

21st Century Realism and the Transatlantic Security Relationship

By Sean Kay

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Introduction and Overview

Realist foreign policy was reflected in the role the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) took in channeling American power to provide collective defense of Western Europe against the Soviet Union. However, realism failed to resonate with post-Cold War leaders who guided the alliance with a liberal foreign policy. This paper revisits debates over how realist and liberal theory understand the relationship between international institutions and security. The evidence shows the liberal approach to NATO was based on faulty assumptions about institutions and security, leading to costly military interventions and over-extension. NATO risked, by 2019, offering a false promise of security, ironically, due to its institutional agenda and attributes. A realist perspective that challenges liberal assumptions about institutions offers a foundation for NATO's future, anchoring the transatlantic relationship in a turbulent time.

Realist Foreign Policy and Transatlantic Security

Realism, with its pessimism toward human nature and the implications of international anarchy, conflicts with American liberal visions of foreign policy – which are built around

spreading democracy, liberty, and commerce.¹ When realist and idealist assumptions are balanced in decision-making, historically America has done well – as with NATO’s founding; when the two are not, danger lurks. One hundred years ago, the world experienced strikingly similar challenges regarding institutions and security between World War I and World War II. Assessing what he called the “Twenty Years’ Crisis” of the League of Nations, E.H. Carr argued: “Political science must be based on a recognition of the interdependence of theory and practice, which can be attained only through a combination of utopia and reality.” Carr proposed: “The exposure by realist criticism to the hollowness of the utopian edifice is the first task of the political thinker.” Carr also observed: “Pure realism can offer nothing but a naked struggle for power which makes any kind of international society impossible.”² The administration of George H. W. Bush set out, successfully, with a realist approach to managing the end of the Cold War. In particular, Bush signaled the United States would not take advantage of the Soviet Union’s weakness, especially while negotiating German unification.³ Bill Clinton, however, shifted America’s vision, embracing a liberal approach to transatlantic security while excluding, even attacking, realists. His Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, for example, said skeptics of this vision reflected “echoes of Munich.” She said policies like NATO enlargement were a

¹ For recent realist critiques of liberal foreign policy, see Michael C. Desch, “America’s Illiberal Liberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter, 2007/2008): 7-42; Sean Kay, *America’s Search for Security: The Triumph of Idealism and the Return of Realism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018), and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018). For a Cold War history of NATO, see Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1988). On NATO’s ongoing adaptation, see Stanley R. Sloan, *In Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union, and the Transatlantic Bargain* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016).

² E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* (New York: Harper, 1964), 13, 89, 93.

³ There was early consideration of NATO enlargement beyond united Germany during the George H. W. Bush administration. A draft strategy document, originating in the Department of Defense, called for a strategy reflecting primacy, including NATO enlargement. This was rejected by the White House. See Patrick E. Tyler, “US Strategy Plan Calls for Ensuring No Rivals Develop,” *New York Times*, 7 March 1992, A1.

“litmus test” for whether America would “remain internationalist...or retreat into isolationism.”⁴ Now, Madeleine Albright concedes she was wrong. NATO, she says, is a military and a political alliance and new members Poland and Hungary (which have dramatically slipped on their commitment to democratic principles) have “failed to deliver.”⁵ This happened because decision-makers perceived NATO’s institutional attributes as causal, helping states avoid war and fostering peace via consultation and democratic consolidation. It is not – power and national interests determine NATO’s institutional relevance. Thus, Richard K. Betts warned in 1994 about the dangers of overstretch: “Under realist norms, the West should leave Ukraine to its fate – tragic for the Ukrainians, but safer for everyone else.”⁶

Primacy and Liberalism as Strategy

After the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union collapsed, the world experienced a “unipolar moment” with the United States remaining the lone superpower.⁷ The way to maintain primacy, the Clinton administration eventually concluded, was to export stability with crisis

⁴ David Broder, “Spare Us the Guilt Trips about NATO,” *Washington Post*, 20 July 1997, C9. Within the U.S. government, there were concerns over NATO enlargement, but they were not welcome. When General Wesley Clark challenged the policy’s pace while representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a meeting, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Canada Richard Holbrooke accused him of insubordination toward the president (although Bill Clinton had only said the issue was a question of not “whether” but “when” NATO would enlarge). When General Clark said there were issues remaining to discuss, Holbrooke charged: “That sounds like insubordination to me. Either you are on the president’s program, or you are not.” Discussion with Wesley Clark, spring 2001 and Michael Dobbs, “Wider Alliance Would Increase U.S. Commitments,” *Washington Post*, 8 July 1995, 1A.

⁵ Madeleine K. Albright, “Interview: Morning Joe,” *MSNBC*, 30 January 2019.

⁶ Richard K. Betts, “Systems of Peace as Causes of War? Collective Security, Arms Control, and the New Europe,” in Jack Snyder and Robert Jervis, eds. *Coping with Complexity in the International System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 272.

⁷ Samuel J. Huntington, “Why International Primacy Matters,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 68-83. Also see Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs: America and the World* 70, no. 1 (1990-91): 23-3, Michael Mastanduno, “Preserving the Unipolar Moment: Realist Theories and U.S. Grand Strategy After the Cold War,” *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 49-88, and Stephen Brooks and William Wolforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

management and cultivating democracy in post-Communist Eastern Europe.⁸ Giving NATO new missions, it was assumed, would sustain geopolitical functions of keeping America in, the German's locked in institutional architectures, and hedge against Russia. Bipartisan advocates in Washington, D.C. saw their vision as a realistic projection of American power, albeit benign and virtuous. Madeleine Albright proclaimed: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation. We stand tall. We see further into the future."⁹ Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) wrote, the 2014 Russia-Ukraine crisis: "...exposed the disturbing lack of realism that has characterized our foreign policy under President Obama. It is this worldview, or lack of one, that must change."¹⁰ Yet, realists consistently warned that NATO enlargement, which Albright and McCain championed, risked provoking Russia. Primacy combined with liberalism required spending resources to secure peripheral American interests. The result can be overstretch, which can provoke balancing behavior – and which now can be achieved by influencing decision-making in NATO.¹¹

Primacy and liberalism, as with any international power dynamic, can also produce domestic-level resentments driving national priorities.¹² Thus, a policy like NATO enlargement can simultaneously be benign in intent and heighten perceptions of threat by Russians. Indeed, public support for Vladimir Putin reached an all-time high of 83 percent following Russia's

⁸ This was not the Clinton Administration's initial pursuit. In 1993 Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff said about pressures for military interventions: "We don't have the influence. We don't have the inclination to use military force. We certainly don't have the money to bring to bear the kind of pressure which will produce positive results any time soon." "It is disarming," he said, "to many of the people who expect that, at the end of the day, we will do it...and we will provide the resources and manpower for it. That's rarely going to be the case now." "Top US Official Questions Role of the US," *Boston Globe*, 27 May 1993, 9.

⁹ Madeleine K. Albright, Interview with Matt Lauer, *NBC News*, 19 February 1998.

¹⁰ John McCain, "Obama Has Made America Look Weak," *New York Times*, 15 March 2014, A21.

¹¹ On over-extension and balancing see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On soft power balancing see Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing Against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 7-45.

¹² For historical context, see Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 2006): 341-370.

invasion of Ukraine in 2014.¹³ One of America's most influential diplomats, and a realist scholar, George F. Kennan had warned in 1999: "This whole tendency to see ourselves as the center of political enlightenment and as teachers to a great part of the rest of the world strikes me as un-thought-through, vainglorious, and undesirable. If you think that our life here at home has meritorious aspects worthy of enumeration by peoples elsewhere, the best way to recommend them is...not by preaching at others but by the force of example."¹⁴

Traditions of realism, such as George Kennan's admonition to separate moral concerns from foreign policy, remain valid - states are the primary actors in an anarchic system, power is the critical variable that determines structure and shapes outcomes, states make rational cost-benefit assessments about their position and options, and states have to worry about absolute and relative gains that others make, thus relying on self-help. Realists have generally not done well at explaining the persistence of NATO. Realists have also not done well at explaining how domestic variables affect institutional outcomes and how institutions can affect domestic dynamics (especially in the context of democracy, as with Great Britain's vote to withdraw from the European Union).¹⁵ A renewed realism can address these concerns by recognizing that NATO appears here to stay and that its members act as if they believe its institutional attributes increase security. At the same time, realists can remind decision-makers and the scholarly

¹³ Julie Ray, "Russian Approval of Putin Soars to Highest Level in Years," *Gallup*, 18 July 2014.

