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On the identity of NATO

HELENE SJURSEN*

At the end of the Cold War many predicted that the Atlantic alliance would wither away. With the loss of its enemy, the very purpose of the organization, the basis of its legitimacy and the glue that kept the allied states together were also gone. However, contrary to expectations, NATO persisted and is still considered by many to be the core security organization in the western hemisphere.¹ This persistence presented researchers with a puzzle. Why did NATO continue to thrive when, according to traditional assumptions about international politics, the basis for cooperation was no longer there? In order to answer this question many turned to so-called 'constructivist' approaches to international relations and suggested that it was necessary to take into account the role of norms, principles and identity in order to explain the persistence of NATO. In fact, it was argued, NATO was never only a military alliance held together by a sense of a common external threat; rather, it was and is a community of liberal democratic values and norms.² As NATO gradually established close institutional links with its former enemies in the Warsaw Pact (including Russia), expanded its membership and redefined its security strategy, this image of NATO appeared increasingly convincing. However, against the backdrop of the second enlargement

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¹ Mark Webber, Stuart Croft, Jolyon Howorth, Terry Terriff and Elke Krahnmann, 'The governance of European security', *Review of International Studies* 30: 1, Jan. 2004.

² Although these authors use slightly different wording to describe NATO they all point to the importance of democratic norms and/or Kant's idea of a 'pacific federation' for conceptualizing NATO. See Harvey Waterman; Dessie Zagorcheva, 'Correspondence: NATO and democracy', *International Security* 26: 3, Winter 2001, pp. 221–27, 227–30; John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the world polity* (London: Routledge, 1998); Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among democracies: the European influence on US foreign policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Sonia Lucarelli, *Peace and democracy: the rediscovered link. The EU, NATO and the European system of liberal-democratic security systems*, final report, NATO Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Individual Research Fellowships, 2000–2002 programme; Frank Schimmelfennig, 'NATO enlargement: a constructivist explanation', *Security Studies* 8: 2/3, 1999; Michael Brenner, ed., *NATO and collective security* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); Alexandra Gheciu, 'Security institutions as agents of socialization? NATO and post-Cold War Central and Eastern Europe', paper presented at the ARENA/RSC IDNET workshop on 'Europeanization, collective identities and public discourses' 22–23 Feb. 2002, available at <http://www.arena.uio.no/events/idnet2002.htm>.

of NATO and the serious disagreements within the organization about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq, it is worthwhile re-examining this argument.

In this article I will suggest that it is problematic to conceptualize NATO as a community of liberal democratic values or as a 'pacific federation' in the Kantian sense. This is so not only because NATO lacks a democratic mandate, but also because there is no cosmopolitan law to which it can refer for justification. Consequently, NATO can be an organization governed at best by the principle of multilateralism, at worst by that of bilateralism; but neither of these 'isms' says anything about democracy. They refer to different ways of organizing relations between sovereign states, different forms of institutionalized cooperation, regardless of the democratic quality of the content of their collective activities or institutions, or of the domestic politics of the participant states. This does not mean that we cannot conceive of NATO as an organization that is held together by something in addition to 'national security interests'. There are numerous norms, rule-sets and ideas that may contribute to ensuring the persistence of NATO; however, the question remains to what extent these norms should be linked to democracy. We know, for example, from organizational theories that organizations have a tendency to seek to reproduce themselves and to search for new forms of legitimization, even after their original *raison d'être* has disappeared. In order to succeed in this endeavour they refer to different types of both interest-based and normative arguments. Such efforts could well grow out of a feeling of solidarity or shared history; and in the case of NATO, such a feeling would suggest that NATO is 'more' than a military alliance in the traditional sense.

The first part of this article outlines the view of NATO as a community of liberal democratic values and norms or a Kantian 'pacific federation'. The second part discusses the strengths and weaknesses of this perspective with reference to the various reforms of NATO after the end of the Cold War. The third part suggests that NATO today can best be understood as a multilateral organization reinforced by a sense of common history. The final section examines the potential implications of this conceptualization for the future of NATO.

Returning to its roots? NATO and democracy

Although the literature on NATO is considerable, and still growing, surprisingly little of it focuses on NATO as an institution: on the fundamental characteristics of the organization as such or on decision-making processes within it. The vast majority of the literature concentrates on the substance of NATO's policies or military strategy, on the differences and similarities in the policies of its member states and in particular on the numerous crises in transatlantic relations.³ Many also aim primarily at making policy recommendations with a

³ According to Lundestad, a librarian at the Nobel Institute in Oslo 'quickly collected nine full pages of relevant titles focusing on crisis or conflict' in the alliance. Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

view to resolving such transatlantic tensions. There may be various reasons for this neglect. It may be that decision-making inside NATO is taken for granted as a process controlled by one superpower, and therefore not considered worthwhile investigating further. However, the reason may well have something to do with the traditional assumption in international relations, and in particular in security studies, about the primacy of states, and the corresponding assumption that institutions, and the particular form that institutions have in a particular context, have no relevance for or impact on policy. However, given what we know of the time and resources state representatives spend on negotiating and arguing about institutional structures, within NATO as elsewhere, this is a rather surprising assumption. This article focuses not so much on the impact of institutions on policies, as on the different conceptions of what characterizes NATO as an institution and institutionalized cooperation within it. The analysis thus relies on the assumption that security institutions are no different from other institutions in that they contain persistent and connected sets of rules of appropriate behaviour. Such rules and norms also shape participants' expectations about reciprocity. However, such rules need not be static and they may be challenged; hence the existence of rules and norms does not exclude the potential for conflict. Most importantly for the argument here, however, to observe the existence of common norms and rules is not the same as observing democratic practices.

