

Opening NATO's Door

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HOW THE ALLIANCE REMADE ITSELF
FOR A NEW ERA

Ronald D. Asmus

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FOREWORD

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's invocation of Article 5 in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 was a vivid reminder of how fundamentally our security environment has changed. The frozen certainties of the Cold War threat to Europe have given way to an entirely new set of challenges, much different, but no less menacing than those of the past.

The invocation of NATO's collective self-defense clause, for the first time ever in its history, and in response to a terrorist attack on the United States, also demonstrated how much the Alliance has changed since the demise of communism and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Originally founded in 1949 to deter Stalin from attacking Western Europe, NATO was then little more than a U.S. promise of protection to a Europe devastated and demoralized by war. But 53 years later, NATO's Article 5 commitment brought the old world to the aid of the new, to reverse the words of Winston Churchill. If ever one was looking for a demonstration of the undiminished vitality of the transatlantic relationship, this is it.

That NATO could respond so swiftly to the events of September 11 was no coincidence. Throughout the 1990s, the Alliance underwent the most far-reaching changes in its history. And Ron Asmus was one of the key architects of that adaptation. In addition to enlarging to Central and Eastern Europe, NATO reached

out to build a new cooperative relationship with Russia, its erstwhile adversary. It also reoriented itself to face new threats beyond its borders and intervened to stop ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo. And it embraced the European Union's efforts to build a European Security and Defense Policy as a step toward a fairer sharing of the transatlantic security burden. Initially a U.S.-West European alliance designed to meet the Russian threat, the Alliance was being transformed into the foundation for a new pan-European alliance between North America and a Europe whole and free.

Behind this transformation lay the conviction that NATO was not just a temporary Cold War creation designed by necessity to deter Russian power. Two world wars and fifty years of working together during the Cold War led both sides of the Atlantic to conclude that the virtues of their strategic partnership transcended the communist or any other specific threat. The Atlantic Alliance is the expression of a community of North American and European democracies based on common values and interests. As NATO heads of state put it in a declaration at their fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington in the spring of 1999, NATO must be adapted so that it is as good in meeting the threats of the 21st century as it was in fighting the Cold War.

In November 2002, at its summit meeting in Prague, NATO will confront a new set of challenges. It must now complete the vision of a Europe whole and free that stretches, in the words of President George W. Bush, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and enlarge to new members willing and able to shoulder the burdens of membership. The terrorist attacks on the United States have only reinforced the desire to consolidate peace and democracy in post-Cold War Europe. A strong and stable Europe is a key asset at a time when American and Western security is under attack elsewhere.

But the war on terrorism has also highlighted the continuing importance of allies and alliances. Today Western democracies face new, potentially existential threats to their security in the form of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Our Alliance must be modernized and adapted to face this threat if we are to live up to the principles NATO was founded on. This modernization must not be confined to developing new strategies or working methods. It must entail, above all, a commitment to build the necessary military capabilities. This is a challenge for NATO Allies as well as for those who aspire to join the Alliance. Our still-young century has already taught us a lesson we must heed as we continue NATO's modernization: that you cannot have defense on the cheap.

In *Opening NATO's Door*, Ron Asmus provides us with a definitive and insider's account of the first chapter in NATO's modernization after the end of the Cold War. He takes us behind the scenes in Washington and into the diplomatic corridors of Europe to tell the story of the debates that took place in the early and mid-1990s as the U.S. and its European allies grappled to define the

Alliance's post-Cold War strategic direction in the wake of communism's collapse. He shows how the initial impulse for NATO enlargement came from dissidents-turned-diplomats in Central and Eastern Europe and how it was eventually embraced by U.S. and European leaders. Above all, he provides us with an insider's view on how Washington's own views and those of its allies evolved as NATO grappled with how to turn enlargement from a noble idea into political reality.

Opening NATO's Door documents the diplomacy, some of it dramatic, that took place in the run-up to the NATO Brussels summit in January 1994 and, above all, during the run-up to the Madrid summit in July 1997. At the same time, he highlights how, from its inception, NATO enlargement was about more than just consolidating the peace in Central and Eastern Europe. His detailing of the intense negotiations that produced the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act documents the lengths to which the Alliance went to create a new relationship with Moscow and to give it a place in a new European security order. He offers some vivid insights into the political battle that took place both in public and behind the scenes in Washington and the building of a true bipartisan consensus for the ratification of enlargement by the U.S. Senate in the spring of 1998.