¹⁴ Richard Ullman, "The US and the World: An Interview with George Kennan," *New York Review of Books*, 12 April 1999, available at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1999/aug/121/the-us-and-the-world-an-interview-with-george-kenn/?pagination=false> (accessed in January 2019).

¹⁵ Regarding domestic variables affecting outcomes for the Soviet Union and Russia, see Richard Combs, *Inside the Soviet Alternate Universe* (College Station, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction and Foreign Policy: Identities and Foreign Policy, Moscow 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 391-425.

community that NATO's assets are dependent variables, cursed with collective action problems, and risk promoting dangerous false promises.¹⁶

At NATO's Founding: A Realist and Liberal Balance

Throughout the Cold War, NATO reflected realist thinking. American and allied power deterred the Soviet Union, reassured allies about Germany's future, and provided a platform for European economic integration. NATO's complex institutional structures were built to facilitate military and political cooperation among members for collective defense.¹⁷ The key variables making the institution relevant were the Soviet threat and American troops defending Western Europe. Realists cannot, however, ignore that NATO's founders endowed the institution with a liberal vision. The preamble reads:

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.

Article 2 of the North Atlantic Treaty called for "further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being." Article 5 is the core of America's commitment to collective defense in NATO. Often interpreted as an automatic security guarantee the treaty, more accurately, reflects realist concerns:

¹⁶ See John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994-1995): 5-49.

¹⁷ See John Duffield, *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

The principle is realist – do not attack or else. However, the language leaves room for self-help.

The only guarantee is that if a member is attacked, it will be considered an attack on all. They then agree to coordinate a response as deemed necessary. This can include, but need not be limited to, a military response. American drafters of the treaty understood that they might wish to have flexibility, especially in a nuclear era, in pursuing self-help.¹⁸

Some American officials advanced a liberal view of NATO during its founding negotiations. As G. John Ikenberry wrote: “...many of those who eventually supported NATO and containment did so not simply to build an alliance against the Soviet Union but also because these initiatives would feed back into the Western liberal democratic order.”¹⁹ Senior State Department officials John Hickerson and Theodore C. Achilles argued for an alliance – as a “basis for further progress toward unity.”²⁰ Achilles discussed with Secretary of State Dean Acheson a “full Atlantic federal union.” Acheson responded: “I’d rather start with Britain, Canada, and ourselves.”²¹ Acheson said on becoming Secretary of State: “We North Atlantic peoples share a common faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the principles of democracy, personal freedom, and political liberty.”²² Yet,

¹⁸ See John R. Deni, *NATO and Article 5* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). The negotiators were also influenced by the US Senate’s procedural rejection of the League of Nations, thus they inserted flexibility also to ease domestic concerns over constitutional war powers.

¹⁹ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 184.

²⁰ Theodore C. Achilles, “Fingerprints on History: The NATO Memoirs of Theodore C. Achilles,” *Occasional Papers I* (Kent, Ohio: Lyman L. Lemnitzer Center for NATO and European Community Studies, 1992), 13.

²¹ Achilles, “Fingerprints,” 32-33.

²² “Acheson to Push Atlantic Treaty,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1949, A3.

Acheson confirmed in 1966: “The plain fact, of course, is that NATO is a military alliance. Its purpose was and is to deter and, if necessary, to meet the use of Russian military power or the fear of its use in Europe. This purpose is pretty old-fashioned.”²³ George Kennan had offered an important and influential realist critique of the alliance during treaty negotiations. Kennan warned:

Instead of the development of a real federal structure in Europe which would aim to embrace all free European countries, which would be a political force in its own right, and which have behind it the logic of geography and historical development, we will get an irrevocable congealment of the division of Europe into two military zones: a Soviet zone and a U.S. zone. Instead of the ability to divest ourselves gradually of the basic responsibility for the security of Western Europe, we will get a legal perpetuation of that responsibility. In the long run, such a legalistic structure must crack up on the rocks of reality; for a divided Europe is not permanently viable, and the political will of the U.S. people is not sufficient to enable us to support Western Europe indefinitely as a military appendage.²⁴

Kennan added: “There is a danger that we will deceive ourselves, and permit misconceptions to exist among our own public and in Europe, concerning the significance of the conclusion of a pact at this time.”²⁵ Senior State Department official Charles Bohlen summarized these dynamics: “Our participation in the North Atlantic Treaty arrangement was entirely due to Soviet policy and power...Had the Soviet Union not chosen to prevent the unification of Germany in 1947 and 1948, there would have been no North Atlantic Treaty.”²⁶ As the Cold War progressed, George Kennan’s warnings were realized – East-West divisions locked in and a structural balance of power defined the Cold War. A Secretary General and Supreme Allied Commander Europe worked along with thousands of international military and civilian staff at

²³ Dean Acheson, “Canada, ‘Stern Daughter of the Voice of God’,” in Livingston Merchant, ed. *Neighbors Taken for Granted: Canada and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 141.

²⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 63.

²⁵ “Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, 29 November 1948,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, 3*: 283-289.

²⁶ Charles E. Bohlen, *Transformation of American Foreign Policy* (New York: WW. Norton & Co., 1969), 114.

NATO headquarters - backstopped by hundreds of thousands of forward deployed American troops and nuclear weapons.

Realists do not ignore potentially beneficial roles of security institutions as were developed in NATO. As Hans J. Morgenthau noted: “In its comprehensive objectives and techniques used to accomplish them, NATO indeed moves beyond the traditional alliance toward a novel type of functional organization.”²⁷ John Mearsheimer observes that “with the United States serving as a night watchman, fears about relative gains among the Western European states were mitigated, and furthermore, those states were willing to allow their economies to become tightly interdependent.”²⁸ But, Mearsheimer summarizes the key point about power:

NATO provides a good example of realist thinking about institutions. NATO is an institution, and it certainly played a role in preventing World War III and in helping the West win the Cold War. Nevertheless, NATO was basically a manifestation of the bipolar distribution of power in Europe during the Cold War, and it was that balance of power, not NATO per se that provided the key to maintaining security on the continent. NATO was essentially a tool for managing power in the face of a Soviet threat. Now, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, realists argue that NATO must either disappear or reconstitute itself on the basis of a new distribution of power in Europe.”²⁹

Realist assumptions were clearly wrong about NATO disappearing. Kenneth N. Waltz had argued: “NATO’s days are not numbered, but its years are.” Waltz asked: “How can an alliance endure in the absence of a worthy opponent?”³⁰ Charles Glaser offered a bridge – showing that state policies often occur because states feel they are getting value, and gains are made when a state increases what it values.³¹ Logically, this explains NATO’s survival: states wanted NATO and new missions were a way to sustain it; presumably at low cost. The right question to ask was whether or not NATO’s survival would matter and, if so, how?

²⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 530.

²⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *The Atlantic* 266, no. 2 (August 1990): 33-50.

²⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise,” 14.

³⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” in Brown, *Perils of Anarchy*, 74.

³¹ Charles L. Glaser, “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994-1995): 50-90.

NATO's False Promise?

Could embracing a liberal approach to NATO for crisis management and enlargement deliver as promised? John Mearsheimer answers: "...international institutions are useful tools of statecraft when states have common interests and need help realizing them. They can facilitate cooperation among states, although that cooperation is not always for peaceful ends. The more important point, however, is that there is no reason to think institutions can push states away from war."³² In fact, institutions can hinder crisis management if decision-making rules create gridlock and promote false promises. As Joseph Leggold warned, NATO's members have significant collective action problems: "Both humanitarian operations and operations designed to affect the political incentives of the actors in a conflict are likely to be seriously undersupplied, which could pose a difficult international problem in view of the need for such operations." Leggold added: "Even if the members of some group agree on an objective, individual incentives are to pay few, if any, of the costs of producing some good that will benefit a larger group." Leggold explained that "an actor may fear that if one contributes toward the common good, others will ride free on that actors' efforts."³³ Jack Snyder's caution in 1994 was prescient: "...institution-building will do great damage if it is attempted, but doesn't work...It will damage the West by embroiling it deeply in the possibly insoluble problems of the East."³⁴

³² John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 216. European economic integration played the key role in this integrative function. The European Coal and Steel Community (which fostered joint production in coal between Germany and France) combined with the US Marshall Plan led to confidence-building between Germany and France after World War II. Yet, by 1949 it was clear that these efforts required additional reassurances in the form of an American security guarantee to hold off overwhelming Soviet military power to the East.