There are, of course, exceptions to the general academic neglect of NATO as an institution and institutionalized cooperation within it. In particular, there is a growing literature focusing on NATO not only as a form of collective security organization, but as a form of community based on liberal democratic values and norms.⁴ The core argument in this literature is that shared liberal democratic values and norms are crucial for the cohesion of the alliance, and that it is on the basis of this common identity that NATO in the post-Cold War period has turned to focus on democracy promotion as a core principle for its activities. According to Thomas Risse, for example, we would miss the point about NATO if we were to conceive of it as 'just another military alliance'.⁵ A critic of realist and neo-realist explanations, Risse argues that it was not the Soviet threat that created the Atlantic community in the first place, although it strengthened the allies' sense of common purpose. Rather, the origins of the alliance are to be found in the wartime alliance of France, the UK and the United States, which led to a sense of community and common values. At the centre of these common values was the principle of democracy. A closer study of NATO confirms, according to Risse, the expectation that democratic states can form a security community that is based on the same democratic principles as those that are governing their domestic political systems. Hence

⁴ See in particular Zagorcheva, 'Correspondence'; Waterman, 'Correspondence'; Lucarelli, *Peace and democracy*; Ruggie, *Constructing the world polity*; Schimmelfennig, 'NATO enlargement'; Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among democracies*; Brenner, *NATO and collective security*. Also Webber et al., 'The governance of European security'.

⁵ Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among democracies*, p. 223.

Risse argues that 'the norms regulating interactions in such institutions are expected to reflect the shared democratic values and to resemble the domestic decision-making norms.'⁶

Others put a stronger emphasis on the current democratic identity of NATO as linked to reforms introduced after the end of the Cold War. From such a perspective the redefinition of NATO's identity becomes more clearly part of a 'search for relevance'.⁷ The enlargement process is often described as crucial in terms of redefining NATO's *raison d'être*. Zoltan Barany, for example, suggests that the gradual inclusion of newly independent East European states offered NATO 'a plausible, if partial, way of responding' to its identity crisis at the end of the Cold War.⁸ Again, however, the link to democracy is considered to be at the core of this so-called 'identity'. Such a perspective is, perhaps ironically, confirmed by the critics of enlargement, who consider that NATO ought to maintain its core characteristics as a defence organization. By expressing their regret at the new identity of NATO as an organization that grants membership on the basis of criteria that have more to do with political assessments and adherence to democratic principles, than with the capacity to make military contributions to security, they implicitly endorse the view that adherence to democratic principles is one of NATO's core characteristics.⁹ To some, the transition was 'grounded in the basic values of the original community' and 'completely inscribed in the DNA of the organization and its member states'.¹⁰ To others, it marks a new departure, symptomatic of the 'radical transformation of NATO after the dissolution of the Soviet Union'.¹¹ According to this argument, whereas security came before democracy for NATO during the Cold War, this is no longer the case. Adherence to democratic norms within NATO is seen as crucial in the context of enlargement, and on this basis NATO is described as the most important democratizing agent in Europe.¹²

Looking back to NATO's early years, it is clear that representatives of member states had ambitions of establishing not only a military alliance, but also an Atlantic 'community'.¹³ This dimension to NATO was strongly emphasized, for example, in the 1956 'Report of the Committee of Three on non-military cooperation in NATO'. Presenting an ambitious line of action for the North Atlantic alliance, the report proposed that, alongside its overall objective of guaranteeing security, NATO should aim at creating an 'Atlantic

⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷ Lucarelli, *Peace and democracy*; Zoltan Barany, 'NATO's peaceful advance', *Journal of Democracy* 15: 1, Jan. 2004.

⁸ Barany, 'NATO's peaceful advance', p. 65.

⁹ For a discussion of such criticism see David Yost, *NATO transformed: the alliance's new roles in international security* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998), pp. 128–31.

¹⁰ Lucarelli, *Peace and democracy*, p. 25.

¹¹ Zagorcheva, 'Correspondence', p. 229.

¹² Waterman, 'Correspondence', p. 226.

¹³ For a discussion of the concept of Atlanticism and the Atlantic community, see Michael Smith, 'Atlanticism and North Atlantic interdependence: the widening gap?', in Barry Jones and Peter Willetts, eds, *Interdependence on trial* (London: Pinter, 1984), pp. 167–229.