Above all, Ron underscores how the early proponents of enlargement were trying to develop a rationale for a new NATO that would bind the U.S. and Europe together as closely in the post-Cold War era as they had been during the fight against communism. For the United States, NATO enlargement became the centerpiece of a broader agenda—to transform and modernize the U.S.-European strategic partnership to deal with the threats of a new century. That strategy reflected an American commitment to the spread of democracy and Western values, the premium put on building new alliances in a globalized world and the fact that Washington looked to Europe whole and free as America's most natural partner likely to share those values and address those challenges.

NATO heads of state will doubtless draw some of the intellectual, political and diplomatic lessons from the events described in this book when they meet in Prague in November 2002. The questions they must grapple with—the scope of the next wave of NATO enlargement, how best to deepen NATO-Russia cooperation and how to build capabilities so that the Alliance serves as an effective tool in the war on terrorism—are the natural outgrowth of the debates and policies described in these pages.

Dean Acheson, one of NATO's founding fathers, once said that “the really successful international organizations are those that recognize and express underlying realities.” In facing long-term, strategic challenges, there can be no substitute for long-term, strategic partners: Partners you can trust. Partners who trust you. That is the underlying reality which the North Atlantic Alliance has always been about.

Ron Asmus' fascinating account explains how NATO, by recognizing and expressing these "underlying realities" in post-Cold War Europe, transformed both itself, European security, and the transatlantic security partnership.

Ron Asmus played a key—indeed essential—role, both in and out of government, in ensuring that this effort was enormously successful. For that, I thank Ron and am grateful for the contribution this book makes to documenting this historic story.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen
Secretary General of NATO
May 2002

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This book is the result of a decade's involvement in the intellectual and political battle over NATO enlargement. I would like to thank Jim Thomson at RAND for encouraging me to pursue my initial ideas on NATO enlargement and modernization in the early 1990s. One of RAND's many strengths is its analytical teamwork. I owe a great debt to Richard Kugler and Steve Larrabee for their personal friendship and intellectual collaboration. A special word of thanks also goes to Vice Admiral Ulrich Weisser. As a guest scholar at RAND and subsequent top aide to German Defense Minister Volker Ruehe, he contributed in many ways to RAND's early work on these issues. Our work together in and outside of government is a testimony to the spirit of the trans-Atlantic relationship.

It was an honor to serve my country under President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright from 1997 to 2000. I would like to thank Strobe Talbott and Jim Steinberg for helping to bring me into the State Department. For three years I had the opportunity to work with some of the best and the brightest diplomats the United States has: Eric Edelman, Dan Fried, Marc Grossman, Victoria Nuland, E. Anthony Wayne and Sandy Vershbow. Similarly, Jeremy Rosner was a true friend and colleague who helped me understand the nexus between policy and politics during the Senate ratification debate and afterward. Their support then and now has helped make this book

possible. I hasten to add that opinions expressed in this book are mine alone and do not reflect any official position of the United States government.

Without the support of Les Gelb and the Council on Foreign Relations this book would never have become reality. The Council provided the environment and support that allowed me to translate the swirl of events of the last decade into a narrative for a broader audience. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski was kind enough to chair a Council study group whose members read and critiqued the initial draft chapters of this book. While they are too numerous to be named individually, their comments and feedback helped sharpen my thinking and arguments. I would also like to thank Madeleine Albright, Richard Holbrooke, Tony Lake, Jim Steinberg, and Strobe Talbott for their comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

Bruce Curley edited and helped shape my initial draft with an eye toward a broader audience. My Research Associate, Jessica Fugate, deserves special thanks for her tireless work in helping to organize my research, track down facts, and contribute in countless ways in transforming a mass of paper and ideas into this book. Leigh Gusts and her team at the Council's library deserve special thanks for their research support as well. I would also like to thank my Senior Executive Editor, Peter Dimock, at Columbia University Press, for his encouragement and advice on how to make this story accessible. Similarly, Leslie Bialler's editing helped tighten both my prose and my arguments.

A special word of thanks also goes to all of my friends and colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe. You are too numerous to mention. But NATO enlargement was your idea. You continued to believe in and fight for it even when many in the West said it was impossible. You served as an inspiration to all of us.

