

NATO in the 1960s: Challenges beyond Deterrence

Veranstalter: Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich as a partner in the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP)

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On 26-28 August 2004, a conference on NATO in the 1960s was organized and hosted by the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich as a partner in the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP). Some twenty-five established NATO historians and younger academics discussed the alliance's „Challenges beyond Deterrence.“ Striking features of the conference were the focus on NATO's „soft power,“ the scope and limits of alliance consultation, and the variety of state, institutional, transnational and individual actors involved in NATO's evolution in a crucial decade.

Under the title „The Promise of Alliance,“ the question whether NATO was based on a community of values was hotly debated. Departing from a paper by Jeremi Suri (University of Wisconsin), concluding that NATO survived the critical period of the late 1960s and indeed gained cohesion in the early 1970s due to its underlying democratic consensus, participants elaborated on the premises of NATO and the question whether NATO really overcame deep-rooted skepticism about its suitability as the Atlantic security community in the late 1960s. In his paper on psychological warfare within NATO and through the private transnational network „Interdoc,“ Giles Scott-Smith (Roosevelt Study Center) traced attempts at Western psychological warfare in the 1960s. Driving force for NATO action in this field were above all West German efforts, while Britain opposed a psychological warfare agency within NATO, and the United States remained subdued. Because of its unwanted undemocratic implications, psychological

warfare was never made an official alliances task. For the ungratified West Germans, the establishment of „Interdoc“ therefore was a way of preventing isolation after the Berlin crisis. Looking at the lower-level day-to-day implementation of decisions taken at the 1957 NATO summit in the field of collective forces, air defense and research & development, Ine Megens (University of Groningen) concluded that the impetus of 1957 did not boost the coordination of defense within NATO. Her findings critically tested Suri's assumptions, since the assumed „soft power“ hardly affected the bureaucratic workings of the alliance.

A second panel in the same session looked at the NATO promises from small state, institutional, individual, and elite networks' perspectives. All three papers addressed the (sense of a) serious internal crisis in NATO. Thomas Gijswijt (Heidelberg University) discussed the Bilderberg Group's debates on ways to energize Atlantic partnership in the mid-1960s. Addressing the influence of this private informal network of high-level policy-makers on NATO decision-making for instance in the Multilateral Force (MLF) question, Gijswijt concluded that while they were no substitute to formalized official NATO meetings, the Bilderberg conventions including such influential political personalities as George Ball and Dirk Stikker formed part of the overall fabric of the Atlantic alliance. In her paper on the French stance in NATO as trigger and trajectory of NATO's concerns in 1963-66, Anna Locher (Center for Security Studies) emphasized the importance of a NATO crisis perception as manifested during NATO's routine meetings and among NATO and national officials departing early 1963. De Gaulle's double non press conference and the French-German Elysée Treaty of January 1963 provoked alliance-wide uncertainty about the fundamentals of NATO. This in turn produced methods of crisis management and ways for the alliance's adaptation much before de Gaulle's actual withdrawal from NATO's military command structure. Bruna Bagnato (University of Florence) examined Manlio Brosio's views on the alliance in what he judged a critical time. Her close reading of the NATO secretary general's unpublished diary in the years 1966-68 revealed not only deep-rooted concerns about

the French stance in NATO, but even more so about the „Anglo-American“ push for détente, which he considered a danger potentially more detrimental to NATO for discounting German interests. Therefore, Brosio firstly distanced himself from the Harmel exercise and adamantly opposed a Nonproliferation Treaty.

The second session was dedicated to NATO's relevance in East-West relations. Four papers discussed NATO consultations during the Berlin crisis from 1958 to 1963. Comparing the late Eisenhower years with the Kennedy presidency as well as the role of the secretary-generals Paul-Henri Spaak and Dirk Stikker, Christian Nuenlist (Center for Security Studies) concluded that NATO consultations, after improving in 1957-58, dramatically deteriorated due to Eisenhower's policy of bilateral détente with Khrushchev in the latter half of 1959. He argued that, contrary to conventional wisdom, political consultations within NATO were enhanced under Kennedy, in particular during the 'summer of détente' in 1963, when NATO was mandated to debate multilateral East-West agreements in the aftermath of the limited test ban treaty. Looking at the military aspects of the Berlin crisis, Bruno Thoss (Military History Research Institute of the Bundeswehr) came to a different assessment on how NATO was consulted by the three major Western powers with special responsibility towards the German question. Citing various incidents where the US administration, the US-UK-French three-power working group on ambassadorial level, the three-power LIVE OAK staff, or the US NATO supreme commander failed to inform NATO about decisions with serious potential consequences, he came to the conclusion that the three Western powers in general informed their twelve allies after a decision to win them over. Erin Mahan (Office of the Historian, US Department of State) discussed Franco-American differences about the most effective NATO strategy for countering the Soviet threat to Berlin in 1961. Using French sources, she explained de Gaulle's refusal to enter into negotiations with the Soviet Union on Berlin and Germany with his belief that Khrushchev was, as in 1958, just bluffing, and with his support of a status quo in Berlin.

