

Global NATO

Its place in the evolving Atlanticist tradition

by **Emiliano Alessandri***

The slogan “Global NATO” made it into the limelight in 2006-7, then faded deep into obscurity. Nevertheless the processes of globalization continue in NATO to this day, and can be expected to continue well into the future. These processes are addressing, imperfectly and incompletely, but in actual practice, the central concern of Balladur’s *Union of the West*: the uniting of the West on global foreign policy issues.

The “Global NATO” idea made its splash in 2006 when two distinguished foreign-policy analysts advocated it in a much-remarked article under that title in *Foreign Affairs*.¹ After that, similar proposals multiplied. The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Tom Lantos, spoke in 2007 in favour of NATO’s enlargement to Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea.² NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer emphasized the need to further strengthen NATO’s ties with the ever-growing number of its “global partners”.

As is often the case when emphatic formulas are put forward, “Global NATO” lent itself to different interpretations, and the NATO allies were divided on whether or not to endorse it. This article argues that, in many important respects, the “globalization” of NATO is already underway. It is a phenomenon to which all members have contributed. What seems to be lacking is the vision and leadership to guide this change, and clarity of definition.

Defining “Global NATO”

First, a word of definition. The phrase “Global NATO” encapsulated two distinct processes: 1) NATO taking up missions worldwide, overcoming the old geographical limitations in its work; 2) development of NATO partnerships with countries all around the world, along with proposals for new formal members in the Pacific.

The phrase itself, “Global NATO”, by conflating the two processes, lent itself to misperceptions; it seemed to imply a global scope for new membership proposals. Many of its friends and foes alike were energized by these misperceptions. Europeans feared the Atlantic group was being dissolved into a global group; but the actual mainstream proposals for new NATO members under the “Global NATO” rubric were limited to a few countries that were already a part of the Atlantic economic structure (OECD) and have been working quietly with the Atlantic Alliance for decades. The numerous other global partnerships were to remain accessory relationships, like spokes sticking out from the NATO wheel. The goal was a NATO that would be global in missions, with global

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¹ Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, “Global Nato”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 5, September/October 2006, pp. 105-113.

² “Why Can’t NATO Go Global”, Reuters, 22 June 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSN2218656320070622>



partnership connections, and a world-spanning but essentially Western not global membership.

When NATO's 2008 Summit decisions fell short of the most far-reaching Global NATO proposals, many writers concluded that Global NATO had failed. This underestimated the globalization processes still in operation; it was a mirror of the earlier, opposite exaggeration of the revolutionary character of "Global NATO". Most of the globalization process continued unhindered after the Summit: expansion of NATO's special partnership relationships with Japan, Australia, and South Korea; expansion of NATO's other partnerships worldwide; and expansion of NATO's missions. Already in the new strategic concept NATO adopted in the 1990s, the main missions were out-of-area and tending toward a global reach; what needed to be added was not the global scope but the sharp new security focus for it, imposed by the struggle with terrorism in the 21st century.

The gap in Vision

Now to the question of vision. In order to find the necessary vision for making public sense of Global NATO, the Atlantic allies would profit from a recovery of the thinking of Atlanticism in the past century and even earlier. Contrary to popular belief, Atlanticism did not begin in 1949 but in the late 1800s. From its very inception, as we shall see, it advanced a "worldview" concerned with the maintenance of peace and order, not only in the Atlantic region but in the international system as a whole. At the same time it focused on supporting the international forces of democracy, whose core straddled the two shores of the North Atlantic, in their struggle against authoritarian and extremist powers. It is a matter that is still relevant today.

Even though the meaning of "NATO going global" has not been clearly articulated, in practice, NATO's development since its creation shows a coherent direction, encompassing the globe while maintaining definite Atlanticist foundations and constraints. Recovery of the roots of globalization in Atlanticist thinking would make it possible to understand the continuing Atlanticist constraints on the process as reliable and constructive; it would help calm the fears that exist from two opposite ends—that it is not going far enough, and that by venturing beyond the Atlantic it is dissolving the Atlantic.

Historical processes of globalization in NATO

The "globalization" of NATO is a multi-layered process, already at an advanced stage. Since its inception, NATO has steadily expanded its functions, enlarged its membership, and extended the perimeter of its operations. Since the end of the Cold War it has continued all three processes at a conspicuously accelerated pace, while also intensifying its cooperation with non-NATO ("partnership") countries.