³³ Joseph Leggold, "NATO's Post-Cold War Collective Action Problem," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 79, 86.

³⁴ Jack Snyder, "Averting Anarchy in the New Europe," in Lynn-Jones and Miller, *The Cold War and After*, 139.

Liberalism and the Realist Test

America and its transatlantic allies spent twenty years – from 1994-2014 - embracing a liberal strategy for NATO by adapting its missions and form, manifested in wars in the Balkans and membership enlargement.³⁵ These concepts reflected a dramatic shift when, in 1996, the US declared an expansive view of its European interests:

While democracy will not soon take hold everywhere, it is in our interest to do all that we can to enlarge the community of free and open societies, especially in areas of greatest strategic interest, as in Central and Eastern Europe and the new independent states of the former Soviet Union...Our national security strategy is therefore based on enlarging the community of market democracies while deterring and limiting a range of threats to our nation, our allies, and our interests. The more that democracy and political and economic liberalization take hold in the world, particularly in countries of strategic importance to us, the safer our nation is likely to be and the more our people are likely to prosper.³⁶

America had never previously conceived of security commitments to Central and Eastern Europe (beyond Germany) as being of “greatest strategic interest.” Some realists saw this as beneficial. As Kenneth Waltz offered in 1979: “Although we would prefer that East Europeans freely choose their governors, we may nevertheless understand that the Soviet Union’s managing a traditionally volatile part of the world has its good points.”³⁷ The new approach to NATO was derived from liberal assumptions about institutions and security. As Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright declared NATO enlargement would: “...do for Europe’s east what NATO has already helped to do for Europe’s west.”³⁸ She said, testifying to the US Senate: “By adding

³⁵ Some realists argued unsuccessfully for preserving NATO to hedge against resurgent Russia. Richard K. Betts argued: “Shells are far from useless – they can maintain the base from which remobilization and coordination can be accomplished in a shorter time than if they had to be accomplished from scratch – but they do not provide the animation or originality that revolutionary political changes seem to mandate.” Richard K. Betts, “Systems of Peace as Causes of War? Collective Security, Arms Control, and the New Europe,” in Betts, *Coping with Complexity in the International System*, 272. These case examples of Kosovo and NATO enlargement were accompanied by other major initiatives including global partnerships, Mediterranean initiatives, and emergency response. See Rebecca Moore, *NATO’s New Mission: Projecting Stability in a Post-Cold War World* (New York: Praeger, 2007).

³⁶ The White House, “A National Security Strategy of Enlargement and Engagement,” February 1996, available at <https://fas.org/spp/military/docops/national/1996stra.htm> (accessed in January 2019).

³⁷ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 208-209.

³⁸ Jane Perlez, “Albright Speaks of New Duties Allies Face: The Overview,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1999, A1.

Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to the alliance, we will expand the area within Europe where wars simply do not happen.”³⁹ President Bill Clinton declared: “...by reducing rivalry and fear, by strengthening peace and cooperation, by facing common threats to security of all democracies, NATO will promote greater stability in all democracies, NATO will produce greater stability in all of Europe, including Russia.”⁴⁰ US Ambassador to NATO Alexander Vershbow said (regarding NATO’s war over Kosovo in 1999): “NATO is now in the business of defending common values – freedom, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights – are themselves every bit as much worth defending as is our territory.”⁴¹ Even if experience justified such ambitions, as John M. Owen shows: “...liberal ideas cause liberal democracies to tend away from war with one another and...the same ideas prod these states into war with illiberal states.”⁴²

Institutional Assets and Security Provision

Liberal approaches to NATO see it enhancing security via its organizational attributes, which themselves produce norms of cooperation that can generate peace and aid crisis management. The scholarly approach, pioneered by Robert O. Keohane, posits that international institutions facilitate problem-solving, guided by principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures.⁴³ These dynamics reflect interdependence which motivates states towards

³⁹ Madeleine K. Albright, “Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC,” 7 October 1997.

⁴⁰ “Remarks by President Clinton at NATO/Russia Founding Act Signing Ceremony,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 27 May 1997.

⁴¹ US Mission to NATO, *Security Digest* no. 125, “US Ambassador Vershbow’s Speech on NATO After Kosovo,” 30 June 1999.

⁴² John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produced Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 88-89.

⁴³ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

multilateral cooperation to maximize gains and reduce collective action problems.⁴⁴ Institutions, it is thought, can increase security because information-sharing routines can reduce the transaction costs of collective action. Through this regular interaction, proximity, and transparency, states can gain a sense of community and confidence.⁴⁵ Adding a normative dimension - spreading democracy - became central to the liberal vision for NATO – expanding the “democratic peace.”⁴⁶ Keohane had actually hedged on how theory and practice might align, asserting liberal approaches “can backfire as policy prescriptions.”⁴⁷ For example, NATO members perceived gains from a consensus decision-making process.⁴⁸ Procedurally, there are no “votes” in NATO, rather formal and informal consultation facilitates consensus, which is required for official NATO policy. A “vote” occurs when a negative view is expressed by a member on an agenda item - “breaking silence.” This decision-making approach offers the benefit of “all for one, one for all” signaling backed by the political, economic, and military power of those sending the signals. It also allows any of its twenty-nine members to block NATO action and create gridlock, undermining institutional credibility. Even if the members of NATO approve action, they may not contribute or offset costs for fighting allies, opting to free-ride.⁴⁹ Interests and morals can clash in the North Atlantic Council, where decision-making

⁴⁴ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd edition (New York: Longman, 2001), 7.

⁴⁵ See Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane, “Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions,” in David Baldwin, ed. *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 128-129.

⁴⁶ Democratic peace theory posits there is less war among democracies as publics constrain decisionmakers and transparency increases credibility of commitments, reassuring states over other democratic country’s intentions. See Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ Robert O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 54.

⁴⁸ See Leo Michel, “NATO Decision-making: The ‘Consensus Rule’ Endures Despite Challenges,” in Sebastian Mayer, *NATO’s Post-Cold War Politics: The Changing Provision of Security* (London: Palgrave/ Macmillan, 2014), 107-123.

⁴⁹ Similar problems presented in subsequent NATO engagements. Allies placed caveats limiting operations in NATO’s mission in Afghanistan and only a handful of allies contributed to NATO’s training mission in Iraq and the Libya bombing campaign. On NATO and Afghanistan, see Sean Kay and Sahar Khan, “NATO and Counter-

occurs in NATO. Nevertheless, the normative elements of liberal values present at NATO's founding became central to America's new liberal strategy. Theory and practice aligned, as Keohane also wrote: "...the strength of liberalism as a moral theory lies in its attention to how governmental arrangements will operate in practice, and in particular, how institutions can protect human rights against the malign inclinations of power holders."⁵⁰

Liberal theory of institutions proposes that states learn by socializing and, consequently, the habit of consultation can become a norm. Meanwhile, cheating can be identified and, if necessary, punished collectively and burdens shared. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye assert that security institutions aid the exercise of influence, constrain bargaining strategies, balance or replace other institutions, signal governmental intentions by providing others with information and making policies more predictable, specify obligations, and impact both the interests and preferences of states.⁵¹ As Steven Weber observed of NATO, its institutional attributes can facilitate security through a network of permanent and intermittently meeting bodies, as well as ad-hoc groups set up at the request of member states.⁵² Liberal theory generally asserts that power and institutions work together to create positive outcomes. For example, institutional assets can help with the flow of power in crisis management. Robert

insurgency: Strategic Liability or Tactical Asset?" *Contemporary Security Policy* 28, no. 1 (April 2007): 163-181. On Libya, see Sean Kay, "No More Free-Riding: The Political Economy of Military Power and the Transatlantic Relationship," in Janne Haaland Matlary and Magnus Petersson, eds. *NATO's European Allies: Military Capability and Political Will* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2013), 97-120. On the incentives to free-ride in NATO, see Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) and Mancur Olson and Richard Zeckhauser, "An Economic Theory of Alliances," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 47, no. 3 (August 1966): 266-279.

⁴⁹ Keohane, *Power and Governance*, 75.

⁵⁰ Keohane, *Power and Governance*, 75.

⁵¹ Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann, eds. *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 2-3.

⁵² Steven Weber, "Does NATO Have a Future," in Beverly Crawford, ed. *The Future of European Security* (Berkeley: Center for German and European Studies, University of California, 1992), 369-70, 381. NATO reflected this role during the Cold War and after creating consultative forums including a Defense Planning Committee, Nuclear Planning Group, special working groups like the Harmel Report, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, Partnership for Peace, Membership Action Plans, and the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council.

