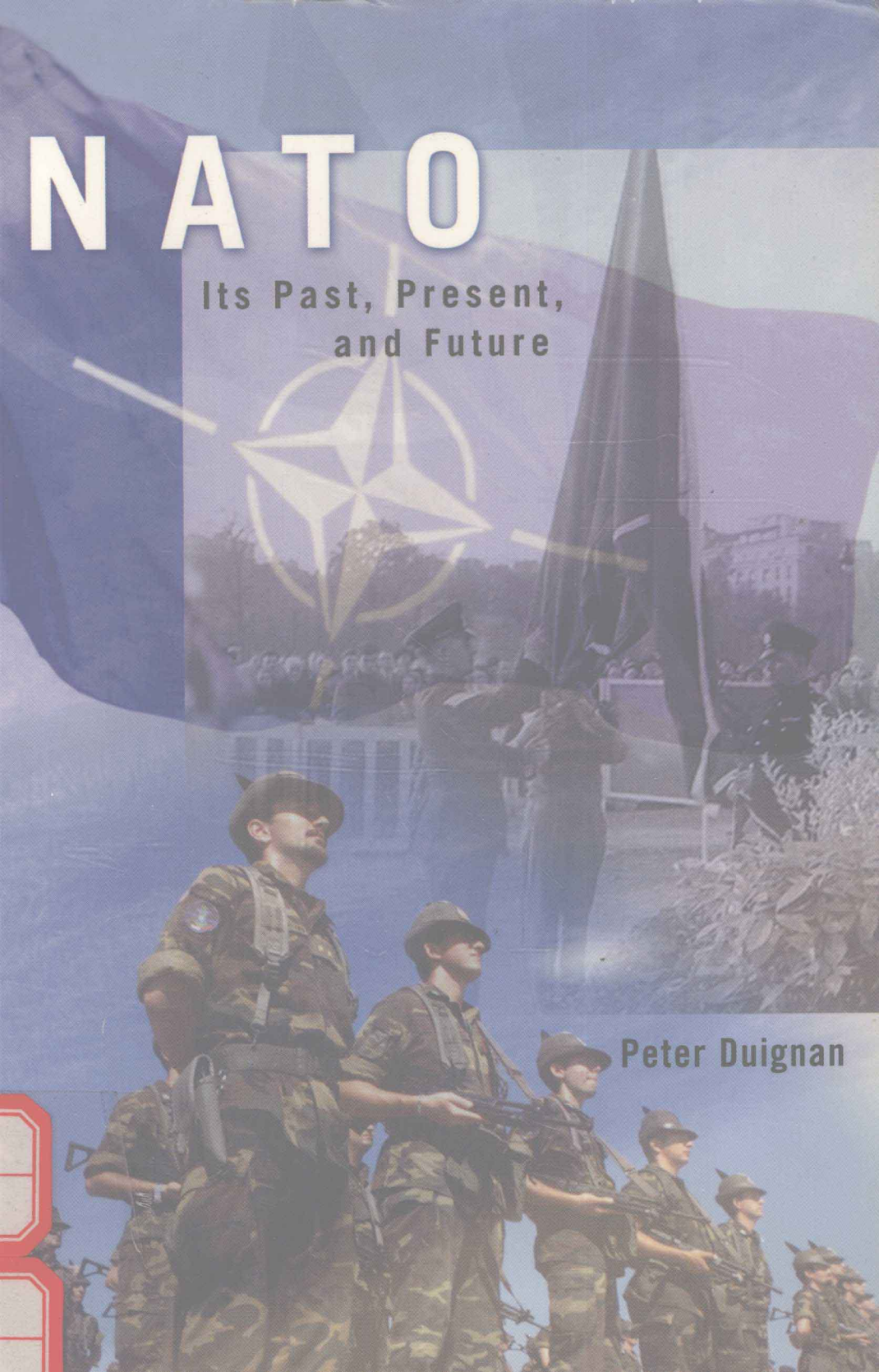
NATO

Its Past, Present, and Future



Peter Duignan

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to look at the fifty-year history of NATO (1949–1999), the most successful alliance system in the history of the world. NATO protected Western Europe from communism and brought the West together in the Atlantic Alliance—an alliance system that made war impossible between twelve nations that had gone to war with each other twice previously in the twentieth century. The NATO shield allowed Europe's economy to recover and grow and democracy to return to Germany and Italy. NATO had three purposes: to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in Europe. Although the Cold War is over, Russia still remains a potential threat to the region. The Europeans still need to be reassured by the continued involvement of the United States in controlling Germany and in extending protection to the new members of NATO, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and nations even further into Eastern Europe.