NATO has been assuming functions that far exceed those required of a military alliance strictly for the territorial defense of its members. Its 1949 Treaty already envisaged a wide range of cooperative functions that it encouraged in Articles II and IV and the preamble, ranging from cooperation against threats to the peace to cooperation on economic intercourse and on democratic values, and a global scope within which it could exercise these functions. It was only the defense of its members' territory, in Articles V and VI in the Treaty, that was restricted geographically to that territory; and was further restricted to the metropolitan not colonial territory of its members, since





America had a negative attitude toward the empires of the Western European democracies and did not want to assume obligations for defending their imperial holdings. Since 1991, NATO's broader security functions have come into play in far-flung locations. NATO forces are now being extensively employed in peace-keeping missions, post-war reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. In the context of the international campaign against terrorism, NATO is engaged in both Afghanistan and in Iraq, places that would have formerly been considered far "out of area". As its Secretary General has authoritatively noted, NATO troops are now deployed systematically, and not only episodically, outside of Europe, regularly operating on three continents.³ NATO has enlarged from the 12 original members in 1949 to 26 today, while also establishing over 20 other "partnerships", starting with the Partnership for Peace (PFP) launched in 1994.

All NATO members have endorsed these changes in function, operational perimeter and membership. All have thus supported this evolution, albeit not all with the same degree of enthusiasm. NATO was not dismantled at the end of the Cold War, when many contended that it had lost its *raison d'être*. On the contrary, the NATO allies invested in its future. At the 50th anniversary in 1999, NATO's "strategic concept" was revised by consensus, adapting the Alliance to the reality of a post-bipolar world. In various summits since, the NATO allies have confirmed the commitment to evolve. At the Prague Summit in 2002, seven new countries were invited to join. At the Istanbul Summit in 2004—which took place after the transatlantic crisis of 2003 over Iraq—the globalization of NATO was further reinforced, as the countries participating in the "Mediterranean dialogue" became formal NATO partners. Despite many divisions among the Allies as to the best strategy for coping with terrorism and with instability in the Islamic world, the "Istanbul Cooperative Initiative" was launched with those countries in the Middle East (so far, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates) interested in consulting with NATO members on strategic and security matters.

When domestic politics took the place of shared vision

What seems to be lacking is thus not the will to transform and enhance the Alliance, but a vision to guide this evolution, and leadership to cope with the many challenges along the way. Despite the rather impressive transformation so far, the NATO allies still seem reluctant to draw the necessary conclusions. Within Europe, NATO's mission and functions are clearly defined, but outside the transatlantic area the Alliance has proceeded only on an *ad hoc* basis, and with no clear view of what the methods and ultimate goals of NATO's operations should be. NATO's engagement in post-Saddam Iraq is a sign that the NATO allies have put aside the dispute that arose in 2003, when the US invaded that country. But NATO's rather limited role—confined to the training of new Iraqi security forces—testifies to the fact that the Allies are still working out the exact terms of NATO's role in "nation-building" missions. In Afghanistan, NATO has gradually substituted for the U.S. command and U.S. forces on the ground, thus assuming a leading role in what remains the central front of the campaign against international terrorism. But faced with growing instability and mounting casualties, the Allies have divided on the issue of burden-sharing, and have failed so far to establish a clear mechanism for the generation of new forces.

³ "Beyond the North Atlantic", interview by James Kitfield of NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, *National Journal*, vol. 38, no. 14, 8 April 2006, <http://nationaljournal.com>

NATO's outreach similarly seems to be lacking vision and leadership. The problems are both practical and political. The practical problems relate mainly to decision-making after the admission of new members. An alliance that works through consensus tends, by the nature of things, to become less efficient as more members are brought in. The political problems are related to the direction of future enlargement. There is a widespread view, nearing consensus in American and Canadian discussion, that NATO should offer membership to—or should at least establish more formal ties with—non-European countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea; and some also say Israel. But many European allies are leery of this move, pointing to risks involved and fearing a dilution of the Atlantic relation.

The idea of creating “global partnerships” built on the Partnership for Peace of 1994, the Mediterranean dialogue, and other partnerships that emerged after 9-11-2001. The phrase itself can be traced back at least to the end of 2005, and was embodied in a formal Anglo-American proposal at a meeting of the NATO foreign ministers in Sofia, Bulgaria in April 2006.⁴ The rationale behind this proposal was two-fold.

First, there was a pragmatic consideration. For years now, the U.S. government has been requesting its European allies to raise their budgets for common defense closer to the US level. With little progress in this area, the US decided to seek contributions from non-NATO nations.