In today's world no book can be written without financial support. I would like to thank the United States Institute of Peace and the Carnegie Corporation, for providing generous grants to help support my research and writing while at the Council.

And, finally, a heartfelt thanks goes to my wife Barbara who for a decade has endured with patience and humor a steady stream of trips to, and visitors from, the region, as well as phone calls at all hours of the day (and night) by people wanting to discuss NATO enlargement. As I was leaving for yet another trip to Warsaw in the late 1990s, she said to me: "Make sure you get NATO enlargement right so that members of another generation of Americans, including our son Erik, will not give up their lives fighting in Europe twenty years from now." I am confident we did.

NOTE ON SOURCES

This book was written under an executive order signed by the Secretary of State granting the author access to the U.S. Department of State's archives. While it is not unusual for former officials to consult government records while writing historical accounts, it is unusual to cite these records as a professional historian would. In doing so, I have followed the precedent set by Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice in *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*.

My archival access was limited to the Department of State. However, those archives contain documents from other government agencies—e.g., the National Security Council or Department of Defense—circulated for inter-agency consultations or to U.S. Embassies abroad. The records I cite remain classified and will remain unavailable to the public for the time being. I am able to refer to them because the references themselves were determined not to reveal any secrets. Until they are declassified, scholars will have to take on faith that I have used the evidence fairly.

As a scholar, I recognize the dilemma that colleagues will not have immediate access to the same sources. But not to have cited my sources could have left the reader, as well as future scholars, even more frustrated. The issue of privileged access is not a new one. Papers or materials held by private persons or institutions are often made available with restrictions. The documents I have

drawn on belong to the American people and will eventually be made available to the public. Scholars may, of course, request documents cited through the Freedom of Information Act.

The author's research has benefited from other sources as well. Strobe Talbott and Jeremy Rosner allowed me access to their private papers. Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek granted me access to select documents from the Polish Foreign Ministry's archives. Alfred Moses and Nicholas Rey provided me access to personal diaries they kept from their days as U.S. Ambassador to Bucharest and Warsaw respectively. Stephen Biegun shared his personal files on NATO enlargement from his tenure working for Senator Jesse Helms (R- NC) on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Bruce Jackson granted me access to the archives of the Committee to Expand NATO. Similarly, Jan Novak allowed me to look through his private papers and correspondence, and Zbigniew Brzezinski allowed me to draw on several memos summarizing key conversations with administration officials. Each of these contributed in an important way to my research.

Finally, my research also included an extensive set of interviews with officials on both sides of the Atlantic. They included: Andrej Ananicz, Ivan Baba, Allison Bayles, Steve Biegun, Samuel Berger, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, Hank Brown, Martin Butora, Per Carlsen, Ashton Carter, Emil Constantinescu, Lynn Davis, Jorge Domecq, Thomas Donilon, Stephen Flanagan, Newt Gingrich, Mircea Geoana, Przemyslaw Grudzinski, Istvan Gyarmati, Hans Haekkerup, Richard C. Holbrooke, Wolfgang Ischinger, Geza Jeszensky, Rudolf Joo, Andrzej Karkoszka, Gyula Kodolanyi, John Kornblum, Laszlo Kovacs, Jerzy Kozminski, Anthony Lake, François de Lattre, Jean-David Levitte, Richard Lugar, Jean-Claude Mallet, Gebhardt von Moltke, Dick Morris, Robert Mroziwicz, Klaus Naumann, Pauline Neville-Jones, Jan Novak, Joseph Nye, Andrzej Olechowski, Sir David Omand, Gardner Peckham, William Perry, Carter Pilcher, Bruno Racine, Steve Rademaker, Gunnar Riberholdt, Jamie Rubin, Volker Ruehe, Klaus Scharioth, Elizabeth Sherwood-Randle, Jamie Shea, Marek Siewic, Ferenc Somogyi, James Steinberg, Karsten Voigt, Alexandr Vondra, Ulrich Weisser, and Sir John Weston.

INTRODUCTION

It was March 12, 1999 and I was walking across the tarmac at Andrews Air Force base to the plane of Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. As the senior representative of the State Department's European Bureau, I was flying with her to Independence, Missouri to celebrate the entry of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As the U.S. Secretary of State, Albright had the honor of receiving the protocols of accession officially marking the entry of these three countries into the Alliance. She had chosen the Harry S. Truman Library for the ceremony. It was her way of emphasizing that the U.S. and our European allies were continuing the original dream of Truman and NATO's founding fathers by enlarging the Atlantic Alliance to include countries from Central and Eastern Europe who, only a decade earlier, had broken loose from Soviet rule.