With the war in Algeria, France's defense capabilities in Central Europe were so limited in 1961 that de Gaulle's rhetoric needed to compensate for French weakness. Mahan also demonstrated how afraid the Kennedy administration in the summer of 1961 was of an independent dialogue between Paris and Moscow, as a result of a meeting between Couve de Murville and Gromyko in Moscow on 5 July 1961. Ralph Dietl (University of Belfast) reflected on European political and security cooperation from 1956 to 1964 and focused on the close linkage of the process of European integration and NATO reform. During these years, the challenge to NATO structures was finally overcome by the formation of an East-West regime to stabilize bipolarity in 1963. Attempts to create Europe as a 'Third Force' led to fierce struggles about the future defense architecture of Europe and the West, with Europe trying to challenge bipolarity and to duplicating NATO defense structures. A European defense identity, Dietl concluded, failed to emerge in the early 1960s because of the mutually exclusive US and French concepts of Europe.

The third session was dedicated to NATO and disarmament, with the major themes Multilateral Force (MLF, 1960-1964), Nuclear Planning Group (NPG, 1966ff.), and Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT, 1968). Andrew Priest (University of Wales) looked into the long petering out of the idea of a MLF for the alliance as the most important condition for a „software“ solution. After the unofficial death of the project in December 1964, US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in May 1965 introduced the idea of a Select Committee of NATO defense ministers to discuss nuclear problems and share expertise in the nuclear field. Yet the phantom of the MLF enabled the NPG, the committee's successor, to take off only in late 1966, after new German Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger replaced Ludwig Erhard. David Tal (University of Tel Aviv) examined the „NATO factor“ in slowing down the NPT process - the reasons why it took until July 1968 to reach an agreement both Washington and Moscow favored. He argued that intra-bloc relations mattered in this bargaining process as much as did conflicting inter-bloc interests. Two problems hindered

an earlier conclusion of the treaty, Tal argued: the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Atom Agency Euratom, with the major stumbling blocs being the issues of inspection and safeguards. Oliver Bange (University of Mannheim) discussed the „triangulations“ between Bonn, Washington and Moscow necessary to reach the NPT. He argued that the nuclear ambitions of important circles within the ruling West German CDU/CSU amounted to the main element retarding the process. Things changed once the Social Democrats acceded to the coalition government in December 1966. New foreign minister and former Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, who championed a concept interweaving the nonproliferation treaty, Ostpolitik, and German reunification, decisively helped bringing about the NPT. However, the tacit fait accompli on the NPT reached between Washington and Moscow already in September 1966 had to await the important West German elections of September 1969.

The fourth session looked at „NATO and Détente in Domestic Perspectives“ and the impact of small powers on the conduct of the cold war. Vincent Dujardin (Université catholique de Louvain) analyzed the Belgian contribution to East-West détente in the 1960s, particularly by analyzing Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel's dialogue with Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki in 1966-68 and including Harmel's role in the preparation for NATO's famous Reykjavik Signal of June 1968, his reaction to the Soviet intervention in Prague in August 1968, and his strong support for the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1969 to 1973. Harmel was reluctant to consult with NATO in advance of his initiatives vis-à-vis Eastern Europe, as he felt that this would seriously slow down any progress towards an East-West rapprochement. In 1966-67, Harmel believed that bilateral talks were more efficient than bloc-to-bloc discussions. Interestingly, the latter were codified in the landmark 1967 NATO report defining the alliance's twin tasks as defense and détente, which became famous as „Harmel report“. Jonathan Agger (Danish Institute for International Affairs, Copenhagen) investigated whether Denmark's détente policy of 1966-67 was

caused by a genuine desire to reduce East-West tensions or by tactical, domestic reasons. At the request of the US, Denmark in May 1966 suggested that NATO should promote an East-West détente and proposed a conference on European security. Apart from the rationale to achieve a propaganda success vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact, counter de Gaulle's détente policy, and to contain a bilateral West German approach towards the Soviet Union, Agger argued that domestic factors were equally important for the Danish push for multilateral détente. To sustain Danish public support for NATO, it was indispensable that NATO demonstrated its readiness for détente. Mary Halloran (Foreign Affairs, Ottawa) examined the revaluation of Canada's defense policy after Pierre Elliott Trudeau took office in 1968, most remarkably Ottawa's intention to effectuate a reduction of the size of its forces in Europe. The government's decision was preceded by an in-depth debate involving different government branches, and amounted to a compromise between NATO defenders and critics. Instead of letting the alliance define Canada's defense policy priorities, Trudeau aimed at defining Canada's defense policies according to genuinely national foreign policy priorities. Canada's allies resented the lack of consultation leading to the decision, and partly came to doubt Ottawa's future commitment to NATO. Yet at the same time, they welcomed the fact that Canada would ensure its military presence in Europe, if at a lower level.

