

## INTRODUCTION

# Missions in Search of a Vision

*Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca R. Moore*

AS THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, NATO, enters its seventh decade, it finds itself busier than at any time in its history. Not only is the Alliance involved in an array of military missions, widely ranging in scope and geographical area from Afghanistan to Sudan; NATO also stands at the center of a host of regional and global partnerships now increasingly focused on equipping it to address the new global challenges that it confronts in the post-Cold War, post-September 11, 2001, world. Yet despite NATO's wider engagement in these global missions and partnerships, it remains troubled by the absence of a grand strategic vision to guide its activities into the twenty-first century.

NATO demonstrated a newfound sense of political purpose in the early 1990s, first by reaching out to its former adversaries in Central and Eastern Europe and then by adopting a collective security role, beginning with its "out of area" operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. However, since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, these roles have been overtaken by the intensification of NATO's mission-driven evolution and transformation, including its adoption of global military missions from the Balkans to Afghanistan. To some degree, this is a consequence of the demands placed on NATO as the only existing institution with an integrated military structure. This mission-driven focus, however, has eclipsed the importance of the Alliance's normative origins and the role of the liberal democratic values embedded in the preamble to the original North Atlantic Treaty in defining both NATO's identity and larger political purpose. In short, rather than looking to the values at its core to determine its missions, since the late 1990s NATO has permitted itself to be defined by its missions.

This trend is troubling, because NATO has always been something more than the sum of its members and its capabilities. Although its main function was to provide a system of collective defense to integrate and pacify Western Europe in the immediate post-World War II period, it also formed the core of a larger project that involved the creation and preservation of a new post-war order. But this was not entirely NATO's mission alone; nor was it taken up only by its member states. Rather, NATO represented a broader security community and a concept of the West not necessarily confined even to Europe. The idea of NATO as a values-based community was also critical to its evolution during the 1990s and the project of building a new European security order. That project was predicated on an assumption that the tools necessary to build a Europe that was "whole, free, and at peace" were as much political as military in nature. Indeed, NATO would ultimately pursue its vision through the creation of new values-based partnerships and institutions, including the Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and, ultimately, its enlargement. The success of its partnership initiatives during the 1990s subsequently led it to seek partnerships beyond the borders of Europe in the form of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

However, despite NATO's successes in contributing to the integration and democratization of the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the vision that guided its transformation during the 1990s now confronts multiple challenges. One of these challenges arrived on September 11 in the form of international terrorism—a threat that transcended the traditional understanding of security as deriving from the military capability of states. The al-Qaeda attacks on the United States also prompted the first-ever invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (which is NATO's collective defense clause)—an ironic development, given the Cold War-era presumption that Western Europe depended on the United States in matters of security and defense.

September 11 thus revealed the fundamentally altered nature of NATO's strategic environment—an environment now populated by a variety of increasingly global and less predictable threats, ranging from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to failed states to the rise of global terrorism. As several Washington-based think tanks concluded in a joint report on NATO's future issued in February 2009, "the global has become local," and the well-being of the Alliance's member states will be "increasingly influenced by flows of people, money and weapons, good and services, technology, toxins and terror, drugs and disease." The report further suggested

that “the networked nature of modern societies” now requires “reconsideration of what, exactly, needs protecting in today’s world,” a discussion that is vital to adapting NATO’s collective defense mission to its new strategic environment.<sup>1</sup>

The September 11 terrorist attacks, however, also clearly revealed that NATO was ill prepared militarily for the security challenges its members now confronted, thereby prompting the United States to push during NATO’s 2002 Prague Summit for a new focus on military transformation, which would include “new capabilities” and “new partners” as well as “new members.”<sup>2</sup> The focus on capabilities, specifically, led to the adoption of NATO’s Prague Capabilities Commitment, which identified priority categories for which improved military capabilities were required. Additionally, NATO authorized the development of a new, rapidly deployable NATO Response Force.

However, NATO’s Prague Summit was ultimately about more than new capabilities. The George W. Bush administration in the United States was also determined to use the summit to focus NATO’s attention beyond Europe. As the former U.S. ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, explained, the Bush administration sought to “pivot the new NATO from its prior inward focus on threats within Europe to a new outward spotlight on the recent challenges to peace in the arc of countries from South and Central Asia to the Middle East and North Africa.”<sup>3</sup> Less than a year after the summit, on April 16, 2003, NATO agreed to assume command responsibility for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. In late May 2003, NATO also agreed to provide logistical support to Poland, so that it might assume command responsibility for a peacekeeping sector in central Iraq. These decisions appeared to move the Alliance beyond the out-of-area debates that had divided the United States and Europe during the 1990s toward an understanding that threats would now need to be addressed from a functional rather than geographical perspective. As NATO’s then–secretary-general, Lord Robertson, explained in late 2002, NATO’s new security environment no longer gave its members “the luxury of fighting theoretical battles about what is ‘in’ and what is ‘out of area.’” Rather, he stressed, NATO would have to be prepared “to act wherever our security and the safety of our people demand action.”<sup>4</sup>