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Community whose roots are deeper even than the necessity for common defence'. It argued that politics and security were interdependent and also that the challenge to NATO was not exclusively military. Consequently, it concluded that the success of the military alliance depended on the political cohesion of an Atlantic community. Referring to the decision to create NATO in 1949, it pointed out that

in a shrinking nuclear world it was wise and timely to bring about a closer association of kindred Atlantic and Western European nations for other than defence purposes alone; that a partial pooling of sovereignty for mutual protection should also promote progress and cooperation generally. There was a sense of Atlantic Community, alongside the realisation of an immediate common danger ... it gave birth to the hope that NATO would grow beyond and above the emergency which brought it into being.¹⁴

More specifically with regard to democracy, the North Atlantic Treaty, as well as numerous subsequent documents and declarations from NATO, emphasize the importance of democratic principles. Thus, in the preamble to the treaty it is stated that the parties 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'.¹⁵

With the end of the Cold War, NATO's references to democracy were intensified, in particular with regard to its policies in Europe, where NATO has not only established close institutional cooperation with Russia, the former Soviet republics and the Central and East European states, but also enlarged its membership to include several of these states.¹⁶ For the supporters of enlargement within NATO a key argument in favour was related to the potential for spreading democracy, the responsibility of NATO at the end of the Cold War to contribute to the end of division in Europe and to ensure that both East and West were stable and secure. Hence US President Bill Clinton, whose role in moving NATO towards the decision to enlarge is considered crucial, argued that NATO could 'do for Europe's East what it did for Europe's West: prevent a return to local rivalries, strengthen democracy against future threats'.¹⁷ Clinton repeated these arguments in several speeches during his visits to Europe in 1994,¹⁸ and his sentiments were echoed by his closest associates and members of his administration. The US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, a key actor in the US strategy on European security, claimed that the

¹⁴ 'Selection from the Report of the Committee of Three on nonmilitary cooperation in NATO', Dec. 1956, appx 3 in Robert Jordan, *Political leadership in NATO: a study in multinational diplomacy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), p. 283.

¹⁵ 'The North Atlantic Treaty. Washington DC, April 4 1949', in *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization: facts and figures* (Brussels: NATO, 1989).

¹⁶ The first NATO enlargement to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic was decided upon in Madrid in 1997. An agreement on a second round of enlargement to include Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia was agreed upon in March 2003.

¹⁷ Cited in Barany, 'NATO's peaceful advance', p. 66.

¹⁸ James M. Goldgeier, *Not whether but when: the US decision to enlarge NATO* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 55.

alliance had 'made respect for democracy and international norms of behavior explicit preconditions for membership, so that enlargement of NATO would be a force for the rule of law both within Europe's new democracies and among them'.¹⁹ Reference to democracy as one of several conditions for membership was also made by the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, who argued that prospective members would have to show that they adhered 'to the principles of democracy, individual liberty and respect for human rights, the rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the inviolability of national boundaries'.²⁰

Evidence that might support the argument that NATO enlargement confirms NATO's so-called 'democratic identity' can also be found in several of the key NATO documents dealing with this issue. The alliance's 'Study on NATO enlargement' from September 1995 gave seven rationales for enlargement, two of which refer explicitly to democracy. A first rationale is that of 'encouraging and supporting democratic reforms, including civilian and democratic control'; another is to contribute to 'reinforcing the tendency toward integration and cooperation in Europe based on shared democratic values and thereby curbing the countervailing tendency towards disintegration along ethnic and territorial lines'.²¹ The NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996 also contains claims that the human rights record of candidate states will be considered.²² Finally, reference to respect for democracy in candidate states is found in the documents from the Washington summit of 1999, where further enlargements (beyond Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic) were discussed. The Membership Action Plan stated, for example, that future members must conform to democratic principles and principles of individual liberty.²³

References to democracy as a central element in the 'new NATO' are also present in NATO's own presentation of its purpose, with regard to how it defines security as well as how it justifies the redefinition of its security strategy. Some of these references take on a more obviously rhetorical dimension than others: 'Our unique partnership was born in common philosophies of freedom and democracy. It was forged during half a century's fight against tyranny. Now it stands as a beacon of democracy, toleration, plurality, openness and candor in a world menaced by extremism and tyranny'.²⁴ However, if we look to NATO's strategic concept of 1999, we find the argument that 'through outreach and openness, the Alliance seeks to preserve peace, support and promote democracy, contribute to prosperity and progress, and foster genuine partnership with and among all democratic Euro-Atlantic countries'.²⁵ And

¹⁹ Cited in Yost, *NATO transformed*, p. 124.

²⁰ Cited in Goldgeier, *Not whether but when*, p. 56.

²¹ Yost, *NATO transformed*, p. 103.

²² NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act of 1996, available at <http://www.fas.org/man/nato/congress/1997>.

²³ NATO's Membership Action Plan, April 2000, available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/facts/2000>.