It was an important day for the United States and for the Administration of President Bill Clinton. The U.S. and its allies were extending a security guarantee to Central and Eastern Europe—a region that had been at the center of many of Europe's great conflicts in the past. It was the largest increase in the American commitment to Europe in decades—and came at a time when many people doubted the staying power of the U.S. in Europe and elsewhere around the globe. It was a testimony that America was not becoming isolationist but in-

stead was renewing and expanding its commitment to alliance with the old continent and with the world more generally.

But NATO enlargement was only part of a broader effort to transform and modernize the Atlantic Alliance. Founded in 1949 to defend Western Europe from a Soviet threat, the Alliance was now being used to help unify Europe by opening its door to new members from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In parallel, NATO had reached out to establish a cooperative relationship with Moscow, its erstwhile adversary. While maintaining the core commitment to the collective defense of its members, the U.S. had also pushed NATO to embrace new military missions in response to new threats and to intervene militarily beyond its borders in defense of Western values and interests, starting in the Balkans.

These were some of the most far-reaching changes in NATO in decades. And it was all coming together in the spring of 1999. The enlargement of NATO's members and missions were the highlight of the Alliance's fiftieth anniversary summit scheduled for April 1999 in Washington, D.C. The vision was clear: a new NATO between the U.S. and a Europe whole and free committed to tackling the new threats of the 21st century. Enlargement was a centerpiece of a strategy to make NATO effective in meeting the challenges of the future as the Alliance had been in winning the Cold War. While none of us could foresee it at the time, these efforts helped to lay the foundation for NATO's invoking of Article V on September 11, 2001 in response to terrorist attacks on the United States.

It had not been easy or without controversy. At a time of general indifference to foreign policy following the end of the Cold War, NATO enlargement sparked one of the most passionate and fierce national security debates of the decade in the United States. The reasons went beyond the issue of the fate of those Central and East Europeans nations. Instead, the debate revolved around America's vision of Europe, relations with Russia, as well as NATO's future purpose now that communism was gone. Initially, much of the American foreign policy establishment opposed it; most Europeans were lukewarm at best; and the Russians were almost unanimous in their opposition to it. Critics claimed that it was a strategic blunder that would derail Russia's democratic reforms, provoke a new Cold War, and dilute or weaken America's premier military alliance. And they doubted President Clinton's commitment to this project and insisted that the U.S. public and Senate would never consent to extend a U.S. security guarantee to these countries.

But President Clinton overcame opposition to the idea—first in his own Administration, then among our European allies and, finally, in Russia—and successfully enlarged the Alliance. And he did so without the crisis in relations with Russia or the evisceration of NATO as a military alliance critics had predicted. Both major political parties supported NATO enlargement and the U.S. Senate ratified it by a vote of 80–19. In doing so, the Administration laid a cor-

nerstone for a new NATO that reflected the realities and threats of a new Europe—an accomplishment that was likely to be one of the Administration's most enduring foreign policy legacies.

Why had the Clinton Administration done it? There were three key reasons. First, President Clinton was attracted early on to NATO enlargement as a means to help create a democratic, peaceful, and secure Europe whose future, as he often put it to visitors, could be better than the continent's bloody past. He believed that the U.S. had a unique chance to help do for Europe's eastern half what the generation of Truman and Acheson had done for the continent's western half. He wanted to extend NATO's security umbrella to lock in peace and democracy in Europe as a whole and complete the overcoming of Europe's Cold War divide that had started with the crumbling of the Berlin Wall ten years earlier. And he wanted to do so while also embracing and integrating a democratic Russia.

Second, the President believed that one of the great lessons of the 20th century was that the United States and Europe should stick together. Although the old Soviet threat had gone away, America's interest in an alliance with Europe had not. He wanted to modernize NATO in a way that would keep the U.S. and Europe tied together and the Alliance relevant in a way that publics on both sides understood. Clinton believed that there was perhaps no other part of the world with which the U.S. had more common values and interests. By locking in peace and security on the continent once and for all, the U.S. could create precisely the kind of stability in Europe that would better allow it to address new challenges elsewhere. This would in turn allow the U.S. and its European allies to focus on the new challenges they needed to confront together in the years and decades ahead in a globalized world.