The second reason was more political, and had to do with the trans-Atlantic tensions seen in recent years. The first-term Bush administration was severely criticized by some European governments for its theorization and practice of “unilateralism.” The statement by the former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld—“generally, the mission will determine the coalition; the coalition should not determine the mission”—translated into the creation of *ad hoc* “coalitions of the willing”. This was perceived by many at the time as a near-fatal blow to NATO as the privileged military institution of the West. Tightening the relationship between NATO and countries such as Australia and Japan could be seen as an attempt by the Bush administration to have it both ways: investing in the Alliance while substituting “global partnerships” for “coalitions of the willing”. This would reaffirm the centrality of NATO, but would at the same time transform NATO by making the relationship between the Americans and the Europeans less exclusive. As is the case with NATO's new Eastern European members, NATO's global partners were expected to be more accommodating to the U.S. than are the original European members.

This view might have changed if the issue had arisen just a year later, when changes in government in Australia and Japan had led to ending some of their military activity in support of America's efforts in Afghanistan as well as Iraq, while the agreed NATO efforts of the European allies continued and grew in Afghanistan. Americans of the Europe-bashing sort might have become less attached to the proposal; Europeans might have become less opposed. Europeans have had a good experience of inclusion of Japan in the G-7, where it helps them achieve a larger and more effective balancing weight vis-à-vis America on issues such as global warming, without introducing any adversarial element to the balance. In the long run, the extension of NATO to the Pacific basin allies, approximating its membership to that of OECD, is likely to proceed less on the basis of the particular party sentiments and resentments that were visible in 2007, more on its general objective merits: merits for NATO as an organization serving the global

⁴ For further information on the meeting: <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2006/04-april/e0427c.html>.



security needs of its original members, and merits for the new countries as a way of participating more fully in international security management.

But the particular party and national fears weighed heavily in 2006-7, and shaped the way the politics of the issue divided at that time.

It comes as no surprise, in this light, that the idea of global NATO partnerships was received only tepidly in Europe. It was said in some quarters that the original rationale of NATO partnerships was to encourage stability and democratic reform on the Alliance's immediate Eastern flank, in order to re-unite the European continent after the division imposed by the Cold War.⁵ The new global partnerships, instead, would include countries far beyond the borders of Europe and whose membership in the West—with the exception of South Korea—was not seriously challenged during the Cold War. Many Europeans also believe that the partnership on which efforts should be concentrated is that between NATO and the E.U., the exact terms of which are far from clear.⁶

It should be apparent, then, that the globalization of NATO brings up many issues that require vision and leadership.

Atlanticism then and now

There is a common tendency to see Atlanticism as only an ideological by-product of the Cold War; thus the denials of NATO's *raison d'être* after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reality is quite different. NATO was to be sure born during the bloc-building process early in the Cold War, but much of it already existed under its other name—"the Atlantic Alliance"—in the two World Wars. Much of the institutional strength of NATO derives from the fact that it builds on those two generations of earlier experience, in which the allies were pressed together by force of a life and death struggle; one need only think of the World War II origins of the Supreme Allied Commander.

It is, similarly, a mistake of perspective to think that the only objective in the late 1940s among Western leaders was to establish a regional bulwark against the threat posed by international Communism. The Atlanticist vision that inspired the creation of NATO had developed well before the outbreak of the Cold War. In fact, the individuals who created NATO had matured and developed their ideas during World War I and the interwar years. When history is periodized in terms of the post-1945 period, it lops off this main root of the Atlantic tree, introducing a basic mistake into the understanding of the thinking that went into NATO.

The sources of the Atlanticist vision go back still farther, into the late 1800s. That vision was, essentially, of a "union" of a core group of "experienced" democracies bordering the Atlantic. This nucleus was intended for global as well as regional missions. It might undertake some of its missions in cooperation with other countries, depending on their stage of economic and political development, as well as on the degree of convergence of their strategic and other primary interests.

⁵ See, for instance, the considerations expressed in the recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Transforming NATO (. . .)—A Primer for the NATO Summit in Riga 2006*, 14 November 2006, http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,3590/type,1/

⁶ See, The Atlantic Council of the United States (ACUS), *The Indispensable Partnership*, Transatlantic Relations Program, Issue Brief, November 2006, http://www.acus.org/docs/061110-Indispensable_Partnership.pdf

Clarence Streit, a founding father of modern Atlanticism, systematized in the 1930s the two-tiered conceptualization of Atlanticism that had been developing since the 1890s. The “mature” democracies and economically most developed countries—the first tier, consisting primarily of the Atlantic nations—would pool their resources to assure the maintenance of peace and order at the global level. This would favor a long-term evolution of the less developed nations—the second tier—to converge with the first. In 1939, when the most urgent problem was to prevent the worldwide spread of authoritarianism, Streit advocated “federal union” among the North Atlantic democracies. Streit’s bold proposal did not stop with the initial creation of an “Atlantic union” but conceived it as the nucleus of a gradually evolving and expanding federation that would eventually embrace all mankind. Its proposed original membership included Australia and New Zealand. It specified Japan, alongside Germany and Italy, as prospective members in the relatively near term, once they had successfully transited to democracy. The union of democracies, centered on the Atlantic, would expand over time by admitting other like-minded nations.