²⁴ Lord Robertson, 'This ain't your daddy's NATO', speech delivered at conference on 'The Marshall legacy: the role of the transatlantic community in building peace and security', 12 Nov. 2003, on the occasion of Lord Robertson's visit to the United States. Hosted by the George C. Marshall Foundation, the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins SAIS and the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

²⁵ 'The alliance's strategic concept'. See press communiqué NAC-S(99)65, 24 April 1999.

among the fundamental security tasks of the alliance we find: 'To provide one of the indispensable foundations for a stable Euro-Atlantic security environment, based on the growth of democratic institutions and commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes'. These formulations were already present in the first of NATO's new strategic concepts, agreed upon in 1991, and were reproduced in almost identical terms in 1999.²⁶

If we define a military alliance as an organization that is set up with the sole aim of protecting the member states from a clearly identified external threat, and that is held together chiefly as a result of a common perception of such a threat, then it seems plausible that NATO has ambitions to, and perceives itself as, something more; and there is some evidence to support the idea that the 'new NATO' has sought to forge a basis of legitimacy for itself, and a definition of its own purpose, that are somehow linked to the idea of democratic governance. However, if this is a new 'invention' on the part of NATO, it cannot help to explain why NATO persisted after the end of the Cold War. Also, and most importantly, does this mean that we should consider democracy as the core identifying feature of NATO and conceptualize NATO as a Kantian pacific federation or as an organization evolving in that direction?

Limitations to the idea of NATO as a community of democratic values

It is possible, perhaps even probable, that a simple comparison between words and actions, and an examination of the consistency of NATO's claims to democracy, will show that defining its core identity as linked to democracy is problematic. Some would also argue that it is highly debatable to what extent the ambition to create an Atlantic community could ever be realized, given the anarchic nature of the international system. Others would echo Clive Rose, former British ambassador to NATO, referring to the Report of the Committee of Three: 'These are admirable guidelines. If they had been scrupulously followed by all members during the subsequent 26 years, the history of the Alliance would no doubt have looked different.'²⁷ However, the fact that a norm is not always respected does not mean that it is not considered legitimate. So the norm of consultation, codified in Article 4—'The parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties is threatened'—may be jointly accepted and acknowledged even if it has not been respected at all times and in all situations. But the point here is not to pinpoint behavioural inconsistencies, or to argue that institutions do not influence behaviour or that ideas do not matter in international politics. Rather, it is to question from a more principled perspective the conclusion that NATO's core identity is linked to

²⁶ The alliance's strategic concept agreed by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Rome, 8 Nov. 1991.

²⁷ Clive Rose, 'Political consultation in the alliance', *NATO Review* 31: 1, 1983, p. 2.

democracy, that NATO is an example of a Kantian ‘pacific federation’ and that it is on this basis that we should explain its continued existence as well as its current activities.

Such claims must be questioned because NATO is not an organization based on the rule of law. That the norm of consultation inside NATO is important is one thing. However, this norm, along with a decision-making process defined as non-hierarchical, based on ‘frequent consultation implying co-determination, and consensus-building’,²⁸ is linked not to procedures for adjudication by third parties but to the principle of sovereign equality among states. Although Kant’s idea of perpetual peace is based on the idea of a confederation of sovereign states—a confederation of democratic republics—and though Kant did not foresee a supranational power above the states that might command direct legitimacy, the Kantian notion of democratic peace nevertheless entails the idea of a confederation of states that are subject to a common law.²⁹ Thus Kant’s argument about perpetual peace does not sit easily with his theory of law, where it becomes clear that a peaceful order requires the settlement of disputes by an impartial and powerful third party. Setting aside the discussion of the extent to which the principle of external sovereignty and that of individual rights are reconcilable, the main point here must be that Kant’s idea of democratic peace entails an emphasis on legal commitment.³⁰ States must be willing to settle disputes with the help of a common legal framework rather than with the help of military force, and they must be willing to submit to arbitration according to law.³¹ It is not the case, as Talbott claimed, that NATO is a force for the rule of law among European states.

If NATO is not a legal community with a tribunal or a court to resolve disputes, it is even less likely that it has a democratic identity. In fact, one should probably ask if the principle of democracy is at all relevant for a conceptualization of NATO. Democracy is needed to control the law-making process and its application. It is important in order to check that adjudication follows proper procedures. Given the absence of such adjudication, or of a common legal structure above the nation-state, in NATO, we are faced with an intergovernmental organization, where indirect legitimacy suffices. It may well be that the principles of governance within NATO resemble some of the basic rules that regulate political processes within a constitutional state, such as ensuring equal political rights to all citizens, giving all votes equal weight, ensuring the possibility that each citizen may develop his or her own opinion. However, the crucial difference is that the citizen is replaced by the state. What is more, there is no cosmopolitan law above the states to ensure that the states

²⁸ Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among democracies*, p. 36.

²⁹ James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, eds, *Perpetual peace: essays on Kant’s cosmopolitan ideal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

³⁰ For a discussion of this point see Erik Oddvar Eriksen and Jarle Weigård, *Understanding Habermas: communicative action and deliberative democracy* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 260–61.

³¹ Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant: political writings*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 34–5; Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann, eds, *Perpetual peace*.

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respect their legal commitments. There is no direct legitimacy in NATO, and this renders the conception of NATO as a liberal democratic security community problematic. It gives an illusion of democratic legitimacy to an organization that has neither a democratic mandate nor a democratic structure of decision-making such as majority voting. Most importantly, it makes the argument that NATO's emphasis on the link between security and democracy is the result of NATO's democratic identity difficult to sustain. Encouraging democratic rule may simply be considered the most cost-effective security strategy in Europe after the end of the Cold War.