As suggested above, the attention devoted at NATO’s Prague Summit to the need for new capabilities as well as NATO’s new ventures outside Europe reflected important steps in its continuing transformation, but they did not reflect the articulation of a new, larger strategic vision—beyond the creation of a Europe, whole, free, and at peace—that would assist NATO’s members

in determining how, when, and where any new capabilities should be used or its relationships with other actors, such as the European Union and the United Nations. Rather, NATO's new out-of-area missions were largely tactical ventures, stemming from a recognition that these situations would benefit from its capabilities. Indeed, NATO still functions under its 1999 Strategic Concept, which predated the events of September 11 and, as its members recognized at their 2009 Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl, must now be replaced. Although the process of completing the integration of the rest of Europe into Euro-Atlantic structures has continued with NATO's admission of Albania and Croatia to membership in 2009, that vision is no longer sufficient to sustain the Alliance in a dramatically transformed strategic environment.

At the same time, however, NATO must grapple with the fact that Russia, with its military intervention in Georgia in the summer of 2008, has directly challenged the hitherto-unstoppable eastward expansion of the Euro-Atlantic community, and thereby the 1990s project of expanding a Western system of normative values with like-minded governments bonded to each other through the power of international institutions. Russia's intervention, and its subsequent recognition of the breakaway Georgian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which NATO condemned, have thus created a dilemma for the West in dealing with the ever-growing discrepancy between the realpolitik of regional geopolitics and the expansionary nature of a global system of values and norms based on Western-led principles of democracy, human rights, and free markets—the last of which has also been seriously challenged by the global financial crisis. As the foreign ministers of NATO's member states recognized in December 2008, though dialogue and cooperation through the NATO–Russia Council . . . remained important to addressing “common security threats and challenges . . . in a partnership based on common values, the lack of a shared commitment to those values must naturally cause the relationship and the scope for cooperative action to suffer.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet it is also clear that Russia's actions have revealed a division within NATO over the balance between maintaining a cooperative relationship with Russia and the project of enlarging the Euro-Atlantic community. Indeed, this rift was already evident during NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit, at which Germany and France, among other member states, refused to support the United States' bid to extend immediate invitations to Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO's Membership Action Plan, due largely to concerns about antagonizing a Russia on which Europe has become increasingly energy dependent. Russia's intervention in Georgia several months later, however, led to the establishment of a NATO–Georgia Commission and then a compromise several months later at the December 2008 meeting of

the NATO members' foreign ministers, whereby it was agreed that Georgia and Ukraine would develop annual national programs aimed at advancing the reforms essential for NATO membership within the context of the existing NATO–Ukraine and NATO–Georgia commissions.<sup>6</sup> The agreement essentially deferred the decisions of how and when Georgia and Ukraine would become NATO members, but Germany reportedly remained unhappy with the terms of the compromise.<sup>7</sup>

NATO's internal divisions are also not limited to its relations with Russia. As is well known, NATO faces enormous challenges in Afghanistan, which some commentators now view as the key test of its continuing relevance. Although the United States has appealed repeatedly for NATO's European members to commit more troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, there have been few significant increases in troop contributions. Moreover, at least some of NATO's European members continue to impose caveats on the location of their troop deployments that are aimed at reducing the chances that these forces will actually be involved in combat. These caveats have challenged NATO's solidarity by raising questions about whether the burdens of the ISAF mission are being fairly shared among its members. At the same time, a number of non-NATO, non-European states—such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea—have made significant contributions to the ISAF mission in the form of troop deployments or other forms of logistical support. Although NATO has welcomed this assistance and demonstrated a desire to enhance its cooperation with what have generally come to be known as its “global partners,” the extent to which it should institutionalize this cooperation has also become a source of disagreement among its members.

Indeed, the fact that NATO has gone out of area in terms of both its military missions and its partnerships should not be seen as suggesting that a consensus has emerged within NATO as to just how “global” it should become. Some of its members, in fact, continue to resist giving it a truly global political and military role in favor of a more minimalist interpretation of its function. One concern these members have raised is that NATO's out-of-area missions have distracted it from its core function—the collective defense of its members' territories. The challenge for those members favoring a more global role is to reconcile its new missions with its traditional collective defense role. At the same time, however, those advocating a narrower role must explain what collective defense means in the context of a new strategic environment where regional threats can quickly become global.