Born in 1949 as the Cold War began, NATO evolved from a war-fighting, defensive alliance that kept the peace in Europe until the war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s. NATO had become a force for peacekeeping and conciliation after the breakup of the Warsaw Pact (1989) and then was drawn into a war against Yugoslavia. So significant was the war in Kosovo that I decided to extend the coverage beyond 1999 and follow that crucial event in NATO's history into the year 2000. The air war over Serbia and Kosovo, and the occupation of Kosovo by NATO forces (KFOR), created a new NATO, perhaps one with a new interventionist strategy for the future. NATO had been a defensive alliance for Western

Europe during the Cold War and then a peacekeeper after 1990. But then, in a seventy-eight-day air war, it bombed Yugoslavia, a sovereign state, for mistreating its citizens in one of its provinces, Kosovo. The change in NATO's behavior will have vast consequences for the United States and its NATO allies.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been looking for a reason for its continued existence. The humanitarian intervention in Kosovo may become that raison d'être. Although international law said that external aggression should be resisted, no such right exists to intervene in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. The implications for the future are stark. What will NATO do against Russia, China, and India if internal conflicts develop in those nations?

The conduct of the Kosovo war also divided NATO, weakened U.S. control over the alliance, and stimulated the EU to develop an independent European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) with its own rapid reaction force and military-industrial complex. This could weaken the U.S. resolve to stay in NATO and to act as Europe's defensive shield. All this is in stark contrast with the first fifty years of NATO, when NATO was a successful military alliance dominated by the United States. This essay charts the years from 1949 to 1999, and beyond, to look into the future to see what NATO might become in the twenty-first century.

I want to thank my Hoover colleagues Thomas Henriksen and James Morrow for reading and commenting on the manuscript, as well as Harold Farmer who typed and checked facts, figures, and the organization of the manuscript. I alone, however, am responsible for the interpretation and any flaws and errors. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the support of John Raisian, director of the Hoover Institution, for encouraging me to do this book on NATO under the Hoover program on International Rivalries and Global Cooperation. Also I wish to express my gratitude to Pat Baker, executive editor of the Hoover Press, and the staff at the Hoover Press for their efforts in publishing this work on NATO's history and future.

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Part I

The Origins of NATO, 1949–1960

Harry S. Truman became the thirty-third president of the United States after the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945. Truman had had very little experience in foreign affairs, but was aided by Secretaries of State George C. Marshall and Dean Acheson, and other officials in the Department of State, such as George Kennan and Charles Bohlen. Truman's first major foreign-policy decision was to drop atomic bombs to end the Pacific War and to restrain the Soviet Union. It was, however, as a leader in the Cold War that Truman will be ranked high in history's pantheon of great leaders.

At war's end Truman had demobilized over twelve million persons in the armed services and, in effect, pulled out of Europe. Good relations with the Soviet Union proved impossible. When a weakened Britain decided in 1947 to withdraw from the Eastern Mediterranean, Greece was left alone to fight a Soviet-backed civil war, and Turkey was also threatened by the Soviet Union. President Truman, on March 12, 1947, then announced the Truman Doctrine (written by Truman and Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson) to give immediate economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey in a first effort to resist Soviet expansionism. The U.S. Congress responded to Truman's message by appropriating $400 million to save Greece and Turkey. Thus was born the policy of containment—but it was not limited to military aid in the eastern Mediterranean. Under the European Recovery Program (the Marshall Plan, 1947–51), Truman offered economic aid to help Europe rebuild and recover from

the ravages of World War II. In 1948 Congress buttressed the Marshall Plan by creating the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) to help create a common market in Western Europe, to assist in restoring the economies of Europe and thus enable them to better resist the Soviet Union and its allies.

The Birth of NATO

In Europe itself, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg formed the Western European Union (WEU), to prevent either Germany or the USSR from dominating Europe. Because of the Berlin Blockade (1948) and Communist aggression in Czechoslovakia and Korea, the United States and the WEU combined forces in a new alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949).

Early in 1950, President Truman set up a working group from the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Department of Defense to study national security policy. This group produced the landmark National Security Council (NSC) Memorandum 68, which called for a massive conventional military buildup and a global system of alliances—NATO, SEATO, and the United States–Japan Security Treaty. Yet Truman did little and called for yet another study. (It was only after North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, that NSC Memorandum 68 became operational to carry out Truman's policies of containment in Asia and to arm NATO.) After 1951, economic aid through the Marshall Plan was transformed into military aid to equip NATO and, in 1954, to rearm West Germany to be NATO's military shield against the Soviet Union.