It could perhaps be argued that there are some efforts to approximate the model of a liberal democracy through institutions such as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. However, the Assembly has no formal powers and no influence on decisions made. It is at best a deliberative body. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the Assembly supports the idea of democratizing NATO, or sees itself as the forerunner of developments in this direction. So actors within the alliance do not seem to have a preference for democracy within the organization. If we look at the way in which the Assembly's tasks are defined, the closest one comes to such questions is in the long-term aim 'to provide greater transparency of NATO policies, and thereby a degree of collective accountability' and in one of the new objectives identified after 1989, of 'assisting in the development of parliamentary democracy throughout the Euro-Atlantic area by integrating parliamentarians from non-member nations into the Assembly's work'.³²

NATO is also clearly inconsistent over time in terms of the importance it attributes to democratic principles. Several of its members have at different times in history been non-democratic states. This raises the question of when NATO acquired its democratic identity. It is difficult to argue that it has been there from its inception, as one of its founding members, Portugal, was a ruthless dictatorship when NATO was established in 1949. Likewise, Turkey's membership raises serious questions with regard to a conceptualization of NATO as a community of democratic states. The same sceptical view holds with regard to enlargement. Although the first enlargement to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic was consistent with the idea of enlarging to secure democracy, given that these three states were considered to be among the most consolidated democracies in Central and Eastern Europe at the time, this can hardly be said of the second round of enlargement.³³ Among the new member

³² The objectives of the Assembly are defined as follows: to foster dialogue among parliamentarians on major security issues; to facilitate parliamentary awareness and understanding of key security issues and alliance policies; to provide NATO and its member governments with an indication of collective parliamentary opinion; to provide greater transparency of NATO policies, and thereby a degree of collective accountability; to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. After 1989 the objective of assisting in the development of parliamentary democracy throughout the Euro-Atlantic area by integrating parliamentarians from non-member nations into the Assembly's work has been added: see <http://www.nato-pa.int>.

³³ European Parliament, News Report, 19 Feb. 2004, 'Yellow card for Romania'; accessed at <http://www2.europarl.eu.int/omk/sipade2?PUBREF=-//EP//TEXT+PRESS+NR-2004>.

states, Romania in particular does not live up to the criteria underlined by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, that prospective members of NATO would have to show that they adhere 'to the principles of democracy, individual liberty and respect for human rights, the rule of law, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the inviolability of national boundaries'.³⁴ Thus it is hard to sustain the argument that 'democracy is a requirement for NATO membership'.³⁵ Furthermore, the claim that NATO member states' back-sliding from democratic principles 'would be a defection discouraged by precisely the institutional commitments and ties that NATO affords' is seriously weakened given that democracy is not a *sine qua non* condition for membership.³⁶

The early and the mid-1990s may have introduced a window of opportunity in terms of a potential transformation of NATO; and the current evasiveness regarding the democratic criteria stressed at that point should probably be understood in the light of the events of 11 September 2001. However, this only demonstrates the fragility of NATO's commitment to democratic principles and confirms that the fundamental goal of the organization remains that of security. The transformation of NATO in the 1990s was not so radical that its fundamental identity and purpose were transformed. When circumstances put the organization to the test, other considerations have priority, and the need for enlargement to 'serve the overall strategic and political interests of the Alliance' appears ultimately to be the most important.³⁷

However, given that cosmopolitan law is weakly developed, we should perhaps not expect too much of NATO. It might be that if we were able to observe a policy that has as its core aim the strengthening of such a common legal order, this would be enough to support the 'pacific federation' thesis.

It could perhaps be argued that agreements such as the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative launched in 1994, which includes in addition to the NATO members nearly 30 other states, most of which were part of the former Soviet bloc, and establishing the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) are examples of an expansion of a 'pacific federation' beyond the borders of NATO itself. These agreements provide an institutional basis for consultation and cooperation between countries that in the past were enemies. Hence, they contribute to transforming the very basis of relations between these states, away from a balance-of-power logic and towards a common commitment to resolve conflict through discussion and negotiation and without resorting to military means. The same could perhaps be said about the enlargement of NATO.

However, the kind of institutional arrangements provided in PfP and EAPC do not seem to be an expression of a general approach by NATO that seeks to

³⁴ Cited in Goldgeier, *Not whether but when*, p. 56.

³⁵ Zagorcheva, 'Correspondence', p. 229.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁷ With regard to the willingness of NATO to accept the potential cost of enlargement to Eastern Europe, this can probably be accounted for by the new member states' ability and readiness to provide niche capabilities.

maintain peace through the spread of the institutional and legal structure. There is little indication that they represent the beginning of a 'peaceable federation' among independent republican states that respects the basic rights of its citizens and establishes a public sphere in which people can regard themselves as free and equal citizens of the world.³⁸ This would have required, among other things, a different attitude on the part of NATO and the United States to the Chechen war from that which consists in defining it as part of the global 'problem of terrorism'.³⁹ Again, the structural limitations of NATO become evident. Finally, if the aim is to establish a pacific federation, NATO appears poorly equipped. Its capabilities are primarily military; its civilian resources are limited to diplomacy. Hence, while it may be capable of military interventions or other actions to ensure stability or the respect for international law, it must rely on others to handle the aftermath of such interventions and ensure a democratic transformation.