These and a variety of other issues discussed in this volume will no doubt figure in NATO's drafting of its new Strategic Concept, although reaching a

consensus will likely prove difficult. Indeed, one of the common themes that emerges from the chapters that follow is a recognition that some NATO members have avoided a concentrated discussion of many of these issues on the assumption that the Alliance works better in practice than it does in theory. This volume, however, suggests that NATO is increasingly hobbled by its ad hoc approach in the absence of a larger strategic vision. The process of drafting a new Strategic Concept represents an opportunity for it to shape a new, common transatlantic vision—one anchored in the normative principles so crucial to its successes during the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War eras but also designed to guide its continuing evolution from Cold War Alliance toward an increasingly complex political-military institution equipped to anticipate and address increasingly global and less predictable threats and challenges.

### **Structure of the Work**

The contributors to this volume examine the key issues that will undoubtedly shape NATO's vision, while addressing the means whereby it can tackle the immediate and real challenges of the post-September 11 world. Hence the chapters in this volume not only provide an assessment of NATO's evolution thus far but also an analysis of where it must go if it is to remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

In chapter 1 Jamie Shea offers a NATO insider's perspective on the challenges and opportunities that the Alliance confronts in drafting a Strategic Concept for the twenty-first century. He devotes particular attention to two seemingly contradictory priorities: NATO's need to be an organizer of expeditionary missions beyond the territories of its members (including the Balkans and Afghanistan) while reassuring many of its member states that it is taking its Article 5 collective defense obligations seriously. He also discusses NATO's current operation in Afghanistan and analyzes the lessons to be learned as the Alliance adapts to being a contributor to stabilization and nation-building tasks.

In chapter 2 Gülnur Aybet suggests that the nature of NATO's 1991 and 1999 Strategic Concepts has contributed to its post-Cold War role, which has been driven largely by its military missions rather than a grand strategy or common transatlantic vision. This is because during this period, NATO acted as a "provider" within a larger Western grand strategy, which had a two-pronged purpose—first, exporting the norms and values of its security community to the former Warsaw Pact member states; and second, creating

a system of collective security. This grand strategy is now outdated in the post–September 11 world. Aybet explains why NATO now needs a new comprehensive grand strategy and not simply an updating of its 1999 Strategic Concept. She argues that the development of this new Strategic Concept must begin with NATO’s core values and principles and outline the kinds of tasks necessary to fulfill these values and principles in a new strategic environment, including the necessity for NATO to serve as a transatlantic forum for the discussion of global security issues beyond its ongoing missions.

In chapter 3 Ryan Hendrickson offers a comparative assessment of the role of NATO’s secretaries-general in shaping a common strategic vision for the Alliance. He concludes that its post–Cold War secretaries-general have played an increasingly important institutional role in shaping its strategic direction. The chapter includes an examination of the more expansive institutional role played by Jaap de Hoop Scheffer as secretary-general, which reflects NATO’s continuing evolution.

In chapter 4 Friis Arne Petersen, Hans Binnendijk, Charles Barry, and Peter Nielsen focus on the development of NATO’s Comprehensive Approach to civil–military cooperation. They argue that the question is no longer whether NATO needs such an approach but rather how to define its content. And they thus explore how Europe and the United States can work together on joint training, sharing lessons learned, and generating best practices in this area, not only to ensure that military forces and civilians in the field share a common approach but also to harmonize the oversight, objectives, and resources of every country and institution engaged.

In chapter 5 Martin Smith considers possible future trajectories for NATO–Russia relations with reference to the course of the relationship thus far. In particular, he explores the breakdown of relations during the 1999 Kosovo crisis and the crisis that resulted from Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008. On the basis of the subsequent reconstitution of NATO–Russia relations following the Kosovo crisis, he concludes that the prospects for both the survival and revival of NATO–Russia relations are surprisingly good.

In chapter 6 Sean Kay explores the impact on the NATO–Russia relationship of NATO’s decision to endorse the development of European missile defense programs for deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic. He examines the primary rationales for these systems and concludes that NATO is incurring high costs in one set of security relationships with Russia to address a separate threat that is as yet undefined or undeveloped. He thus recommends a major revision of NATO’s approach to missile defense and offers an alternative approach.

In chapter 7 Roger Kanet addresses four interrelated questions that are linked to NATO's expansion eastward to incorporate former Soviet client states and, later, states that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself. First, he examines the degree to which NATO's eastward expansion has contributed to the deterioration in Russia's relations with the West. Second, he discusses the deterrent effect of Russia's opposition to Georgia and Ukraine's NATO accession on NATO's further expansion eastward. Third, he considers the likely impact of NATO's new central European and Baltic members on its future policy toward Russia, given their heightened level of security concern in the aftermath of the Georgian crisis. Fourth, given the serious existing tensions between both the United States and some of its key European Allies, which are also NATO members, and between these same Allies and the new members of NATO and the European Union, he discusses the likely impact of the NATO–Russia relationship on the future of transatlantic relations and the nature of NATO itself.