Keohane and Lisa L. Martin concluded of these trends: "...liberal institutionalists do not argue that NATO could have maintained stability under any imaginable conditions. What we argue is that institutions make a significant difference in conjunction with power realities."⁵³ G. John Ikenberry observed: "...international institutions can make the exercise of power more restrained and routinized, but they can also make that power more durable, systematic, and legitimate."⁵⁴

Explaining NATO's institutional adaptation after the Cold War, Celeste A. Wallander asserted its rules and procedures were "institutional assets": "International institutions play a role in security relations by reducing transaction costs and making it possible for states to cooperate when it is in their interests to do so... These institutional assets enable states to cooperate by providing resources, such as information on intentions or compliance; by establishing rules for negotiations, decision making, and implementation; and by creating incentives to conform to international standards necessary for multilateral action."⁵⁵ NATO members also positioned the institution, as Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal suggest, to be a "community representative" manifested in the alliances' decision to represent UN values in the 1999 Kosovo war absent a legal mandate from the Security Council.⁵⁶ Robert Keohane wrote of Europe: "If the theories of institutions have any validity, the rich tapestry of institutions should both constrain states, through the operation of rules, and provide them with opportunities without positing the threats to other states that are so characteristic of realist anarchy."⁵⁷ Wallander and

⁵³ Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, "The Promise of Institutional Theory," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 42.

⁵⁴ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 273.

⁵⁵ Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000): 709.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Why States Act through Formal International Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 1 (February 1998): 3-22.

⁵⁷ Robert O. Keohane, "Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War," in Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*, 272.

Keohane, writing together, asked, “What went wrong with realist theory, and right with NATO?”⁵⁸ Two cases answer this challenge – liberal war in Kosovo and NATO enlargement.

Liberal War

In 1991 Yugoslavia began to collapse as Slovenia and Croatia, followed by Bosnia-Herzegovina, declared independence. What was left of Yugoslavia was dominated by Serbs, who inherited the army and supported ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina carried out a brutal campaign of ethnic cleaning, especially against the Bosnian Muslim population. As Yugoslavia collapsed, NATO stayed out - guided by realism.⁵⁹ The allies understood that the crisis had moral implications, threatening NATO’s credibility. But they also understood that intervention was dangerous.⁶⁰ Henry Kissinger summarized the concern: “Having at one time shared responsibility for national security policy and the extraction from Vietnam, I am profoundly uneasy about the proliferation of open-ended American commitments involving the deployment of US forces in the Balkans.” He warned: “We must take care not to treat a humanitarian foreign policy as a magic recipe for the basic problem of establishing priorities in foreign policy...statements that ‘we can make a difference’

⁵⁸ Celeste A. Wallander and Robert O. Keohane, “Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions,” in Helga Haftendorn, Robert O. Keohane and Celeste A. Wallander, eds. *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21-22.

⁵⁹ For discussion of the early Balkans conflict, see Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institutions, 1995).

⁶⁰ Colin Powell, then Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, asserted about using force to advance liberal goals in the Balkans: “These are the same folks who have stuck us into problems before we have lived to regret...I have some memories of us being put into situations like that which did not turn out quite the way that people who put us in thought – i.e. Lebanon, if you want a more recent real experience, where a bunch of Marines were put in there as a symbol, as a sign. Except those poor young folks did not know exactly what their mission was. They did not know really what they were doing there. It was very confusing. Two hundred and forty-one of them died as a result. Michael R. Gordon, “Powell Delivers a Resounding No on Using Limited Force in Bosnia,” *New York Times*, 28 September 1992, A1.

and ‘America symbolizes hope and resolve’ are exhortations, not policy prescriptions.”⁶¹ NATO initially adopted an undeclared containment policy towards Bosnia-Herzegovina, protesting Serb atrocities and using diplomacy and a threat of air strikes to support tenuous cease-fires. In 1995, a Croat-Muslim ground campaign pushed Serb forces into retreat. That combined with a limited NATO air campaign to foster a diplomatic solution in the Dayton Peace Accords. This led to a deployment of 60,000 peace enforcement troops, coordinated by NATO. NATO had spent several years developing multinational intervention operational plans, headquarters, and exercises, including coordinating contributions from non-members. The key driver, however, was an American decision to channel its power through NATO, which included sending 30,000 troops for the NATO mission. This intervention brought stability, allowing other institutions to rebuild the country including the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations, and World Bank.

Kosovo, a region within Serbia (which, with Montenegro, made up the last vestiges of Yugoslavia), was not part of the Dayton Peace Accords – although its 90 percent Muslim Albanian population was at risk from Serb forces.⁶² NATO spent much of 1998-1999 locked in decision-making gridlock as Serbs conducted ethnic cleansing with the tactic of a “village a day keeps NATO away” – calibrating actions to the degree of consensus in NATO. Meanwhile, information flows failed to inform decision-making. Experts at the national and institutional levels warned that an air campaign risked increased nationalist support for the Serb leadership - and provoking the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.⁶³ Additionally, NATO officials knew air power

⁶¹ Henry Kissinger, “No US Ground Forces in Kosovo,” *Washington Post*, 22 February 1999, A15.

⁶² For an overview of the Kosovo crisis see Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2000).

⁶³ Bradley Graham, “Joint Chiefs Doubted Air Strategy,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 1999, A1 and Craig R. Whitney and Eric Schmitt, “NATO Had Signs its Strategy Would Fail in Kosovo,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1999, A1.

alone had not determined the outcome in Bosnia-Herzegovina, yet a false narrative prevailed.⁶⁴ The United States found itself reluctantly at war, fighting for the legitimacy of its liberal foreign policy. British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared on the eve of war: “To walk away now would destroy NATO’s credibility.”⁶⁵ During the war, NATO members adopted a new Strategic Concept to: “...stand firm against those who violate human rights, wage war, and conquer territory.” NATO would “contribute to building a stronger and broader Euro-Atlantic community of democracies – a community where human rights and fundamental freedoms are upheld; where borders are increasingly open to people; ideas and commerce; where war becomes unthinkable.”⁶⁶ NATO Secretary General Javier Solana explained the strategy: “...marks the transition from an alliance concerned mainly with collective defense to one which will be a guarantee of security in Europe and an upholder of democratic values both within and beyond our borders.”⁶⁷ After the war, Solana said: “We will foster democracy across the region... We will foster Euro-Atlantic values across the region – the values of tolerance of multiculturalism, of peace, and of justice.”⁶⁸

NATO eventually prevailed – thanks to a ground threat hinted at by the United States and Great Britain, Russian diplomatic pressure on Serb leaders, and an acceleration of the air war (aided by an insurgent Kosovo Liberation Army).⁶⁹ In terms of NATO’s institutional assets,

⁶⁴ Supreme Allied Commander Europe during the Kosovo campaign, General Wesley Clark, said before the war to Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic (referencing the Bosnia-Herzegovina outcome): “Mr. President...NATO didn’t even fight this war. You lost it to the Croats and Muslims.” Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 67.

⁶⁵ William Drozdiak, “Analysis: New Challenges Facing 50-Year-Old NATO,” *Washington Post*, 24 March 1999, A23.

⁶⁶ See “The Alliance’s Strategic Concept, Washington, DC, 24 April 1999” and “The Washington Declaration: Signed and Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, on 23 and 24 April 1999.” NATO Office of Information and Press.

⁶⁷ “Speech by Javier Solana at the XVth International NATO Workshop,” Budapest, Hungary, 21 June 1999, NATO Office of Information and Press.

⁶⁸ Javier Solana, “Speech to the Bulgarian Parliament,” 8 July 1999, NATO Office of Information and Press.