Another early Atlanticist, the renowned American columnist Walter Lippmann, had propounded the “Atlantic Community” idea even earlier, during World War I. The problem, already then, was how to pool the resources of the democracies in the existential struggle against authoritarian nationalism, and how to create the conditions for the eventual establishment of a liberal world order.

The interwar years had seen Atlanticism develop as a critique, partly from within the Wilsonian movement, of the failing Wilsonian approach of achieving world order through reliance entirely on such universal institutions as could be immediately established. Broadly speaking, Atlanticists were those, on both sides of the Atlantic, who believed that the viable solution to the problems of international instability and war was to induce the democratic nations to team up and become the nucleus of world order, the underpinning and supplement for the weaker universal system, and the engine of reform for the rest of the world in the direction of greater political and economic freedom.

The motivation for NATO in 1949 certainly had something to do with urgent Cold War concerns in Europe. It also had something to do with the experience of the Second World War, with its deepened wartime Atlantic Alliance including a Supreme Allied Commander in Europe; and with the emergence of a near-consensus in America rejecting the isolationism that had prevented ratification of NATO’s attempted precursor in 1919, the Anglo-American Treaty of Guarantee to France. These factors combined to finally supply a political will sufficient for overcoming all the old obstacles: the Atlantic powers were able to proceed in the late 1940s with negotiation and ratification of an enduring institutionalized Atlantic Alliance.

Once this longer context is understood, it becomes clear that the Cold War was only the immediate problem; the underlying problem with which Western leaders were grappling at the time was how to close the holes in the world system, embodied at the time in the stalemate of the UN. The Security Council, the UN’s most powerful organ, had been created with a unit veto structure, in deference to great power tradition and to the need for American ratification; it was paralyzed by that same structure, at the time particularly by the repeated Soviet use of the veto. As the Senate debate on the North Atlantic Treaty clearly reveals—the Senate’s Vandenberg Resolution, which opened the way to the pact, states it explicitly—the Atlantic Alliance was not only a regional agreement for the defense of Europe, but also a means to overcome the problems facing the UN, filling in spaces which the UN was meant to cover but for the time being could



not cover. In this way it was intended to lay the foundations for a stable and peaceful international order, despite the uncooperative behavior of the Soviets.

Some of these problems are still with us today. The Soviet Union has dissolved, but the inherent weakness of universal institutions is still apparent. As was the case in the interwar years, and then again in the 1940s, this is due, among other things, to the co-membership of both democratic and non-democratic members within the United Nations, and the co-membership of countries at vastly different stages and levels of political and economic development. These factors are likely to be with us for some time to come.

Recovering the vision that fits the reality

The Cold War misleadingly accustomed us to thinking of the Atlantic community in restrictive terms, as a geographically delimited organization for the defense of Europe alone. Viewed through the longer telescope of history, however, Atlanticism has been a fairly comprehensive worldview. It has provided a coherent, realistic set of ideas about how to make the international system work to preserve peace and support the spread of democracy. It has motivated the building of collective institutions for this purpose, supplementary to the universal institutions but free of their inherent problems.

Today new enemies have replaced old ones, after a period of absence of major enemies. Nevertheless, the challenges facing the Atlantic community have remained largely the same: how to maintain peace, and strengthen democracy, in a world where authoritarianism still represents a concrete threat to free societies, and where world government remains a mirage. Western leaders need to understand the truth about the origins of Atlanticism, and concomitantly, its true vision.

It is instructive that the globalization of NATO had its greatest acceleration, a sort of “take off”, in the 1990s, in the absence of major enemies. It was, in this structural respect, the period most similar to that of the 1890s, when the Atlantic idea was first developed. The arrival of new enemies has entailed a focus on deepening the collective work of the Alliance in its already worldwide scope, to make it more effective; Global NATO is as much about this as about a further widening.

The underlying motivations for Atlanticism have held impressively invariant through all the geopolitical transformations of the last hundred years. The Atlantic structures have grown accordingly over the course of the century, in stages that have been cumulative, unlike the geopolitical transformations external to them. The ongoing “globalization” of NATO flows from this unvarying foundation; it is strikingly close to the original ideas of Atlanticism. Far from an uncontrolled new process to be wary of, it is the logical outgrowth of the strategy that the West has been following for more than half a century.