russian sympathies became clearer, so the pressures increased on my Russian deputy. We had cordial discussions, lunchtime meetings, and shared visits to Bosnia. On one visit, the new Russian Chief of Defense, Colonel General (soon to be General) Kvashnin hosted me at the Russian battalion, where we inspected troops and equipment, and reminisced about our respective military careers. He had commanded a Soviet division in Afghanistan: “We always air landed troops at the tops of the mountains, and then attacked the bandits from above, but once your Stinger missiles arrived, that tactic became impossible, and we were lost.” I related my Vietnam experience—where I was hit by bullets from one of “his” AK-47 rifles. Olga, the Russian wife of a U.S. airman serving at SHAPE translated for us. It was the kind of military-to-military communication that could have fostered a strong and lasting professional military relationship.

As I traveled across Eastern Europe, however, I saw the fear that Eastern European governments had of Russia, and their determination to seek safety with NATO and the West. As the Foreign Minister of Bulgaria explained at a meeting in 1997, “Today Russia is weak, but someday it will be strong again, and before then, Bulgaria must be protected by NATO.” The Romanian Defense Minister angrily recalled past Russian incidents of domination: “In 1878 we allowed Russian troops to pass through Romania, and they stole our province of Bessarabia.” OK, the East Europeans had long memories, some Americans chuckled later. But he wasn’t joking. Romania and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and others, wanted NATO membership. They put their trust in the United States—our values, and our reputation as a reliable ally.

Meanwhile, the leadership in Moscow was also changing. Andrei Kozyrev had been replaced in early 1996 as foreign minister by Yevgeny Primakov. When Primakov became prime minister in September 1998 he was succeeded by Igor Ivanov, a man I had worked alongside at Dayton when he was the Russian representative to Ambassador Holbrooke's team. He was pushing back more against NATO: "Under the terms of this Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, NATO could declare a crisis and deploy a division into Slovakia, threatening Russia." Seriously? One little NATO division? I asked. Ivanov laughed; we had a personal relationship. And he knew better.

Control of the Russian Armed Forces was brought more under the control of the Russian intelligence agencies. My access to the Russian Chief of Defense was curtailed—no more spontaneous calls or friendly conversations. My Russian deputy, clearly under instruction, began to question NATO actions more vigorously. "Why does NATO take sides against Serbs?" "Why do you like these Albanians?" I knew we were jeopardizing him personally, and our relationship with the Russians, and I tried to provide the rationale and facts to justify our actions as they unfolded, even before he had to come in and challenge us. It was painful to see the old Cold War lines of stress reemerging in his questions.

Kosovo was a real dilemma for NATO. Although the region was 90 percent or more Albanian by ethnicity, the minority Serbs held the power and worked to crush Albanian culture, rights and opportunities. President Bush had warned the Serbs in December 1992 that if they used force against the Albanian inhabitants, they would feel the weight of U.S. airpower. Holbrooke had tried to bring the subject into the agreements at Dayton, only to have Milošević refuse again and again to discuss Kosovo, saying this was an internal matter.

The Albanian Kosovars themselves, however, had begun to organize into a militia force able to strike against the Serb police and military. Neighboring Albania, a member of Partnership for Peace, demanded consultations, and complained about Serb ethnic cleansing and Serb use of heavy weapons against civilians. NATO was fully occupied with its mission in Bosnia, but could it stand by and allow a repeat of the ethnic cleansing, and the waves of refugees again, only a hundred miles away in the region of southwestern Serbia known as Kosovo?

In late February, 1998, Serb forces had surrounded the farm belonging to the Jashari family, assaulted, and eventually murdered some 60 members of the family. Women and children were found lain out on the floor, shot in the head at close range. Macedonian President Gligorov asked me to visit, and warned that there would be a much wider war in Kosovo. “These Albanians will fight back,” he said.

NATO was in the process of preparing for its 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington, which would be held in April, 1999. Based on success in Bosnia, NATO authorities, and especially the U.S. leadership, could see a bright new future for NATO, acting as a stabilizing force, even beyond the boundaries of NATO member nations. A new NATO Strategic Concept incorporating this purpose was being drafted for unveiling at the Summit. And yet, would that mean acting to halt Serb brutality and ethnic cleansing inside its own borders, in the region known as Kosovo?