⁶⁹ See Stephen Hosmer, *The Conflict Over Kosovo: Why Milosevic Decided to Settle When He Did* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001).

information flows and transaction costs became liabilities.⁷⁰ This was manifested in several ways:

- Military planners were not permitted to prepare for more than three days of tactical bombing as discussion beyond that would have damaged consensus to start the war. Diplomats declared with confidence the war would only last several days. Consensus could not be achieved on a strategic bombing campaign or ground threat. NATO could only marginally agree to continue more of the same - with accelerations of existing tactical guidance (America sought a strategic air campaign, causing pain deep inside Serbia, but most Europeans preferred targeting Serb forces in the field in Kosovo). As bombing commenced, distrust grew about information sharing among allies. For example, the US did not share specifics for hundreds of sorties that involved F-117s, B2, and cruise missiles, to ensure control.
- Deterring Serb ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was a major rationale for starting the war. Yet, the Serbs only engaged their plan for ethnic cleansing, Operation Horseshoe, after NATO bombing began. Serb forces pushed 863,000 people out of Kosovo into Albania and Macedonia. Yet the UN was only prepared for about 10,000 refugees in Albania when the war commenced. Deterrence was a realist policy objective, but the divergent interests among the allies regarding air and potential ground operations undermined the objective.
- Serbs gained intelligence via leaks from NATO headquarters and interception of communication between allied planes. Also, a persistent Serb reporter challenged NATO press briefers highlighting allied bombing that killed civilians. NATO had errant

⁷⁰ For further detail, see Sean Kay, "NATO, Kosovo, and Neoliberal Theory," *Contemporary Security Policy* 25: no. 2 (August 2004): 252-279.

bombing, including the accidental targeting of refugee convoys, because its consensus would not allow planes be flown below 15,000 feet. This placed pilot and aircraft protection over saving refugees. Also, an information error identified the wrong building and NATO bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade.

According to NATO commander Admiral James O. Ellis, NATO's institutional engagement affected "every aspect of planning and execution." NATO, he concluded, caused "incremental war" instead of decisive operation; excessive collateral damage concerns created sanctuaries and opportunities for the adversary which were successfully exploited; and the difficulty of NATO's conducting out-of-area operations was not anticipated. The operational costs of the "short war syndrome", Ellis observed, included a lack of coherent campaign planning, a lack of adequate component staffing, a race to find suitable targets, and negative impacts on Joint Task Force activation, staff composition, facilities, command and control, and logistics and execution.⁷¹ A RAND study concluded NATO's strategy "gave [Serb leader Slobodan] Milosevic time to bolster his forces, disperse important military assets, hunker down for an eventual bombing campaign, and lay the final groundwork for the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo."⁷² The RAND study quotes a senior NATO official: "NATO got in way over its head, stumbled through, didn't know how to get out, [and] was scared to death by what was happening." The official said the war had been a "searing experience" that had "left a bitter taste of tilting within governments, between governments, between NATO headquarters in Brussels and the military headquarters at

⁷¹ James O. Ellis, "A View from the Top," briefing slides provided to the author via the US Department of Defense, June 1999. According to General Michael Short, who commanded the air campaign, he and his planners were told: "You're only going to be allowed to bomb two, maybe three nights. That's all Washington can stand, that's all some members of the alliance can stand, that's why you've only got 90 targets, this will all be over in three nights." "Interview with Gen. Michael Short," *PBS Frontline*, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/short.html> (accessed in January 2019).

⁷² Benjamin Lambeth, *NATO's Air War for Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001), 13.

Mons.”⁷³ As the war went on, US Senator Gordon Smith (R-Oregon) worried that: “...a belief may arise in Congress and among the American people that but for NATO, we would not be in this fight and because of NATO we can’t win.”⁷⁴

Embroiled in the fog of war, the [then 19] NATO members were unwilling to make decisions needed to win a short war. The lack of a ground threat was critical, if even to complement air power (ground activity helps target location and can force an enemy into more targetable locations). Serbs created facts on the ground in Kosovo while waiting out the air war, testing the limits of NATO’s consensus. For example, NATO authorized the United States to deploy ground attack Apache helicopters to shoot at Serb targets in Kosovo from inside Albania. The Apache delivery was slow and they were never approved for combat operations. Still, they were accompanied by 5,000 American support troops which could have also become enablers of a ground operation.⁷⁵ At a White House meeting on 2 June 1999, US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger asserted victory would be attained “in or outside NATO...a consensus in NATO is valuable, but it is not a *sine quo non*. We want to move with NATO, but it can’t prevent us from moving.”⁷⁶ The more NATO entered the hard realm of warfighting, the more its members abandoned institutional procedures. As the war progressed, key decisions within NATO were relegated to a “quad” of the US, Britain, France, Germany, and occasionally Italy which made

⁷³ Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War*, 206.

⁷⁴ David Finney, “NATO’s Future is Now,” *ABC News*, 23 April 1999.

⁷⁵ NATO eventually began secret planning for ground contingencies including an invasion of Serbia called Plan Bravo using 300,000 NATO troops. Britain already had agreed to send up to 50,000 troops to another option built around 170,000 troops to liberate Kosovo. Milosevic knew about these plans. They might have been real, or a bluff to add to pressure on the Serbs to quit. Patrick Wintour and Peter Beaumont, “Revealed: The Secret Plan to Invade Kosovo,” *London Sunday Observer*, 18 July 1999 and Peter Beaumont and Patrick Wintour, “Leaks in NATO – and Plan Bravo Minus,” *London Sunday Observer*, 18 July 1999. Also based on author’s conversation with senior NATO official, September 1999.

⁷⁶ Steven Erlanger, “NATO Was Closer to Ground War in Kosovo than is Widely Realized,” *New York Times*, 22 November 1999, A4.

operational decisions for the alliance, unencumbered by its institutional assets.⁷⁷ The United States, according to Sandy Berger, was set to abandon fighting through NATO when on 3 June, the Serbs halted their campaign.

NATO did eventually win the war. No allied pilots were lost and refugees returned home. Months later, the Serb public overthrew their government (revolting mainly against corruption and ongoing sanctions, not the war per se) and its head, Slobodan Milosevic, eventually died awaiting trial for war crimes in the Hague. This outcome emboldened those advancing a liberal foreign policy. Bill Clinton declared after the war: “Whether you live in Africa or Central Europe, or any other place, if somebody comes after innocent civilians and tries to kill them en masse because of their race, their ethnic background or their religion, and it’s within our power to stop it, we will stop it.”⁷⁸ For some participants, however, the war negatively affected thinking about NATO. US Secretary of Defense William Cohen conceded: “If we were to carry out and act unilaterally, we would have a much more robust, aggressive, and decapitating type of campaign...The difference here, of course, is that we’re acting as an alliance.”⁷⁹ Admiral Leighton Smith, who led NATO operations, concluded of Kosovo that “the lesson we’ve learned is that coalitions aren’t good ways to fight wars.”⁸⁰ Lt. General Michael Short, commander of NATO’s air campaign asserted: “I believe that before the first bomb was dropped, the door should have been closed, with all those inside who wished to go to war. The

⁷⁷ NATO’s command structure also showed strain. As the war was ending, Russia made plans to send air relief to Serb forces in Pristina, Kosovo. NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley Clark ordered equipment moved onto the air strip to stop the planes from landing. General Michael Jackson called a “red card” (in NATO terms) - going back to his home government (Britain) and seeking it change the orders via the NATO decision-making process. General Jackson was quoted telling General Clark, “I’m not going to start World War III for you.” The order was halted, raising serious questions about command authority in NATO. Mark Tran, “‘I’m Not Going to Start Third World War for You,’ Jackson Told Clark,” *The Guardian*, 2 August 1999.

⁷⁸ Stephen S. Rosenfeld, “Exultant Crusader: For Overseas Rescue Missions, Americans Still Prefer Caution and Care,” *Washington Post*, 2 July 1999, A27.

⁷⁹ Interview with William Cohen, *PBS Frontline*, available at <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/cohen.html> (accessed in January 2019).

⁸⁰ Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War for Kosovo*, 205-206.

United States should have said very clearly, ‘It appears that NATO wants to go to war in the air, and in the air only. If that is the case, the sentiment of the nations here, we will lead you to war. We, the United States will provide the leadership, the enabling force, the majority of the striking power, and the technology required. We will take this alliance to war, but the price to be paid is we call the tune...We’re going to send our young men and women to war. We’re going to fly into the teeth of the threat, and we’ll bear the brunt of the cost and risk. In exchange for that, we’re going to call the tune.’⁸¹ A senior member state official opined at the first gathering of NATO after the war, the primary lesson learned was that the allies “never do this again.”⁸²

NATO Enlargement

NATO enlargement is built into the North Atlantic Treaty as Article 10 allows for new members. Since 1999, NATO has grown to include 29 member states from the 16 that emerged from the Cold War. NATO enlargement became a centerpiece of America’s vision for Europe after the Cold War, and it too became a test of liberalism. NATO enlargement was presented as consolidating democracy, justified by previous membership expansions, and thus contributing to liberal order building. This was knowingly overly optimistic, as Cold War enlargements showed:

- *Greece and Turkey*: Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952 for realist reasons of security in the Mediterranean and the alliance’s southeastern flank. There was minimal socialization, i.e. via joint exercises or other cooperation to offset their historical animosity or help consolidate democracy.⁸³ When, in 1964, Turkey was pressured to

⁸¹ “Interview with Gen. Michael Short,” *PBS Frontline*.

