

# Taking the Atlantic Community Beyond NATO Transformation

By  
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NATO has been embarked on an impressive process of transformation, largely by taking on new roles and missions that have required dramatic changes in how alliance leaders think and how the alliance operates. Now, the NATO members need to move beyond thinking solely in the NATO box, and develop new forms of cooperation that respond to the security challenges that NATO and European Union members face today.

For a start, the transatlantic democracies need to breathe new life into the sense of common destiny among the Atlantic community of nations. This is a bigger task than simply reaffirming the goal of NATO unity, avoiding disastrous unilateralist policies, or tinkering with NATO's method of operations. It requires policies that reflect and acknowledge the mutual dependence and shared values that still make the Euro-Atlantic community special.

It is increasingly clear that the challenges faced by the Euro-Atlantic allies cannot be managed effectively within NATO's narrow confines or even in a treaty between the United States and members of the European Union (EU), which would leave out Canada and important European allies, such as Norway and Turkey. Furthermore, the US-EU bilateral relationship has a distinctly functional nature—it is mostly about the important but mainly technical details of US-EU relations and has very little political

prominence or association with broader goals and values.

The diverse nature of twenty-first-century issues affecting allied interests suggests the need for a new initiative designed to broaden the context of the transatlantic relationship. The point of doing so would be to give form and substance to the apparent belief of all allied governments that, even in the absence of a Soviet threat and in the face of new terrorist challenges, they continue to share — and need to defend — many values, goals, and interests.

Convincing Americans and Europeans to expand the Euro-Atlantic relationship beyond NATO and bilateral US-EU ties would not be an easy task. For most Americans, NATO is the transatlantic relationship. But that relationship is more than just NATO, even though NATO has effectively carried most of the burden of relations for more than fifty years. It is also more than is captured by the growing bilateral US relationship with the European Union, which increasingly represents not only united European economic but also political and now security views in dealings with the United States. But the European Union does not yet include all European democracies, and different views of Europe's future among its members suggest that it will be years, if not decades, before the European Union equals "Europe" in all its aspects.

The Atlantic Community of transatlantic democracies still represents a core of values and interests that is unique, even if imperfect. Some might question whether the community's value foundation remains as strong as it once was and argue that new and important perceptions of interests increasingly divide America from Europe, particularly after Iraq. Nevertheless, the United States still has more in common with its transatlantic allies—from historical roots to contemporary interests—than with any other single nation or group of countries in the world. No single

country has as much in common with Europe or is more important to Europe than is the United States. The simple fact is that the US-European relationship constitutes the vital core of international relations: the international system only works well if the United States and its European allies are working together.

Over the decades, successive administrations in the United States and in Europe have been preoccupied, not unreasonably, largely with the short term. This may once again be the fate for the Riga meeting. Creation of a new Atlantic Community would require leaders to gamble on a long term vision of continued and strengthened transatlantic partnership with new institutions to supplement the old ones. Such an initiative would require foresight and leadership that all too often is missing in US and European government policies.

Nevertheless, the transatlantic idea is not likely to die. Even as the alliance tries to cope with the demands of the war on terrorism, Middle East war and peace issues, relations with Russia, and the EU–NATO relationship, the United States and its allies should consider the need for a new Atlantic Community Treaty. Such a treaty could draw on the expressions of common values and shared interests articulated in the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty that established NATO. It could reflect a contemporary appreciation of those values and interests and should include all members of the European Union and NATO.<sup>1</sup>

The mission of the new organization would be to support and encourage consultations and cooperation among all NATO and European Union members on non-military aspects of their security. Military aspects would continue to be handled primarily by NATO in concert with whatever cooperation developments at the EU level.

Operation of a new Atlantic Community could include the organization of twice-yearly summit meetings among all members of NATO and the European Union as well as observers from any countries recognized as candidates for membership in those two bodies. The meetings could be scheduled in conjunction with the regular NATO and EU summits and would supplant the current US–EU summit meetings. The summit framework could be supported by a per-

manent council to discuss issues as they develop between summit sessions and working groups that meet as needed.