The Albanian Chief of Defense visited me in May, 1998. “We can see Serb mortar rounds falling on our Albanian villages in Western Kosovo,” he said.

As NATO concerns began to focus on Kosovo, and Serb ethnic cleansing there, my Russian Deputy brought more issues. “This KLA – we know they are connected to Chechen terrorists.” “These Albanians are mostly criminals.” I’m sure these same kinds of arguments were made at the political level by Russia in NATO, where the Russians had privileged access to NATO representatives through the NATO-Russia Founding Act, negotiated in 1997 as a means of appealing to Russia.

Former KGB agent Yevgeny Primakov, a man who had masterminded support to Palestinian terrorists in the 1970s, returned to the scene, as head of Russian intelligence and Foreign Minister, then as Prime Minister. His remarks in NATO meetings in 1998, and elsewhere, were the stuff of the Cold War—a beleaguered Russia, surrounded by enemies, Russia with no permanent friends, only permanent interests. While he was known and personally charming to NATO diplomats, he bristled with resentment and hostility in his public remarks. He even threw me a few hostile glances at meetings.

“What can we do about Kosovo?” I was asked by NATO ambassadors and foreign ministers. They wanted the Serb ethnic cleansing stopped.

I consulted with the Pentagon and the State Department. Then, with permission from the Pentagon, I went to the White House to suggest the same general approach that had worked for Bosnia—NATO airpower and diplomacy. The Pentagon wasn't happy about this—for them, the objective was budget growth and prepping for possible action against Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, the White House prevailed in internal discussions.

At the direction of NATO authorities, SHAPE was tasked with preparing “concept plans” for possible intervention. My British Deputy, acting on instructions from the Ministry of Defense in London, challenged me, asking, “What are you trying to do?” But it was obvious that NATO could not stand idly by.

On my visit to Moscow in the summer of 1998, General Kvashnin sat across the table, joined by someone from the Foreign Ministry and the intelligence services, as he argued, “You aim to take these countries in Eastern Europe away from us; they are our countries, and you want to sell them your weapons.” And, “you aim is to take our minerals and make us poor.” And the very charming Olga, the interpreter who accompanied me on the trip, divorced her American husband a few months later, when she was discovered to be a Russian spy planted in our headquarters.

By the autumn of 1998, some 400,000 Kosovars had fled their homes and were hiding in the rugged mountains to escape Serb special police efforts to arrest and eliminate the “troublemakers.” NATO had warned Milošević the violence must stop, had flown aircraft around Serbia's northern and western periphery as a warning that NATO could repeat the types of airstrikes that had brought an end to the Serb siege of Sarajevo in 1995. And through the fall of 1998 NATO escalated the diplomatic pressure and threats. NATO Secretary General Solana, Chairman of the Military Committee Klaus Nauman and I traveled to Belgrade to dissuade Milošević.

NATO's statements and actions—my own headquarters was leading the planning effort—put my Russian deputy under severe pressure from Moscow. He delivered a GRU booklet purporting to prove that Albanians were really Chechens; it was so poorly done that even he couldn't defend it. He was recalled by Moscow, in late 1998, returned briefly for a couple of weeks in early 1999, and then departed for good.

According to reports, he was held under house arrest for some time, and stripped of his pension, before being eventually released.

The Serbs began their ethnic cleansing campaign anew in January 1999. French-led negotiations at Rambouillet between the Serbs and Albanians failed in early March, 1999. Serbia then deployed more of its military forces into Serbia and intensified its activities there.

By the time we admitted Poland Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO on March 16, 1999, and then, a week later, began the air campaign to stop Serb ethnic cleaning in Kosovo, the NATO-Russian relationship was in tatters, and the U.S.-Russian relationship was sustained only by President Clinton's friendliness with President Yeltsin and Vice President Gore's occasional collaboration on economic issues with Russian Vice President Chernomyrdin.

NATO conducted its first airstrikes on the evening of March 24, 1999. Political authorities were hoping that a day or two of strikes would convince Milošević to back down. But he didn't.

On Friday, March 26th, Hungarian Ambassador András Simonyi delivered a message from Hungary's Prime Minister, young Victor Orbán: "Twice before in this century Hungary has joined an Alliance and then gone straight to war; both times it lost and was dismembered; please do not allow this to happen again."