⁸² Discussion with Wesley Clark, spring 2001.

⁸³ James Brown, *Delicately Poised Allies: Greece and Turkey* (London: Brassey’s, 1991).

back-off conflict with Greece over Cyprus, the determining factor was a letter from US President Lyndon B. Johnson indicating that failure would give America pause to defend Turkey if it provoked a Soviet attack.⁸⁴ In Greece, NATO did not oppose the overturn of democracy via a coup in 1967, in which colonels in the Greek military seized power using a NATO counterinsurgency plan. NATO faced what one observer termed a “crisis of conscience.”⁸⁵ Some NATO members raised the issue of the Greek regime for discussion in the North Atlantic Council. However, this was blocked as an agenda item.⁸⁶ The coup leaders met regularly with senior officials from NATO countries and responded with pro-NATO policies.⁸⁷ Ironically, when the coup was overturned, the legitimate leaders of Greece withdrew from the NATO integrated military command in protest.⁸⁸ Turkey experienced a series of military coups as a NATO member. Turkey was a frontline ally and its military kept the nation secular – thus the alliance looked askance. Turkey is now governed by an autocratic despot, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who imprisons journalists and professors, cracking down on dissent while undermining democracy and human rights.

⁸⁴ President Johnson wrote to Turkish Prime Minister Ismet Inonu: “I hope you will understand that your NATO allies have not had a chance to consider whether they have an obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union if Turkey takes a step which results in Soviet intervention without the full consent and understanding of its NATO allies.” The Johnson letter was published *Middle East Journal* 20, (Summer 1966): 386-389.

⁸⁵ D. George Kousloulas, “The Origins of the Greek Military Coup, April 1967,” *Orbis* 8, no . 1 (Spring 1969): 332-358.

⁸⁶ Robert Jordan and Werner Feld, *Europe in the Balance: The Changing Context of European International Politics* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 216.

⁸⁷ Though the US embargoed heavy weapons sales to Greece, Washington continued to be the largest supplier of weapons during the coup years. There were more US weapons transfers to Greece in 1967-1970 from the US than there had been in the three years before the coup. In 1972, Washington negotiated an “open ended” homeport agreement for the stationing of US naval forces in Greece. This was rescinded by Greece in 1974 after democracy was restored. Both France and Germany also traded with and sold military equipment to Greece. See Benjamin Cameron Sharp, *NATO and the Mediterranean, 1949-1979: Deterioration on the Southern Flank* (Ann Arbor, MI, UMI, 1981), 102-103.

⁸⁸ Theodore Coulombus, *The United States, Greece, and Turkey: The Troubled Triangle* (New York: Praeger, 1983), 101-102.

- Federal Republic of Germany*: NATO helped with the integration and re-armament of the Federal Republic of Germany which joined in 1954. Yet, the key variable that reassured its neighbors was the presence of American troops. Germany also helped with unilateral commitments limiting its armed forces' role and agreeing to not seek weapons of mass destruction.⁸⁹ Even Russia was satisfied to see unified Germany constrained in NATO.⁹⁰ US Secretary of State James Baker had asked during German unification negotiations: "Would you prefer to see a united Germany outside of NATO and with no U.S. forces, perhaps with its own nuclear weapons?...Or would you prefer a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO's jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position?"⁹¹
- Spain*: Spain, which joined NATO in 1986, already had a bilateral security relationship with the United States. The European allies refused to admit Spain in 1949, rejecting its recent history of despotic rule by Francisco Franco. After Franco's death in 1975, NATO membership became important for Spain as a pathway towards European economic integration and consolidating civilian control over the military (which had posed a continued coup threat by Franco loyalists). Joining NATO helped via integration of its military planning to shift Spain from internal police functions into multilateral forums for activity outside its borders.⁹²

⁸⁹ "Declaration by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany," Paris, 23 October 1954 and "Declaration by the Governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and France," Paris, 23 October 1954.

⁹⁰ This view was confirmed by the author in multiple meetings with senior Russian military officials in 1992, during semi-official Russian visits to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (then the North Atlantic Assembly). This includes meeting with General Valeri Gerasimov, who is now the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.

⁹¹ Quoted in Michael A. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Level: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1993), 184.

⁹² See Javier Perez Royo, "Repercussions on the Democratic Process of Spain's Entry into NATO," in Frederico G. Gil and Joseph S. Tulchin, eds. *Spain's Entry Into NATO: Conflicting Political and Strategic Perspectives* (Boulder, CO:

This nuanced record was ignored in a seminal analysis advancing post-Cold War NATO enlargement. Ronald Asmus, Richard Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee wrote: “East-Central Europe’s democrats well understand that democracy will succeed only if their states belong to a secure European and Western political, economic, and military community...NATO membership helped stabilize democracy and stem authoritarian backsliding in Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Turkey.”⁹³

Liberal assumptions about NATO enlargement saw the process spreading security as aspirants demonstrated commitments to democratic principles, protecting minority populations, and ending territorial disputes with neighbors.⁹⁴ Enlargement was consistent with liberal theory, as G. John Ikenberry asserted, “NATO bound states together, thereby creating greater security among alliance partners and reinforcing democratic and market institutions.”⁹⁵ Czech President Vaclav Havel said: “The new European security system must be built by democratic forces...The North Atlantic Alliance is...the most appropriate means of ensuring the collective security of our values.”⁹⁶ The problem is, there are no institutional mechanisms to enforce these norms once a country enters NATO – there is no sanction, suspension, or expulsion clause in the NATO treaty.⁹⁷ As US National Security Adviser Sandy Berger said: “There’s no exit door

Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 20-28 and Gergory F. Treverton, “Spain, the United States, and NATO: Strategic Facts and Political Realities,” in Gil and Tulchin, eds., *Spain’s Entry Into NATO*, 129-132.

⁹³ Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, “Building a New NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 4 (September/October 1993): 30. The reference to Portugal is telling, in that despite NATO’s pre-amble, Portugal was a founding member governed by an authoritarian dictator, António de Oliveira Salazar. Also see Ronald Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004) and Daniel Reiter, “Why NATO Enlargement Does Not Spread Democracy,” *International Security* 25, No. 4 (Spring, 2001): 41-67.

⁹⁴ Strobe Talbott, “Why NATO Should Grow,” *New York Review of Books* 42, No. 13 (August 10, 1995), 27-30. These principles were initially laid out in several speeches by US. Defense Secretary William Perry in 1994-1995.

⁹⁵ Ikenberry, *After Victory*, 239

⁹⁶ Vaclav Havel, “NATO and the Czech Republic: A Common Destiny,” *NATO Review* 45, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 8.

⁹⁷ There were warning signs that Hungary was ill-prepared to join NATO despite positive official US statements about its readiness for membership. In Hungary, 63 percent of the public was opposed (at the time of their

from NATO...Once you come into NATO there's no door on the back that says this is the door for countries that didn't make it."⁹⁸ In recent years, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey have become deeply illiberal as despotic leaders have used elections to gain power and then embraced extra-constitutional means to remain. NATO was silent while these trends deepened and has no plan to address this challenge from within. NATO risks domestic-driven divides among members that can be exploited by Russia – either via direct diplomatic or economic pressure, covert action, or via cyberattack.⁹⁹ NATO enlargement, meanwhile, had set off alarm in Russia since the policy's inception. Western reformers in Moscow were bewildered, warning NATO the policy emboldened anti-western hardliners across Russia. Moscow, in particular, saw the West having promised no further NATO enlargement beyond united Germany as a basis for ending the Cold War.¹⁰⁰ Western officials dismissed Russia's provocations as posturing for a domestic audience – ironically ignoring the impact that evolving domestic norms can have on international outcomes.

There was some realist-driven resistance to NATO enlargement that proved prescient.

Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA) led a small and ineffective opposition in the US Senate, arguing:

invitation) to using Hungarian forces to defend another NATO ally if attacked; 88 percent were opposed to increasing defense spending to pay for membership obligations. This data was collected by the US Department of State, but did not appear in Senate testimony from senior American officials. See "Hungarian Public Widely Opposed to Military Spending Increase," *USIA Opinion Analysis* M-66-97 (21 April 1997).

⁹⁸ "Transcript: Berger, Cohen, Talbott Briefing on NATO Summit," *United States Information Agency*, 2 July 1997.