Third, the Clinton Administration viewed the fight over NATO enlargement as part of the larger battle over what America stood for in the world. It was part of the broader foreign policy struggle over whether the United States would remain internationally engaged or retreat into a new kind of isolationism or unilateralism. President Clinton wanted to modernize the Alliance to deal with the threats of the future because he believed the U.S. should not go it alone but had to act together with its partners on the global stage. He wanted to reform NATO so that the American public would understand why it was still relevant in a new era and support its continuation. To be sure, not all opponents of enlargement were isolationist or unilateralist. But there were voices advocating a U.S. disengagement from Europe either to focus on domestic problems, or to free up American attention and resources to act elsewhere in the world. The Clinton Administration believed that these were the false and wrong choices.

As the Secretary of State's plane took off from Andrews Air Force base, I thought about the key individuals who had made this day possible. That vision and strategy were not the result of a sudden epiphany. Instead, they had evolved

over time and resulted from intellectual and political battles waged and won. The idea of enlarging NATO had originated in Central and Eastern Europe where former dissidents turned diplomats and statesmen saw it as the logical extension of their struggle against communism and the culmination of their fight for freedom, democracy, and national independence. It was then picked up by a handful of Western intellectuals and politicians who recast the issue in broader terms of the Alliance's overall future and survival. In doing so, they put the NATO enlargement issue front and center on the West's strategic agenda.

That debate fell into the lap of the Clinton Administration shortly after it assumed office in early 1993. And it was President Clinton who personally set the tone within the Administration by responding positively when first confronted with the issue by Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa, and Arpad Goncz—the presidents of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary—in the spring of 1993. Tony Lake, Clinton's first National Security Advisor, was perhaps the first proponent of NATO enlargement in the President's inner circle along with Sandy Berger. Warren Christopher, Albright's predecessor as Secretary of State, was initially cautious but gradually became a strong supporter, toiling in the diplomatic trenches to lay the groundwork for the successes that followed after his departure. Richard C. Holbrooke was brought back to enforce the President's will on a reluctant bureaucracy, especially the Pentagon, and to get reluctant allies on board. And Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, while initially skeptical, took on the arduous task of negotiating a new cooperative NATO-Russia relationship that would enable enlargement to move forward while avoiding a train wreck in Russia's relations with the West.

But this was also a very special moment for Albright. The daughter of a Czechoslovak diplomat driven from his homeland by Stalin, she was committed to using America's power and influence to overcome Europe's Cold War division. While much of the groundwork for NATO enlargement was completed during Clinton's first term in office, it was Albright who became the Administration's champion on enlargement and pulled together the ideas, the diplomacy, and the politics to successfully get the job done. Her tenacity helped keep the Atlantic Alliance on course. And her passion on the issue, knack for public diplomacy, and personal relationship with Republican Senator Jesse Helms allowed her to reach across the political aisle and build bipartisan support to ensure Senate ratification. To use a sports metaphor that Albright would have frowned on as "boy's talk," she came in as the quarterback in charge of the red zone offense to put the ball in the end zone.

But credit for NATO enlargement clearly extended across the political aisle and beyond the Administration. Without President George Bush's successful reunification of Germany in NATO, the Alliance would never have been able to reach out further to the East. The leaders of Central and East European ethnic groups helped draw early attention to the issue and elevated it on the agenda of both the

Administration and Congress . . . and played a key role in providing support in the ratification process. The Republican Party embraced enlargement as one of its goals in the Contract with America in the summer of 1994 at the same time the Clinton Administration was deciding to move forward on enlargement. The Clinton Administration disagreed with many Republicans on the overall strategy and timing of enlargement and, above all, on how to handle Russia and the NATO-Russia relationship. But at a time of growing partisanship in Washington, both parties came together to produce a bipartisan 80–19 vote on enlargement. Forty-five of those Senators were Republicans. It was an affirmation of a strong bipartisan commitment to U.S.-European relations and trans-Atlantic cooperation.