The inconsistencies regarding the domestic political orientation of NATO's new member and partner states reinforce the impression that although NATO may very well have contributed to stabilizing democratic regimes in many cases, and in particular to ensuring that the military in former authoritarian states in Central and Eastern Europe adjust to democratic rule and become subject to democratic control, democratic values do not constitute the *raison d'être* of NATO.⁴⁰ One might add that external actors do not seem to see NATO in this way either. 'Under conditions of democracy verbal statements raise expectations of consistency between claims and their correctness and between words and actions. In a democratic context double standards and cognitive dissonance will be problematic.'⁴¹ In the case of NATO, living by such double standards does not appear to have been a major problem, thus suggesting that the core identity of NATO is considered to be something else.

The limitations to the image of NATO as a pacific federation are, however, most visible in the nature of its institutional arrangements. There are no procedures for adjudication by third parties. These do not ensure an equal commitment of all parties to adhere to overarching laws. There are no procedures for adjudication by third parties. The possibility of opting out or seeking other partners—a better deal—is clearly available. Furthermore, there is no sanction in this system—or outside it—against such opting out. Thus, while it may well be that NATO has contributed to democracy in Eastern Europe, it is difficult to conclude that this policy evolves out of NATO's basic identity.

³⁸ Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann, eds, *Perpetual peace*, p. 3.

³⁹ Dimitri V. Trenin, 'The forgotten war: Chechnya and Russia's future', *Policy Brief* no. 28, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Nov. 2003.

⁴⁰ Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster, eds, *Democratic control of the military in post-communist Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

⁴¹ Eriksen and Weigård, *Understanding Habermas*, pp. 70–72.

The fragility of multilateralism

Given NATO's intergovernmental character, it can be seen at best as governed by the principles of multilateralism; at worst, it risks sliding into principles of governance more similar to bilateralism. Although these are very different organizing principles, what they have in common is the absence of a claim to democracy. Multilateral organizations do not have a democratic mandate from below, nor do they necessarily commit to an overarching cosmopolitan framework. Rather, they reflect a particular way of organizing relations between sovereign states; a particular form of institutionalized cooperation.

To suggest that NATO can potentially be a multilateral organization may seem like knocking on an open door. However, if we look more closely at what the principles of multilateralism entail, it should be clear that they are not necessarily that easy to adhere to. Following Ruggie, who argues that international organizations as such should not be confused with multilateralism, the mere existence of NATO as an international organization does not necessarily mean that it is a multilateral organization. In order for an organization to be multilateral, Ruggie argues, we must go beyond what he refers to as the 'nominal' definition of multilateralism provided by Robert Keohane, which is to say that multilateralism is 'the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states'.⁴² What is distinctive about multilateralism is its qualitative dimension: 'it coordinates national policies in groups of three or more states ... on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states' (my emphasis).⁴³ It is these principles of conduct, and not the particular interests of the states or the 'strategic exigencies' of a specific situation, that specify what is the appropriate conduct. In this way Ruggie rules out the possibility that the state with most resources at its disposal can on this basis alone legitimately expect to have the final word in any given situation within a multilateral setting.

Multilateralism can be contrasted to both bilateralism and imperialism, both of which also coordinate relations among three or more states. What distinguishes imperialism from the other two in Ruggie's definition is that the organizing principle of imperialism denies the principle of sovereignty. By the same token, a fourth core principle of multilateralism, the principle of sovereign equality, becomes visible. In fact, Ruggie shows that the earliest multilateral arrangements (although not multilateral *organizations*) were designed to cope with the international consequences of the principle of state sovereignty, such as the need to ensure the possession of territory and the exclusion of others from it. A core element of the solutions found was that the same rule would apply to all states irrespective of their size, domestic political regime or material resources.

⁴² Robert O. Keohane, 'Multilateralism: an agenda for research', *International Journal* 45, Autumn 1990, p. 731, quoted in John Gerard Ruggie, 'Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution', *International Organization* 46: 3, Summer 1992, pp. 561–98.

⁴³ Ruggie, 'Multilateralism', p. 567.

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What, then, would the principles of multilateralism, as well as those of imperialism or bilateralism, be when translated into the security sphere? And what is their relevance to the particular case of NATO? Three core properties help us identify and distinguish multilateralism from other forms of organizing principles: indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct and diffuse reciprocity. The principle of the indivisibility of security, or the indivisibility of threats, would be at the core of a multilateral security arrangement. Furthermore, the generalized principles of conduct would signify that the members of a collectivity would be expected not to discriminate between aggressions on a case-by-case basis but to respond in the same manner to the same categories of aggression. An attack on one member, in other words, would be treated no differently from an attack on another member. This in turn entails an acceptance of costs for individual states that might be far higher than the immediate gains, i.e. diffuse reciprocity. On this basis Ruggie concludes that NATO comes close to being a multilateral security arrangement. The 'ideal' multilateral security arrangement, according to Ruggie, would rely on the idea of collective security, not collective defence. He argues that NATO, although originally a collective defence scheme, was founded on the two multilateralist principles of the indivisibility of threats to the collectivity and the requirement of an unconditional response from the members (i.e. the notion of generalized principles).