In chapter 8 Gabriele Cascone focuses on NATO's efforts to integrate the states of the Western Balkans nearly two decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia. He examines NATO's enlargement process and mechanisms, the main requirements and country-specific requirements demanded of NATO aspirants, the connection between this process and concurrent processes from other organizations (chiefly the EU), the results achieved so far, and prospects for the future. He also examines some of NATO's unfinished business in the region, chiefly its relationship with Serbia and the possible development of links and cooperative programs with Kosovo.

In chapter 9 Jeffrey Simon examines two social and economic factors that are likely to influence the development of the transatlantic relationship—the shift from large European conscript armed forces to smaller all-volunteer forces, and diverging transatlantic views on the military's role in providing defense and security. He also explores the future impact on NATO of four aspects of demography: the increasing pressures on the cohort available for European defense establishments, the United States' and Europe's diverging immigration patterns and changing social composition, diverging aging populations and its economic implications, and the changing global population mix and resulting political and economic impact. He concludes that these six diverging factors are likely to have a significant effect on Washington's and Brussels' future views of NATO's importance, its future role, and the transatlantic relationship.

In chapter 10 Rebecca Moore examines the impact of NATO's partnerships, both regional and global, on its continuing evolution and transformation. She observes that, as NATO's partnerships have multiplied, the growing



diversity of their members has served to generate difficult questions about the partnerships' structures and purposes. The debate over NATO's so-called global partners, in particular, has raised the issue of whether NATO should move away from the traditional model of regionally based partnerships and toward a more functionalist approach. She concludes that this debate is about much more than the structure of NATO's partnerships. At a much more fundamental level, it is a debate over NATO's very purpose and identity.

The conclusion, by Gülnur Aybet and Rebecca Moore, evaluates the issues explored in the book's ten chapters in light of two dilemmas facing NATO today: the reemergence of regional geopolitics, and the need for NATO to find a common transatlantic vision that is based on the normative values of its inception rather than the mission-driven *raison d'être* that has prevailed during the post-Cold War era. These dilemmas signify the turning point that NATO has reached, and many of the challenges it now faces are laid out in the issue-specific focus of each chapter. The essential choice that NATO must now confront is whether to focus more on territorial collective defense or on global missions, which are both humanitarian and peace-building operations but nevertheless impinge on the security of its member states, given the transglobal nature of threats emanating from international terrorism and the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to failed states.

Although these intra-NATO debates are presented as choices, NATO's options might be more limited than some suggest. The Alliance is essentially a collective defense organization, and its core mission is to provide territorial defense for its members. At the same time, security is now defined by a plethora of global factors, to the extent that global missions are not just a continuation of NATO's collective security function, which was developed in the early 1990s, but also have a direct impact on the security of its member states. That said, as several of the contributors to this volume acknowledge, it is going to be increasingly difficult for NATO to undertake missions out of its area, in places like Afghanistan, unless it effectively synchronizes its functional efforts with those of other organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations.

## Notes

1. See the report of the Washington NATO Project: Daniel Hamilton, Charles Barry, Hans Binnendijk, Stephen Flanagan, Julianne Smith, and James Townsend, *Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council of the United States, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University, and

Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University, 2009), [www.acus.org/files/publication\\_pdfs/65/NATO-AllianceReborn.pdf](http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/65/NATO-AllianceReborn.pdf), 6. The Washington NATO Project was launched by the four U.S. think tanks that published this report to “spark debate before and after NATO’s sixtieth-anniversary summit in April 2009.”

2. Marc Grossman, “21st Century NATO: New Capabilities, New Members, New Relationships,” *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* 7 (U.S. Department of State), no. 1 (March 2002): 8.

3. R. Nicholas Burns, “The New NATO: Healing the Rift,” speech to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, May 27, 2003.

4. Lord Robertson, “NATO: A Vision for 2012,” speech at a conference sponsored by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Brussels, October 3, 2002, [www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021003a.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021003a.htm).

5. NATO, “Final Communiqué, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held at NATO Headquarters,” Brussels, Press Release (2008) 153, December 3, 2008, [www.nato.int/docu/pr2008/p08-153e.html](http://www.nato.int/docu/pr2008/p08-153e.html).

6. *Ibid.*

7. Steven Erlanger, “NATO Duel Centers on Georgia and Ukraine,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2008.