As we flew toward St. Louis on a dreary March day in the spring of 1999, NATO was bracing to go to war in Kosovo. Albright had kept a grueling schedule in the preceding weeks trying to keep the NATO Alliance together and the Russians on board while the West ratcheted up the political and military pressure on Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to halt his barbaric “ethnic cleansing” campaign. She was in the front line of fire for what the press would soon dub “Madeleine’s war.” But it was time to put the problems of Kosovo aside for a day to welcome the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland into NATO. Albright’s Chief-of-Staff, Elaine Shocas, tapped me on the shoulder and said Albright wanted to see me. As I entered her private cabin, she broke out into a smile and gave me a huge hug. “Madeleine”—as we all referred to her—had been waiting a long time for this day, and her ebullient mood showed it.

We were joined on the plane by the Foreign Ministers of these three countries—Bronislaw Geremek of Poland, Jan Kavan of Czechoslovakia, and Janos Martonyi of Hungary. Each came up to Albright’s cabin to spend a few private minutes with her and to congratulate her. Geremek, a former Solidarity dissident and a close personal friend of Albright’s, reminded her that during Poland’s first post-communist election campaign, Solidarity had used an election poster with a picture of Gary Cooper from *High Noon* to symbolize the triumph of good over evil. “Madeleine,” Geremek said, “this is the fulfillment of that dream.” “NATO enlargement,” he continued, “is the most important event that has happened to Poland since the onset of Christianity.” This was a remarkable statement considering that it came from a Polish medieval historian of Jewish origin. After Geremek left the cabin, Albright turned to me and said: “Ron, it doesn’t get any better than this. We are making history.”

At the ceremony at the Truman Library, each of the three Foreign Ministers spoke eloquently about what NATO membership meant to them and their nations. The table used for the signing ceremony was the same one President Truman had used on March 12, 1947 to sign legislation that provided assistance to Greece and Turkey under the Marshall Plan to help defend them against a possible communist takeover—a first step in a U.S. commitment that would lead to the creation of NATO two years later. After the Foreign Ministers

handed their signed protocols to Albright, she held them above her head in triumph and beamed. “Hallelujah,” she proclaimed. “Never again will your fates be tossed around like poker chips on a bargaining table.” NATO enlargement, she said, was erasing “the line drawn in Europe by Stalin’s bloody boot.” Looking at the three Foreign Ministers, she said to them: “You are truly allies; you are truly home.”

I looked over at the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian delegations. A number of them had been imprisoned under communism in their fight for democracy and freedom. They had always dreamed of the day when they could join the West. For them this day was the culmination of a struggle that had started with the founding of Charter 77 or when a young Polish electrician by the name of Lech Walesa had jumped the fence at the Lenin shipyards in August 1981 in Gdansk to lead the strikes that would lead to the creation of Solidarity and eventually topple the Soviet empire in Central and Eastern Europe. When these Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians had initially raised the issue of joining NATO in the early 1990s, many in the West had dismissed them as hopeless romantics. But they had persevered. They had always been part of the West in spirit. Now they were joining its premier military alliance. It was the fulfillment of their dreams and their triumph as well. Many of them were in tears.

Returning home from Independence on the evening of March 12, I also thought about how my own life had become intertwined with the NATO enlargement debate. Central and Eastern Europe had been a part of my life since childhood. My parents were German immigrants, driven by the aftermath of war and destruction to start a new life in Milwaukee. My family had roots in various parts of Central and Eastern Europe—Bohemia, Pomerania, Lower Saxony, and Silesia. My first exposure to Central and Eastern European politics came at home in the evenings when I would listen to my grandmother tell me about what Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest had been like before World War II destroyed and divided Europe.

My education continued on to the soccer field. Our local soccer league—organized along ethnic lines with German, Polish, Italian, Czech, Hungarian, and Serbo-Croatian teams—reflected the large number of Central and East European immigrants who had landed in Milwaukee. While children kicked the ball around the field, parents yelled at them and each other in a multitude of tongues, only to retire to the tavern afterward to talk about life in the old country. Like many young Americans, I went to Europe to study during my college years. During that time, I visited the battlefields where World War II had been fought and the concentration camps where millions of Jews and other victims had perished. I saw the reality of Europe’s division in a divided Berlin where I searched for the home in which my grandmother had lived in the 1930s.

That reality—complete with barbed wire, armed towers manned by soldiers with guard dogs, and orders to shoot to kill—was a pivotal experience that

changed my life and future career path. Simply put, it horrified me. I began to ask questions: How could this have been allowed to happen? How long would it endure? What could be done to end it? To the great consternation of my parents, I returned home to announce that I was abandoning a planned engineering degree and instead wanted to study European and Russian History and International Relations.