Building on Ruggie's definitions, Steve Weber further nuances this image of NATO by underlining the distinction between the formal institutional set-up of NATO, which he classifies as 'distinctly nonmultilateral' and the way in which NATO provided security to its member states, which 'strongly reflected multilateral principles'.⁴⁴ Focusing on the founding years of NATO, Weber outlines the United States' efforts to embed the multilateral characteristics of NATO in spite of the institutional set-up of the alliance and the exceptional position of the United States given its nuclear capability. Protecting multilateralism in NATO meant most of all ensuring that the Europeans were given equal status to the United States within the alliance. The US political leadership at the time was, according to Weber, concerned that the United States should not have a privileged position within the alliance and should not be 'treating its trusted allies as junior members'.⁴⁵ Rather, the alliance should be based on a sense of shared purpose among peers.

There were alternatives to this course of action for the United States: for example, it could have made a series of bilateral deals based on the individual strategic, economic or political value of each European state. This would most likely have been a less costly choice for the United States, as it would have made the provision of security a stronger bargaining resource. The ability of

⁴⁴ Steve Weber, 'Shaping the postwar balance of power: multilateralism in NATO', *International Organization* 46: 3, Summer 1992, p. 633 and *Multilateralism in NATO: shaping the postwar balance of power, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ US President Eisenhower at a press conference 3 Feb. 1960, reported in *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1960, p. 1, quoted in Weber, 'Shaping the postwar balance of power', p. 654.

the hegemon to extract return payment from its smaller allies is reduced within a multilateral system; and, given the principle of indivisibility of security, sanctioning individual free riders becomes more difficult. What is more, according to Weber, in the aftermath of the Second World War several of the West European states would have been willing to accept such terms of alliance if that had been what was required in order to ensure a security guarantee from the United States.

However, the idea of multilateralism was important to Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower. In the light of today's developments in US policy (in particular the war in Iraq) and transatlantic relations, the reasons for this commitment to multilateralism are particularly interesting. Weber argues that the wartime and immediate postwar US presidents were committed to multilateralism for two reasons. First, they were concerned that a bipolar confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States would encourage ideological extremism on both sides. In the case of the United States this might lead not only to isolationism but also to an ambitious internationalism where the Americans would 'indulge in crusades to reshape the world in their own image'.⁴⁶ By safeguarding multiple powers in the international system, the risk of the superpowers being pushed in this direction would be reduced. Multilateralism in the transatlantic relationship was one way in which this would be ensured.

The second reason advanced by Weber for US political leaders' concern to preserve the principles of multilateralism had to do with domestic politics and a desire to protect democracy at home. Here the logic for someone like Kennan was that bipolarity would lead to spheres of interest where the superpowers would 'dictate their own visions of how to organise a society. For Kennan, attempts at forcibly imposing American political institutions abroad would eventually threaten the character of those institutions at home, since democracy rested precisely on a willingness to tolerate diversity.'⁴⁷

However, a multilateral arrangement is vulnerable. The vulnerability is linked to the absence of the possibility of sanctions within a multilateral system—the absence of the shared commitment of all the member states to be legally bound by the principles of multilateralism. The legal commitment that, as noted earlier, is a requirement for a pacific federation, is not present. Hence, there may be a general expectation inside NATO of consultation, equality and non-hierarchical decision-making processes; and when states break with these jointly accepted norms, they may provoke strong reactions from their fellow members.⁴⁸ However, the possibility of sanctioning the norm-breaker through legal means is not there. Thus, multilateralism within NATO, as elsewhere, is dependent on the benevolence of the member states and in particular the

⁴⁶ Weber, 'Shaping the postwar balance of power', p. 641.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 642.

⁴⁸ Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among democracies*; Helene Sjursen, *The United States, Western Europe and the Polish crisis: international relations in the second Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

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benevolence of the most powerful states within the organization. This was already evident in the early 1960s, when Eisenhower's plans to share the United States' nuclear secrets with the European allies, and thereby ensure equality between the United States and its European allies, were abandoned.⁴⁹

How, then, can we explain the persistence of NATO? And what might such explanations entail for future developments within NATO?

The future of NATO

One argument is that NATO's survival can be explained by the fact that the marginal costs of maintaining it outweigh the considerable costs of creating an entirely new set of norms, rules and procedures.⁵⁰ This would fit with the hypothesis that NATO's arrangements with the former Soviet bloc are aimed merely at ensuring a stable neighbourhood. In the current security context, establishing cooperative frameworks and encouraging democratic rule may simply be considered the most cost-effective security strategy, rather than the first step towards a pacific federation. According to such a perspective, NATO's future would depend among other things on the continued ability of the organization to ensure security functions at a lower cost than other organizations (or at a lower cost than member states could do on their own). Given the enlargement of the European Union, the gradual takeover by the EU of NATO's activities in the Balkans and the EU's new neighbourhood strategy within the wider Europe, it is at least possible that the utility calculations of the European states in this regard will change.

However, one might take the view that the persistence of NATO is linked to an idea of a transatlantic community based on a sense of common history. Such a community would create expectations of loyalty, a sense of solidarity and a mutual confidence that do not necessarily have much to do with what is 'right' from a moral point of view. Furthermore, the emergence of such a value-community may be linked to common security concerns without being reducible to them. The latter conception of NATO would fit, for example, with the large industry of policy recommendations that debate what should be done in order to resolve the numerous crises in the Atlantic alliance. In this literature the alliance is usually taken for granted as a 'common good' without this assumption necessarily being subjected to much critical scrutiny. Recommendations are made with regard to what kind of sacrifices or adjustments each party should make in order to safeguard this common good.