⁹⁹ Rob Bershinski, "The Threat Within NATO," *The Atlantic*, 7 April 2018, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/nato-hungary-authoritarianism/557459/> (accessed in February 2019). Former US Ambassadors to NATO Nicholas Burns and Douglas Lute note: "Especially in Central Europe but not exclusively, there are setbacks in the media, the judiciary and the functioning of national democratic institutions. The rate at which democracy is declining in Poland, Hungary and Turkey is particularly alarming. In 2017 and 2018, these three states' scores represented some of the largest one-year declines in political rights and civil liberties of all 195 countries ranked by Freedom House. Poland—with the largest category declines in the forty-year history of the survey—is close to leaving the 'consolidated democracy' category. Hungary is no longer rated a consolidated democracy. Turkey, whose decline in freedom over the last ten years represents the largest of any country in the world, crossed the threshold from 'free' to 'not free'." See Nicholas Burns and Douglas Lute, *NATO At 70: An Alliance in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Joshua R. Shiffrin, "Deal or No Deal, The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Promise to Limit NATO Expansion," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 7–44.

“NATO is fundamentally a military alliance. If you denigrate the military side of it, then it becomes a political and psychological alliance, which is something very different...The last thing we need is a repeat of what happened before World War II, when commitments were made that were not backed up by military capabilities and intentions.”¹⁰¹ George Kennan also offered a strong critique: “It never pays...for one great power to take advantage of the momentary weakness or distraction of another great power in order to force upon it concessions it would never have accepted in normal circumstances...Over the long run, it almost always revenges itself.”¹⁰² Longtime Russia expert, CIA Director and Defense Secretary, Robert Gates concluded about the policy:

...from 1993 onward, the West, and particularly the United States, had badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation losing the Cold War and then in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which amounted to the end of the centuries-old Russian Empire. The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians, in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the international psychological impact of their precipitous fall from super power status had led to a deep and long-term resentment and bitterness)...Getting Gorbachev to acquiesce to a unified Germany as a member of NATO had been a huge accomplishment. But moving so quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union to incorporate so many of its formerly subjugated states into NATO was a mistake...NATO expansion was a political act, not a carefully considered military commitment, thus undermining the purpose of the alliance, and recklessly ignoring what the Russian’s considered their own vital interests.¹⁰³

Henry Kissinger warned the opposite. He was concerned enlargement risked turning the alliance into a collective security institution like the failed League of Nations. Kissinger objected that the allies had overly accommodated Russian opposition by granting it influence over NATO decision-making: “Had I known the price of NATO enlargement would be the gross dilution of

¹⁰¹ Sam Nunn, “The Future of NATO in an Uncertain World,” speech to the SACLANT Seminar 95, 22 June 1995, Norfolk, VA.

¹⁰² George F. Kennan, *At a Century's Ending: Reflections, 1982-1995* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 184.

¹⁰³ Robert Gates, *Duty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 157.

NATO, I might have urged other means to achieve the objective.”¹⁰⁴ These critiques were treated as inconveniences by officials in the US government who drove the enlargement process. Considerable effort was coordinated by the State Department Policy Planning Staff to rebut critics of enlargement without engaging the substance of concerns (including those raised in the interagency process). “We’re working on that” was a common refrain when a substantive concern was presented, i.e. about member state commitments to democracy, military capabilities, and decision-making around collective defense.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, earnest efforts were made to reassure Moscow via new councils for NATO-Russia consultation. Bill Clinton saw this as important for US-Russia relations and it was essential for getting consensus in NATO to begin enlargement with Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic entering in 1999.

John Mearsheimer sees NATO enlargement as the root cause of the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine.¹⁰⁶ Liberal strategy clearly had overreached in signaling inevitable Ukrainian NATO membership, recklessly driving the alliance into the backyard of a declining and paranoid nuclear power. Rather than returning to an offensive posture, Russia was – in its perception - acting defensively as it lost its buffer to NATO in Ukraine.¹⁰⁷ It was, however more precisely, NATO’s “open door” to Ukraine and Georgia that provoked Moscow, not so much the initial enlargements.¹⁰⁸ The first rounds of post-Cold War enlargement brought Russian

¹⁰⁴ Henry Kissinger, “The Dilution of NATO,” *Washington Post*, 31 December 1994, C9.

¹⁰⁵ This conclusion is based on the author’s time as a member of the NATO Enlargement Ratification Working Group coordinated by the US Department of State, while the author worked in the US Department of Defense in 1997.

¹⁰⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 1-12.

¹⁰⁷ Joshua Rovner, “Putin’s Crimea Blunder,” *The National Interest Online*, 6 March 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Russia moved quickly on Ukraine in 2014 after the European Union had begun extensive cooperation with Kyiv. American officials note that Ukrainian membership in NATO was not on the table. The geostrategic implications for Russia of western guarantees moving closer to its border nevertheless had a motivating impact. If Ukraine achieved NATO membership, Russia’s only naval access to the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea (via the Crimean Peninsula, where Ukraine had previously agreed to allow Russian access to strategic bases there) would become a NATO base. NATO’s area of responsibility would also be driven to the Ukraine-Russian border, 300 miles from

opposition, but no balancing. Russia made gains as NATO agreed not to deploy permanent troops or nuclear weapons/facilities in new member states, created a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council for collective decisions in some issue areas like counter-terrorism cooperation, and was invited to join the “G8” group of leading industrial nations although its economic collapse did not merit this designation at the time.¹⁰⁹ NATO Secretary General Javier Solana demonstrated institutional thinking asserting that NATO and Russia: “...must learn more about each other, we must speak to each other more regularly, we must continue to develop trust, unity of purpose and habits of consultation and cooperation between NATO and Russia.”¹¹⁰ NATO’s concession not to forward deploy troops to deter an attack on, for example, the exposed Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was significant. Collective defense would be based on reinforcement from deep within NATO: allies would rush in and fight a war on the attacked nation’s territory to overturn a Russian invasion, if all the remaining NATO members agreed.¹¹¹ US Secretary of State John Kerry thus projected a potentially dangerous false promise when in 2014 he declared: “...we have to make it absolutely clear to the Kremlin that NATO territory is inviolable. We will defend every single piece of it....Article 5 of the NATO treaty must mean something, and our allies on the frontline need and deserve no less.”¹¹² Given NATO’s collective action problem in decision-making, gaining consensus to reinforce allies in a crisis could paralyze the institution. A senior Polish official said after Russia invaded Georgia in 2008:

Moscow. NATO enlargement, NATO’s ballistic missile defense plans, and its role in the 2011 regime change war in Libya were used by Vladimir Putin to build a narrative of the West taking advantage of Russia.

¹⁰⁹ Russia also gained via better relations with a more confident Poland, which grew more comfortable with their ongoing economic interdependence with Russia. See Joshua B. Spero, *Bridging the European Divide: Middle Power Politics and Regional Security Dilemmas* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

¹¹⁰ “NATO-Russia Relations at the Turn of the Century, Speech by the Secretary General at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation,” Berlin, 7 November 1997, NATO Office of Information and Press.

¹¹¹ Even agreeing on what constitutes an “attack” could cause serious division within NATO, given the hybrid kinds of warfare that have been adopted and employed by Russia.

¹¹² David Brunnstrom, “Kerry: NATO Territory Inviolable – ‘We will Defend Every Single Piece’,” *Reuters*, 29 April 2014.

“Poland and the Poles do not want to be in alliances in which assistance comes at some point later – it is no good when assistance comes to dead people.”¹¹³

Moscow’s perceptions of Russia’s security concerns also were not abated despite NATO’s attempts to reassure it with institutional engagement and operational restraint. But, it was only after NATO met in Bucharest, Romania, in 2008 that Russia took overt action against Georgia then Ukraine. In Moscow’s view, NATO crossed a red-line.¹¹⁴ The allies provoked Moscow at Bucharest declaring: “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.”¹¹⁵ This declaration was tragic as there was zero appetite to implement the pronouncement.¹¹⁶ Yet in 2014, liberals celebrated a new pro-western government in Ukraine (which Russia believed America played a hand at installing). NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow visited Tblisi, Georgia during the Ukraine crisis, adding to pressure on Moscow, and tweeted, “All tools in place to help #Georgia move from #NATO partnership to membership. W/ necessary political commitment, I’m sure it will happen.”¹¹⁷ Henry Kissinger countered (regarding proposals to send defensive American weapons to Ukraine): “I’m uneasy about beginning a process of military engagement without knowing where it will lead us and what we’ll do to sustain it...I believe we should avoid taking incremental steps before we know

¹¹³ Thomas Shanker and Nicholas Kulish, “Russia Lashes Out On Missile Deal,” *New York Times*, 15 August 2008 (published online).