My first job after graduate school was with Radio Free Europe (RFE) in Munich, Germany. There was hardly a better microcosm of Central and Eastern Europe for a young American interested in the region. Many of the most knowledgeable experts on communist affairs in the world worked at or visited RFE. Solidarity was on the rise in Poland. It and other dissident movements in Central and Eastern Europe were signs that the Soviet bloc was starting to crumble. The émigrés and experts there taught me a great deal about the aspirations and fears of the people of this region. Several colleagues would return to their native countries following communism's collapse and reappear in my life as diplomatic counterparts after I joined the State Department.

In the late 1980s I joined RAND, the leading think tank in the U.S. at the time on European security issues. It was an exciting time: the Berlin Wall would soon fall and much of the conventional wisdom on European security went out the window. RAND was a beehive of debate over future U.S. strategy toward Europe and Russia. The Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary had turned to RAND for assistance in developing new national security strategies. Working with them provided a unique window into their thinking and aspirations to join NATO. Many of our new colleagues and friends were as pro-western and committed to the values NATO was pledged to defend as any of us. How could the U.S. say "no" to their desire to join the Alliance?

During the 1992 Presidential campaign, I was attracted to then Governor Bill Clinton's "New Democrat" philosophy. I joined one of several groups of foreign policy experts attached to the campaign. The purpose of such ragtag groups was as much to keep us would-be foreign policy advisors feeling involved as producing anything of use to the campaign. But the battle lines on NATO enlargement were already being drawn. Several colleagues and I argued that the U.S. should enlarge NATO as the natural extension of the American commitment to democracy and integration in Europe, while others argued that such a move would alienate Moscow and that the Central and East Europeans should be encouraged to look to European structures instead. Such discussions foreshadowed the debate that would unfold in the years to come.

The selection of Clinton's initial national security team did not fill me with confidence that the issues I cared about were high on the Administration's agenda. Along with two RAND colleagues, Steve Larrabee and Dick Kugler, I decided to go public with the case for enlarging NATO in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in the fall of 1993 that quickly became a *cause célèbre* in policy-making

and diplomatic circles. German Defense Minister Volker Ruehe, the first major West European politician to publicly advocate NATO enlargement, now turned to RAND for help in developing his ideas. So did the Polish government. The debate over NATO's future was launched and my colleagues and I were in the center of it.

In late December 1993, the phone rang while I was at home in Santa Monica. On the line was Rose Gottemoeller, a former RAND colleague then at the National Security Council. She was calling on behalf of Strobe Talbott who was about to become Warren Christopher's new Deputy at the State Department. Rose had just returned from Moscow with Vice President Gore and Talbott. During a stopover in Bonn, Richard Holbrooke had recommended me for a job. Talbott wanted to know if I could come to Washington as soon as possible for an interview.

I had met Holbrooke some months earlier. He was known for his audacity. He was also keen on getting me into the Administration. He once sent me a postcard saying: "Ron, I will be in touch to let you know how you can best serve your country." It was vintage Holbrooke. But Talbott's interest left me even more curious. I had met him at several seminars but did not know him well. He was reported to be the leading opponent of NATO enlargement in the Administration's inner circle. Why would he want to hire me? As I walked into the lobby of the State Department two days later, I couldn't help but wonder what I was getting myself into.

But Talbott and I had an immediate personal and intellectual rapport. I quickly realized that his views were different than the caricature presented in the media—including on NATO enlargement. At one point he remarked that while he had not read all of my writings, he did know one article quite well, the *Foreign Affairs* article that he had been arguing about for the past three months. I could not help but ask him: "Strobe, if you have been fighting my ideas for all of these months, why do you want to hire me?" He answered: "Because we have a Russia policy but we do not yet have a European policy. And we need to have both and they need to fit together. We need to find a way to meld our European and Russian policy requirements. I want you to help me figure out how to do that."

The job offer did not work out. When Talbott offered me a less senior slot, I declined. I knew Washington well enough to understand that rank mattered if one wanted to have an impact. Talbott sat me down in one of the Department's ornate seventh-floor rooms to make a final pitch. He pointed out that I had no previous government experience and asked me to consider taking a staff position with a promise of a promotion down the road. When I noted that his lack of government experience had not prevented him from getting a very senior post, he laughed and said: "But you haven't known the President for twenty-five years either." As we parted, he told me: "You will end up working for this Administra-

tion before it is over. I will make sure of that.” He later hired me as a consultant to the Department so that we could stay in touch.