Approaching problems and issues from the broad perspective offered by an Atlantic Community framework would open up possibilities for discussions of issues that are discussed unofficially among allied representatives at NATO but are not within NATO's formal mandate. In an Atlantic Community forum, there would be a better opportunity for a dynamic problem-solving synergy to develop when all aspects of issues can be put on the table. The war against terrorism is a good example. If there had been an Atlantic Community Council on September 11, it could immediately have established working groups to address all aspects of the campaign against sources of international terror. The North Atlantic Council would not have been required to wait for the Atlantic Community

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Council to act and could have invoked Article 5 on September 12 just as it did. However, in the meantime, discussions in the Atlantic Community Council could have been coordinating the response of police authorities in Community countries, discussing actions to cut off sources of financial support to terrorists, developing public diplomacy themes to accompany military and diplomatic action, and beginning consideration of long-term strategies designed to undermine support for terrorist activities.

A new Atlantic Community would embrace, not replace, NATO in the overall framework of transatlantic relations. Because it would be a consultative forum only, it would not threaten the “autonomy” of the European Union or undermine NATO's Article 5 collective defense commitment. In fact, it could help bridge the current artificial gap between NATO discussions of security policy and US–EU consultations on economic issues, which have important overlapping dimensions.

Because an Atlantic Community organization would encourage members to address issues that NATO does not tackle, the new structure would provide added value beyond that offered by the tradi-

tional alliance. It might also provide some additional options for shaping coalitions willing to deal with new security challenges in cases where using the NATO framework might not be acceptable to all allies and where action could be blocked by a single dissenting member.

Such an initiative would admittedly face some tough questions. Some critics might ask what another “talk shop” among the Western democracies would accomplish. Would consultations in the Atlantic Community framework eventually take precedence over those in NATO’s North Atlantic Council? Would such a forum have avoided Euro-Atlantic differences over Bosnia and Kosovo or Iraq? Would discussions in such a forum contribute to the settlement of transatlantic economic issues? Would US participation in such a setting simply add to the expense of US international involvement? Some might question whether the proposal is an attempt to substitute process (more consultations) for a diminishing substance (common interests) in the relationship. Others might charge that such a community would threaten the “autonomy” of the European Union, others that the United States would be sacrificing sovereignty.

The answer to all these questions is that no one outcome is guaranteed, and all such questions will be answered by the choices made by participating governments. Some in Europe and in the United States might prefer to move away from alliance and toward something more like a “handshake relationship” in which cooperation continues but in a more ad hoc, less institutionalized setting. This formula might yield greater freedom of maneuver for the United States and a uniting Europe but would also likely produce more tensions and frictions, given the lack of a solemn commitment to cooperation as a frame of reference.

These questions and issues should all be considered in a debate on the need for a new Atlantic Community. The point, however, is that such a debate is required. No consultative arrangement will guarantee that the United States and Europe will be able to solve all problems between them. But without a renewed commitment to community and without the necessary institutional settings for dialogue and cooperation, the foundations of the transatlantic relationship could be at risk.

In 2006, the transatlantic bargain remains a criti-

cal, valid framework for the United States, Canada, and the European democracies. The bargain survived the Cold War and after by adapting to changing circumstances. Now Euro-Atlantic leaders need to face up to the need to adapt their bargain to the demanding challenges of the twenty-first-century world.

The idea of creating a new Atlantic Community organization may remain beyond the political will and energy of the Euro-Atlantic democracies at Riga. However, the story that began following World War II and that has led to an unprecedented level of cooperation in the Euro-Atlantic area is far from over. The future relevance and vitality of the bargain will depend on whether it continues to grow and adapt its institutions and processes to changing international circumstances. □

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed explanation of how the North Atlantic Treaty’s text could be adjusted to form the basis for a new Atlantic Community Treaty, see *NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community...*, p. 250-53.



**NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community: The Transatlantic Bargain Challenged**  
*By Stanley R. Sloan*  
(Rowman and Littlefield, 2005)

Now, fully revised and updated, this full interpretive history of the transatlantic alliance explores critical developments in U.S.-European relations and inter-democracy cooperation. Stanley R. Sloan analyzes the consequences of U.S. in the transatlantic debate over Iraq. At the same time however the United States and Europe have made historic choices concerning NATO’s future, not only continuing the process of enlarging alliance membership to other democracies, but also expanding the concept of NATO’s missions to include peacekeeping and enforcement without geographic limitation. Sloan also enlarges on his ideas for a new Euro-Atlantic pact, a call that has now been echoing in both European and American quarters. Assessing both the good and bad news for the alliance, this book offers a thought-provoking reading for all citizens concerned about future US foreign policy and Europe’s role in it.