¹¹⁴ Russia had been attacking Ukraine via cyber since 2010.

¹¹⁵ “Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest,” 3 April 2008.

¹¹⁶ The Bucharest Declaration also foreclosed on a deal that Vladimir Putin implied in a meeting with George W. Bush in spring 2008. If NATO would back-off Ukrainian membership, Russia would apply sanctions on Iran’s nuclear ambitions. This overture was rejected by the United States. Months later Russia invaded Georgia, a pro-Russian government emerged in Ukraine, and Iran continued unabated in its nuclear program. Off-the-record discussion with senior US diplomat who travelled with George W. Bush to the Putin meeting. Author’s notes, Council on Foreign Relations meeting, Washington, D.C., April 2008.

¹¹⁷ Vershbow’s tweet is available at <https://twitter.com/ARVershbow/status/561084447123320832> (accessed in January 2019).

how far we are willing to go.” He added, “This is a territory 300 miles from Moscow, and therefore has special security implications.”¹¹⁸ John Mearsheimer asserted: “Washington has a deep-seated interest in ending this conflict and maintaining Ukraine as a sovereign buffer state between Russia and NATO. Furthermore, good relations with Russia are essential, because the United States needs Moscow’s help to deal with Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, and eventually to help counter China, the only genuine potential rival to the United States.”¹¹⁹ Even regarding morals, realists had the upper hand: was it moral to offer Ukraine a false promise? Ukraine is an independent sovereign nation that can choose where it aligns. But, a moral approach might involve being honest with Ukraine, so that it can adjust toward self-help – toward neutrality.

The United States and its allies sanctioned Russian political and business leaders, suspended NATO-Russia cooperation, and commenced rotational troop deployments into Eastern Europe.¹²⁰ These were small, symbolic trip-wire deployments - numbering in the hundreds of American soldiers (although innovative joint multinational command structures have been established to facilitate any inflow of allied troops in an Article 5 situation). NATO was now realigning around a new threat refocusing on Article 5, as realists would expect of an alliance. Tragically, the threat grew in response to NATO’s commitment to Ukrainian membership – which itself was a false promise. Meanwhile, liberal impulses over Ukraine were checked by the structural distribution of power. Russia was weak and the NATO allies had overwhelming military and economic advantages. However, Moscow had escalation dominance in eastern Ukraine, a second strike to sanctions (shutting off energy to NATO allies), and nuclear

¹¹⁸ “Kissinger Urges Military Restraint,” *McClatchy News*, 29 January 2015, published online.

¹¹⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, “Getting Ukraine Wrong,” *New York Times*, 13 March 2014 (published online).

¹²⁰ One strategic dilemma that the United States had to consider was Ukraine’s decision in the 1990s to give up its nuclear weapons and join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on the basis that its sovereignty would be guaranteed. Additionally, some strong signals had to be sent to China and others that one could not invade, occupy, and annex another nation’s territory without paying some steep price.

weapons. America's liberal vision peaked in Ukraine as reality imposed high prospective costs: a new Ukrainian economy built on western-guaranteed loans, rebuilding from scratch of the military and intelligence sector, and introducing a new judicial system and rooting out corruption and organized crime.¹²¹ This outcome affirmed Robert Keohane's caution that: "Democracies may act to stop starvation or extreme abuses of human rights...but they are unlikely to sacrifice significant welfare for the sake of democracy – especially when people realize how hard it is to create democracy and how ineffective intervention often is in doing so."¹²²

Next Steps for a Realist Foreign Policy

NATO's twenty years of institutional adaptation contradict liberal assumptions about the institution. There now appears no appetite in NATO for new missions or endless enlargement.

What then might its members focus NATO on? Realism offers a framework:

- *NATO engagement in the Balkans and enlargement demonstrate the value of realism as a check against liberal foreign policy impulses.* Realists are especially valuable in challenging assumptions about security institutions like NATO. By focusing on identifying the conditions in which institutions can impact security outcomes instead of holding outdated views about NATO disappearing, realists might find a more welcome place at the decision table. At the same time, the United States might not be in the security dilemma it is with Russia had realists been involved in decision-making during the recent era of liberal foreign policy. Realists are essential to the formulation of

¹²¹ See Tim Ash, et al, "The Struggle for Ukraine," Chatham House Report, October 2017, available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-10-18-struggle-for-ukraine-ash-gunn-lough-lutsevych-nixey-sherr-wolczuk.pdf> and Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Boston: MIT Press, 2015).

¹²² Keohane, *Power and Governance*, 1.

successful policy as engaging hard tests of policy assumptions can be the difference between success and failure.

- *A new realism that factors for the domestic foundations of state interests offers important concepts for institutional reform.* As NATO has enlarged membership to consolidate democracy, a hard test of that commitment can deter against illiberal political movements backstopped by Russia. An annual NATO-wide review of membership commitments could identify those who fail to deliver on democracy. To enforce that principle, NATO needs a mechanism to sanction, suspend, or expel non-contributing members. NATO could, if need be, revert to more geographical and power foundations of membership if circumstances require. Individually, the United States would be well-served to examine scenarios of unilateral action or coalitions of the willing it might have to lead if NATO is tied in gridlock during a serious crisis. Would, for example, the United States extend bilateral security guarantees to the Baltic countries if NATO failed to respond? How would Russia react to that? Alternatively, European NATO members are well-advised to prepare for Article 5 scenarios where the United States is non-responsive, acting in concert to reassure against unilateral initiatives and to lower the risk of nuclear weapons proliferating should the American commitment to collective defense be deemed unreliable.
- *A realist view would limit NATO's main planning and operational role to Article 5 missions.* For now, maintaining rotational forces as a symbolic presence in peripheral NATO allies offers some reassurances that can be ramped up or down, depending on Russian behavior. However, NATO's guarantees are more like layers of concentric circles with those on the outside left wondering what might happen in crisis? Would the

allies agree to defend, or would they be locked in institutional gridlock? Do the NATO allies really wish to limit their choices to an escalating game of chicken with a nuclear-armed Russia or appeasement? NATO could plan, exercise, and signal specific Article 5 scenarios short of a military response (political, diplomatic, financial sanctions, covert operations, cyber, etc.), while maintaining existing military concepts. NATO might also wish to consider a “consensus-minus” approach so that 100 percent agreement need not be achieved before allies act in a crisis.

- *Realists are good at helping states to prioritize when it comes to conventional threats and the distribution of power.* The transatlantic relationship is vital, but the most critical challenger to America’s global position is China, not Russia. America is likely to continue pivoting toward Asia. It is therefore reasonable to expect more burdensharing from European allies. The European allies do not need to spend more on defense. The problem is inadequate interoperable allied capabilities that are not dependent on American operational platforms – especially for force projection. Yet America wants its platforms as a basis for NATO interoperability, favoring its arms industry. To make a long-term gain, this short-term residual of primacy can be let go of in Washington, D.C. Finally, the United States and its allies might wish to revisit realist concepts about the security dilemma, arms races, and arms control as prior agreements on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces have been abrogated by Russia and abandoned by the United States. Realist theory also needs to better account for how power is manifested in world politics - ranging from cyberattack, to terrorism, to the implications of climate change while cautioning over institutional capacity and national willingness to address these challenges.

- *Helping to get its European allies able to act cohesively without the United States is important so America can tend to the domestic foundations of its power; not retrenching from Europe, but rebalancing.* Having capable allies can make the US transatlantic commitment durable as allies can serve, under the right conditions, as force multipliers or take the lead. Rebalancing can help the United States prioritize internationally and focus on the domestic foundations of power, returning after a period of nativism to an era balanced by realism. A new realism need not abandon the idea of peace spreading to reflect liberal thinking; but rather America would invest in that, leading by example and setting the path towards progress at home.

While realism dictates NATO needs decision-making reform, its decision-making processes may make that difficult, if not impossible. Europe is at risk of another period of institutional disconnect from geopolitics, as happened during the League of Nations period. Liberal foreign policy, although well-intended, resulted in over-stretch of institutional responsibilities combined with diminished capacity. Realism offers a framework that allows for advancing human liberty by setting the best model at home and holding close allies to account. If the case for liberal interventions exists, realism can identify what tools are necessary for success and what pitfalls to avoid. Critically, a new realist foreign policy will help America, and its allies, avoid dangerous false promises.