With Clinton’s reelection in November 1996 and the nomination of Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, that time had arrived. I knew Albright through my former RAND colleague, Jim Steinberg, who was about to become President Clinton’s Deputy National Security Advisor. She was looking for someone to be her point person on NATO enlargement. Talbott and Steinberg convinced her I should be it. I joined the Clinton Administration later that spring as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the State Department’s European Bureau under Assistant Secretary John Kornblum and, subsequently, Marc Grossman. On my first day on the job, Talbott took me to see Albright. “Ron,” she told me, “I am looking to you to help us enlarge NATO, work out this deal with the Russians, and come up with a strategy for the Baltic States.”

Talbott took me back to his private office. He told me that he would look to me personally to be his representative on all issues related to NATO enlargement. I was to have direct and personal access to him. But Talbott underscored the need to work NATO enlargement and NATO-Russia in tandem and with equal commitment. “You need to commit to bringing the same amount of intellectual commitment and passion to the building of a NATO-Russia relationship as you have brought to NATO enlargement,” he told me. “It is what the President, the Secretary, and I all want.” As he put it, we needed to think “bi-lobally” — with one lobe of the brain working on enlargement and the other on NATO-Russia. It was a phrase I would hear many times over the next three years.

A Deputy Assistant Secretary, or DAS in the nomenclature of the U.S. government, is a key link between the political leadership and the working level of the State Department. He or she is not in the innermost circle of power, but is senior enough to observe and at times participate in high-level policy decisions and to help carry them out. For the next three years I was part of the senior staff at Albright’s and Talbott’s sides as the United States enlarged NATO, negotiated the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and steered enlargement through the U.S. Senate. I was the U.S. negotiator for the U.S.-Baltic Charter and was part of the team that put together a new strategic concept for the Alliance’s fiftieth-anniversary summit in the spring of 1999 and NATO’s air campaign in Kosovo. For someone who had spent his professional career writing about NATO and European affairs, it was a unique perch from which to witness how policy really is made.

As we returned from Independence and prepared to land at Andrews Air Force base, I realized it was time to leave the world of diplomacy. Much of what I had set out to accomplish when I joined the Administration had been achieved. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were free and safe in NATO. We had laid the foundation for a more modern Atlantic Alliance that

was reshaping itself for a new era, changes that would be embraced at the Alliance's Fiftieth Anniversary Summit the following month.

Most importantly, the Europe my son would grow up to visit would be a different and better one. The line that had cruelly and artificially divided families, countries, and an entire continent for half a century was being erased. Whereas I as a young student had traveled across a continent divided by barbed wire and guard dogs, my son would never think twice about visiting Berlin, Warsaw, or Budapest. He would never know the divided Europe I had grown up with and what it was like to cross a Cold War boundary where great armies stood in an ideological and military standoff for some four decades. Thank God, I thought to myself.

Rarely does one have the opportunity to contribute intellectually to the origins of a major policy initiative as well as to implement it in practice. I was fortunate to have that opportunity. This book is a history of that experience—the intellectual origins of the NATO enlargement debate, the diplomacy that turned those ideas into real policies, and the politics that shaped the battles and final outcome. This story is told from the perspective of someone who was involved in that debate—as a scholar, policy activist and a diplomat. It does not attempt to cover every aspect of the debate, though I have tried to be comprehensive in my treatment of many issues. Additional insights will undoubtedly emerge as the memoirs of many of the key participants are published, the archives of other countries open, and as other scholars in the United States and abroad unearth additional insights.

This book is also unique in one final regard. My library at home has one section for memoirs and another for scholarly studies. They are very different genres. But this book seeks to combine the two. It is written first and foremost as a diplomatic and intellectual history. But my perspective has inevitably been shaped by the fact that I participated in the debates and was a witness to many of the events described in these pages. I have tried to use my personal experience to capture the passion, drama and occasional messiness of the diplomacy as it happened. For me personally, this was the most honest and accurate way to tell this story. I hope it will contribute to a deeper understanding of how Europe's divide was overcome.

R.D.A.
Washington, D.C.,
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Opening NATO's Door