Truman thus reversed the traditional isolationism of the United States, returning troops to Europe in NATO in 1950–51 under General Dwight Eisenhower, then rearming West Germany and thus

reconciling World War II enemies and friends. In 1951 Allied Command Europe became operational, with Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) located at Roquemcourt, near Paris. The United States, under Truman, helped rebuild the economies of Western Europe, and kept itself involved in European affairs, resulting in fifty years of peace, stability, and economic growth, the "golden years" of modern European history. NATO formed, and continued to form, the most successful peacetime venture in Western cooperation. The alliance lasted much longer than its architects had anticipated; it also developed into a more integrated political and military organization than its makers had planned.

Not that NATO lacked blemishes. It suffered from internal jealousies and disputes, but such deficiencies were at least partially balanced by the fact that the NATO partners freely cooperated in a common endeavor—unlike those of the Eastern Bloc consolidated through the formation of Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) set up on June 25, 1949, and the Warsaw Pact, concluded on May 14, 1955.

NATO, in fact, was a purely defensive alliance to protect Western Europe and was not able or willing to project its power anywhere else. (Initially, the Allies had planned to withdraw behind the Rhine; but once the West Germans were admitted in 1954, NATO switched to "forward defense" that would avoid surrendering the bulk of the Federal Republic to the invaders.) NATO was also defensive in a purely political sense. It lacked a propaganda or political warfare branch. NATO was not framed to exploit what Lenin would have called "internal contradictions." Of these there were many within the Soviet empire—the contradictions between the needs of rigid central planning and growing consumer demands, between the hegemonical power of the Soviet Union and the dependent Communist regimes, between the ethnic groups within the Soviet Union, between the regnant Marxist-Leninist philosophy and popular religious beliefs. NATO policymakers did not try to embarrass the

Soviet Union politically, say, by calling for the independence of the Baltic republics, former sovereign states and members of the League of Nations but now absorbed by the Soviet Union. NATO policymakers were content with "containment." Even "containment" came under fire, as George F. Kennan, the man who first coined the phrase, spent much of his subsequent career criticizing his brainchild as being too militaristic in its implementation, when he had called for the political containment of communism. From the political warfare perspective, Western policy remained reactive. The troubles experienced by the Soviet Union within its own sphere remained uncovenanted benefits, apples that dropped from a tree that NATO policymakers proved reluctant to shake. The formation of NATO nevertheless represented a turning point in the history, both of the United States and of the Atlantic powers as a whole. For the first time in peacetime, the United States had engaged in a permanent alliance linking itself to Western Europe in both a military and a political sense.

Opposition to NATO continued, from Communist states, old-style isolationists, pacifists, the pro-Communist left and, later on, from the new right. But NATO's foundations were well laid. President Truman, at a critical time, found himself well served by a team of loyal civilian advisers (Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy), men who had gone to expensive prep schools and to prestigious Eastern universities, who believed in public service, and who felt convinced that the United States had a duty to serve the world. Equally important was the new group of soldier statesmen and soldier viceroys—especially Generals MacArthur, Marshall, Lucius Clay (military governor in Germany 1947–49), and—on the British side, Sir Gerald Templer (first Director of Civil Affairs and Military Government in the British zone). Clay and Templer between them can rightly claim to be counted among the unacknowledged founding fathers of the German Federal Republic.

The success attained by U.S. policymakers went beyond merely personal factors—the statesmanship shown by Truman and his advisers, and the solidity evinced at the time by the so-called Eastern Establishment. Policymakers drew on a mood of profound national confidence at the time when a victorious United States dominated the world militarily, politically, and economically. On the European side, there was also widespread commitment, especially among veterans and college-educated youth, the very group most widely inclined to criticize NATO a generation later. To those who had experienced war and its aftermath, the creation of transnational institutions represented a challenge—especially to those tired of traditional chauvinist slogans.

A year after the North Atlantic Treaty was signed, the British held a conference in London in 1950 which laid out the basic policy objectives for Great Britain: the need to sustain Britain's position as a great power, albeit of the second rank; the higher direction of the Cold War; the necessity to develop and extend Atlantic rather than European institutions of cooperation between Western states; and the transformation of the "special relationship" into a more effective partnership with U.S. Cold War strategy.

The founding of NATO had had unintended consequences. The "special relationship" between Britain and the United States deteriorated. This relationship had depended on the success of the wartime alliance, on Churchill's personal prestige, on the skill displayed by British diplomacy in creating for a time the illusion of Britain's enduring great-power status after World War II. The "special relationship" was sustained also by ties of personal friendship. (For example, Socialist Bevin and General Marshall, an incongruous pair, got on extremely well together.) In a profounder sense, the "special relationship" was supported by a common cultural heritage that linked many British and U.S. diplomats, senior civil servants, and some Establishment politicians.