From this perspective the future of NATO depends not only on the costs of maintaining it but also on the extent to which the element of mutual confidence is maintained. A common value basis is not set once and for all; it must be not only carefully built but also continuously reproduced and rebuilt.

⁴⁹ For this see Weber, 'Shaping the postwar balance of power'.

⁵⁰ Celeste A. Wallander, 'Institutional assets and adaptability: NATO after the Cold War', *International Organization* 54: 4, 2002, p. 705–36.

Here it would seem that the United States' break with the principles of multilateralism challenges the value consensus. The increasing focus on so-called 'coalitions of the willing' and arguments supporting the idea that 'the mission defines the coalition' further suggest moves away from the multilateral principle of indivisibility of security within NATO. It also strengthens the emphasis on the possibility of opting in and opting out of the alliance framework, thus further undermining a potential reproduction of a sense of community.

It is more difficult to document the extent to which the United States' lack of interest in multilateral principles also means that the US security guarantee within NATO is now less indivisible and more closely linked to individual relations with individual states than during the Cold War, and hence more of a bargaining tool. Although such signals are clearly present, the question is whether this is a permanent trend.⁵¹ Such signals are consistent with the principles of bilateralism as defined by Ruggie. In short, the general reluctance of the current US administration to subject the United States to multilateral agreements also extends into NATO. The European states may, as Weber suggests, have been willing to accept such bilateral arrangements in the early days of the Cold War; but it is unlikely that they will do so today. This is demonstrated through processes such as that leading to the so-called 'Berlin Plus' arrangement, as well as the discussions surrounding its interpretation.⁵²

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article has been to problematize the links made between NATO and the Kantian idea of a pacific federation, as well as the definition of NATO's core identity as democratic. It has been suggested that although we may well be missing the point about NATO if we conceptualize it as just another military alliance, there are structural limitations to NATO as a democratic community. These are linked to NATO's fundamental goal, which ranks security above the principles of democratic governance. This instrumental goal of security is difficult to reconcile with the concept of democracy. What is considered 'necessary' from a security perspective is not, in NATO, made dependent on democratic procedures. Following from this, although NATO may have contributed to the process of democratization in Eastern Europe, we cannot on this basis conclude that NATO is a liberal-democratic value community. In order to draw this conclusion, we must look at the core features of the organization.

A distinction must be made between a community of values linked to particular experiences and a particular context, and a community based on

⁵¹ For example, in March 2003 the US ambassador to Oslo criticized Norwegian policy over Iraq in a speech and suggested that this might permanently damage Norwegian relations with the United States. *Aftenposten*, 'Uakseptabelt press?' and 'Bondevik og Petersen: Ambassadøren tar feil', at <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/utenriks/>, accessed 2 May 2004.

⁵² The 'Berlin Plus' arrangement provides for full EU access to the collective assets and capabilities of NATO for operations in which the alliance as a whole is not engaged militarily.

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democratic principles. Whereas NATO may be close to the first type of community, it does not fit with the definition of the latter. Furthermore, a distinction should be made not only between bilateral and multilateral principles, but also between multilateralism that has the principle of external sovereignty at its core and the idea of a pacific federation that requires states to be subject to a common law and to dispute settlement by a third party. This element of cosmopolitan law is absent in NATO.

If we want to explain or understand the persistence of NATO, the glue provided by a sense of common history or a sense of sharing a common destiny is probably important. Many of the European NATO members no doubt have a strong sense of indebtedness to the United States, arising from its role both in the Second World War and during the Cold War. This no doubt also contributes to strengthen their loyalty to NATO as an institution. In this sense, the member states of NATO may very well perceive themselves as joined together or sharing in a common ethos. However, this kind of tacit value consensus based on a sense of common history must be distinguished from the idea of a pacific federation, and should not lead us to conclude that the core identity of NATO is linked to democracy. Consequently, while NATO may have contributed to strengthening democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, we cannot explain its policies as growing out of such an identity.

If this 'value hypothesis' about NATO is correct, the continued survival of the organization does not depend only on the marginal costs of maintaining it continuing to outweigh those of creating a new organization, or of returning to a system where each nation-state relies exclusively on its own resources to provide security for itself. It will also depend on the extent to which it is possible to restore or (re-)establish a sense of mutual confidence. Current developments in transatlantic relations suggest that the effort continuously to reproduce and rebuild the common value basis is at a historical low. As Michael Cox has bluntly put it: 'The best measure of the Bush administration's indifference to European sensibilities was the raft of international agreements and treaties it either withdrew from or decided not to sign up to during its first few months in office. Taken individually, each move might not have had the impact it did: collectively, however, it sent the clearest possible message across the Atlantic that the skinheads of international politics seemed to have taken over the White House.'⁵³

⁵³ Michael Cox, 'Commentary: Martians and Venusians in the new world order', *International Affairs* 79: 3, May 2003, p. 527.