At one point during the air campaign, as hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanian fled their homes to escape the Serbs, and NATO escalated its series of strikes, Russia threatened to sally forth its Black Sea fleet to impede NATO air actions—but after stern warnings by Deputy Secretary Talbott, nothing came of this.

And in the midst of this was NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington, and the unveiling of the new Strategic Concept. For NATO political authorities, and for the heads of state, the air operation was more than embarrassing. It was a stark challenge to the new Strategic Concept, a severe threat to NATO itself and even a personal political threat to heads of state. Certainly NATO could not afford to fail, but would the air operation succeed? Why was the United States so dominant in this operation? And, if ground forces were necessary, would they be provided?

The air actions continued for 78 days, steadily escalating in scope and intensity. Bulgaria and Romania allowed their airspace to be used by NATO and completed the encirclement of Serbia. Heads of state agreed to do “whatever was necessary to succeed,” thus authorizing planning to begin for ground operations. Eventually Russia agreed to participate with Finland in bringing to Serb President Milošević a proposal to halt NATO action and accept the NATO peacekeeping force which had been proposed earlier for Kosovo, in return for the withdrawal of all Serb military and police from Kosovo. On June 11, the day after the U.N. accepted the peace agreement and approved its implementation, the Russian military, in conjunction with the Serbs, made a belated effort to undercut the agreement. They deployed the Russian battalion by highway from Bosnia through Serbia to occupy the airfield in Pristina, Kosovo, in preparation for flying in reinforcing Russian airborne brigades. It was a well-televised crisis moment for NATO, and for me. But diplomatic and Presidential pressure on Russia blocked the reinforcing brigades, and the Russian battalion eventually moved out to a small sector of eastern Kosovo for peacekeeping duties in coordination with NATO.

Some two months after the Summit, Kosovo was a crisis resolved and a NATO success won by diplomacy, as well as by airpower and the threat of a ground invasion. 1.4 million Albanians returned to their homes. And to this day, it marks NATO’s most successful action.

When new Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Kyiv in November, 1999, for the inauguration of Ukrainian President Kuchma, he remarked in his speech, “Russia and Ukraine are more than brothers, we are in each other’s souls.” The Polish National Security Advisor came later to warn me that now Russia’s aim was clear, to restore the Soviet space; already, he said, they have formed commercial companies to buy up electricity generating and transmission companies in Poland so they have control.” The new Romanian Defense Chief warned me that the Russians were distributing fake Romanian passports in Moldova, attempting to instigate border riots and uncertainty, in an effort to block Romania’s eventual accession to NATO.

In retrospect, NATO nations lacked the understanding, resources and will, to help transform Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. While the top leaders in Russia formed certain relationships with the

West, the efforts of transformation were too difficult and complex to be accomplished without far deeper and much more extensive engagement by the West. And beneath the diplomatic exchanges and visits, the military and security services held the ultimate power in Russia. The historical legacy of antagonism to the West, resentment at the loss of Eastern Europe and the Soviet republics, and stubborn, deeply embedded nationalism, and their own stubborn self-interest became the dominant factors in regenerating hostility. The situation was an eerie echo of Weimar Germany's resentments after Versailles.

NATO enlargement was nothing more than the inevitable response to Eastern European fears, while Europe and the United States, overly optimistic in the aftermath of the Cold War, were pushed by the collapse of Yugoslavia to extend the zone of stability eastwards from the old Cold War boundaries. Had NATO failed to enlarge, it would have opened the door earlier to Russian efforts to restore Soviet space and Russian power in Eastern Europe. As it is, NATO enlargement has become a convenient excuse for the Russians to act out historic policies, and a whipping boy for disenchanted, overly idealistic Western strategists.

NATO did in fact extend stability eastwards and make possible an expansion of the European Union as well.

Today both NATO and the European Union are challenged by resurgent nationalism, a sometimes-faltering European economy, an unexpected security challenge in the form of migrants from the south, and increased Russian military and diplomatic pressure. In Afghanistan, NATO remains saddled with a military operation undertaken at U.S. urging without a plan or strategy for success. But if NATO and its partner organization, the European Union, can maintain their unity and resolve, and together manage the proper response to China's ascending power, the gradual transformation of Eastern Europe and even Russia itself is indeed possible. To use Gorbachev's phrase, "a common European home," and a Europe whole and free, Atlantic to the Urals, is not yet out of reach.