The last session debated domestic constraints on NATO. In his paper, Robin Gendron (Al Akhawayn University) investigated the link between the NATO policies of the Ottawa government and the rise of the separatist movement in Quebec in the first half of the 1960s. Given its interest in a smooth relationship with France and in preserved NATO unity, Ottawa yielded independent Canadian interests to Paris' interests in French-speaking Africa up to de Gaulle's 1966 withdrawal from NATO's integrated command. The Quebec nationalists used this asymmetry as substantiation for their claim that only an autonomous or independent Quebec was a true promoter of French Canadian interests. Leopoldo Nuti (University of Rome III) analyzed the

changing relationship Italy entertained with NATO in the 1960s. Rome placed high importance on NATO, despite substantial opposition to NATO. Bringing in the social democrats into the government did not help to weaken the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) - by the end of the decade, the Communists were stronger than in the early 1960s. Focusing on Italy's views on nuclear weapons and détente, the Vietnam War, and the Mediterranean as new cold war hot spot, Nuti drew a comprehensive picture of Italian foreign and defense policies. According to Rome, the NPT of 1968 was a betrayal confirming Italy's inferior status. As a result, Italy began to lose faith in US policy, an estrangement reinforced by different perceptions of the Vietnam War. When, in the mid-1960s, Rome's concerns over the increasing Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean rose, the alliance had transformed from an instrument for pursuing national interests into an empty shell. Holger Nehring (Oxford University) examined the impact of NATO on domestic politics. Tracing the discussion of NATO and NATO strategy in the protests against nuclear weapons in Britain, West Germany and France, he concluded that all three countries reacted distinctly to the basically same dilemmas ensuing the nuclearization of NATO strategy in the mid-1950s. While large-scale anti-nuclear-weapons protests were characteristic of Britain and West Germany, the French movement remained rather small-scale. Only minorities among the protesters sought exit from NATO; in their perception, after the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, NATO's problems paled besides the increasingly dominant Vietnam conflict. In France, the author argues, the protests were submerged within de Gaulle's government policies and did not gain a strong and independent weight. Oliver B. Hemmerle (Mannheim University) focused on Helmut Schmidt as military affairs writer in the 1960s, who „explained NATO to the (West) Germans.“ Within the SPD, Schmidt was second to none in his writings on defense and foreign policy. Schmidt's publications of the 1960s, less known than his books on NATO strategy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, paved the way for an understanding of the role of a democratic controlled Bundes-

wehr within NATO and enabled the West German public to critically debate defense policy. In conclusion, Hemmerle approached the issue why Schmidt, the great defense and security affairs communicator of the 1960s, failed to convince his SPD party-members on the stationing of the NATO Pershing II missiles in West Germany in the 1980s.

The conference benefited also from the presence and inputs of Lawrence Kaplan (Georgetown University, Washington), Michael Kieninger (Institute of Contemporary History, Berlin), Vojtech Mastny (National Security Archive, Washington), Erwin Schmidl (Austrian Defense Academy, Vienna), Gustav Schmidt (University of Bochum), Heide-Irene Schmidt (University of Bochum), Andreas Wenger, Daniele Ganser, Thomas Holderegger, and Daniel Möckli (Center for Security Studies), as well as NATO Archivist Paul Marsden. In a keynote speech entitled „Reflections on the United States and NATO in the 1960s,“ Lawrence Kaplan presented his thoughts on the perception and realities of US loss of power and status in the 1960s, sharing his insights on the US and NATO from Sputnik and the missile gap to protests against the US war in Vietnam in the late 1960s.

The transformation of NATO since the end of the Cold War provides new historical perspectives on the period of the alliance's 40-year confrontation with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. However, at present no publications offer a comprehensive history of NATO based on the systematic use of archival evidence. While the past decade of historical analysis has produced multi-archival research on NATO's history from 1949 to 1956 - in particular through the pioneering venture by Germany's Research Institute of Military History (MGFA) with its multi-volume *Entstehung und Probleme des Atlantischen Bündnisses bis 1956* -, the conveners believed it was necessary and rewarding to focus on NATO's transformation in the 1960s from a defensive military organization to a clearing-house for Western security policies, as adopted with the Harmel Report in 1967.

Previous scholarly studies on NATO in the 1960s have concentrated mostly on military issues including NATO strategy, nuclear sharing, and troop withdrawals. Based on re-

cently declassified archival sources, the Zurich conference reconstructed the many political dimensions of the Atlantic alliance in the stormy 1960s by bringing together the most innovative results of current historical NATO research. A book publication is envisaged.

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