A good many Britons, for their part, had transatlantic family connections and felt at home in the United States. These ties did not disappear, but within the framework of NATO's high command, Britain counted for less than she had in World War II within SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces). By the beginning of the 1950s, there was an end to serious discussions concerning an English-speaking union that would comprise the United States, Britain, and the "white" British dominions. By contrast, NATO was a political boon to West Germany and Italy. For both of them, membership in NATO and other transnational bodies meant a new acceptance abroad, and a new political legitimacy. The United States gave up on France as the bulwark of NATO and chose West Germany as the key to NATO's defense and Western Europe's recovery.

The Shaky Balance

The Communists responded to this series of events with a welter of vigorous counteroffensives that blended military power, diplomacy, propaganda, and disinformation in the accustomed fashion. The Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb (announced August 29, 1949), thereby breaking the U.S. nuclear monopoly much more quickly than U.S. experts had anticipated. At the same time, the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) called for massive efforts from its associate parties to strive against Western rearmament, and to strengthen the Communist position in Western trade unions, youth organizations, women's leagues, and other bodies. The Communists' political effort in Western Europe, however, did not fare well. Communist strategists had assumed that a series of economic crises and strikes would make Western Europe increasingly vulnerable in a political sense. Instead, the Western economies expanded in a dramatic fashion so that the Western Communist parties in-

creasingly found themselves mere bystanders in a drama that failed to conform to the Marxist-Leninist script.

Above all, the Communists failed in their primary endeavor—to prevent West Germany's integration into NATO. West German rearmament at first proceeded slowly. The process began in May 1950 when Adenauer created the *Zentrale für Heimatdienst* as a secret think tank to study rearmament. In the next month, however, North Korean forces invaded South Korea. The United States suddenly found itself involved in a major war, and became an ardent advocate of German rearmament.*

Truman finally went for a global strategy in 1950 after reading a National Security Council Report (NSC Memorandum 68) about a Soviet atomic weapon explosion in August 1949. This, coupled with Mao's victory in China (1949), led to a new global strategy for the United States. The Soviets were seen to have become more than a political menace, for with atomic weapons they threatened to conquer the world by piecemeal aggression. The "domino theory" emerged, calling on the United States to resist all Communist adventures. When the North Koreans attacked in 1950, the United States rallied the United Nations to oppose this aggression. As noted previously, NATO's military wing was organized and armed in 1951–52 by the North Atlantic Council Organization, to make NATO a permanent organization, headquartered in Paris. General Eisenhower became the Supreme Commander in Europe. Stalin died on March 26, 1953; two days later the North Koreans agreed to the United Nations Repatriation Commission. In May 1954 the

*In May 1945 the U.S. Army in Western Europe numbered 3,500,000; by March 1946 only 400,000 troops remained, and even after the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the policy of containment were in place, troop strength in Europe was reduced even further until it numbered 81,000 in 1950, even after the formation of NATO in 1949—hardly the kind of force an aggressive, anti-Communist power would have deployed.

USSR made a bid to join NATO but was rejected by the United States and the United Kingdom.

Stalin's death, war weariness, and the threat of U.S. nuclear weapons had brought the Chinese and the Russians to Panmunjom. Some critics claim that the United States made a great mistake in using the UN to defend Korea because this harmed that body's role as a peacekeeping force. This writer would argue quite the contrary; it exposed Communist bloc expansionism, showed the resolve and effectiveness of resisting aggression by collective action, and thereby strengthened the hand of world peace through the UN, as opposed to peace through national alliances. A year later, in October 1954, the Federal German Republic formally joined the Western Union, and NATO, and in 1955 formally opened diplomatic relations with the USSR. To counter West Germany's addition to Western power, the Communists strengthened the regime in the Soviet zone by creating the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, an armed force composed of regulars (later the nucleus of the *Nationale Volksarmee*, the East German Army). The Soviets also tightened control over the captive "bourgeois" parties within their zone.

The Warsaw Pact profited by driving a neutral wedge between the northern and southern segments of NATO. There was a brief lull in the Cold War, soon broken by the Soviets' repression of the Hungarian uprising (1956), and by the Soviets' new use of "atomic diplomacy" against Britain and France during the Suez crisis. (In 1956 Britain and France cooperated with Israel in an attempt to seize the Suez Canal, a venture that failed when the United States sided with the Arabs and the Soviet Union against its Western allies.)

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles called for a "rollback" of Soviet power, but in fact he did nothing over Hungary; the United States lacked the resources to do anything effective. It was rather British power that was rolled back; the British retreat in 1956 in turn created new opportunities for the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Although Dulles had at first believed in accommodation with the