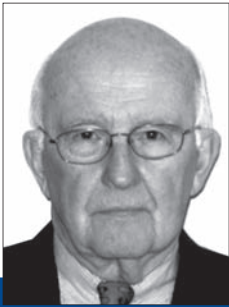


CANADA SHOULD PUSH FOR A RETRO NATO¹



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It was inevitable that NATO expansion eastward would at some point run into a hostile Russian reaction. The attack on South Ossetia by President Saakashvili on August 8, 2008, was the last straw and Russia finally showed its teeth by crushing the Georgian offensive in 48 hours. The Russians then added insult to injury by recognising the independence of South Ossetia and the other breakaway region, Abkhazia. Now we are facing the prospects of a new arms race and – if not the spectre of nuclear warfare – at least a serious set back to global peace and security.

The responsibility for this rests primarily with the US-led NATO powers. The problem stems, in part, from the ideological driven obsession by US political leaders for US global hegemony – an expansion of the Monroe Doctrine³ to apply to all regions of the world – and pressure from human rights advocates and idealists to scrap the principle of national sovereignty and replace it by new concepts: humanitarian intervention, the responsibility to protect and the export of democracy. This combination of selfish desire for domination and a crusading passion to meddle in the affairs of other countries has proven deadly. It has also turned the NATO treaty on its head and converted the Alliance into an aggressive military machine. This was not supposed to happen.

NATO origins and purpose

Although few Canadians may be aware of it, the idea of a North Atlantic treaty was first proposed in 1948 by the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louis St. Laurent. The Foreign Minister had represented Canada at the post war conferences leading up to the formation of the United Nations and he believed that the United Nations would be ineffective without a military capacity.

He therefore proposed that the European Defence Alliance of five European countries established by the Brussels Treaty of 1948 should be expanded to include Canada and the United States. A year later, in April, 1949, in Washington, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was born.

NATO was meant to be a purely defensive military alliance. Its primary purpose was to counteract any attack

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² This is an edited version of the article, which first appeared in "C2C-Canada's Journal of Ideas". – www.c2cjournal.ca/public/article/72

³ Monroe Doctrine, principle of American foreign policy enunciated in President James Monroe's message to Congress, Dec. 2, 1823. It initially called for an end to European intervention in the Americas, but it was later extended to justify US imperialism in the Western Hemisphere. – <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/>



by the Soviet Union against the democratic countries of the West. It also pledged to support and act in accordance with the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Article 1 of the Treaty made this abundantly clear. It read, “The parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved, by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered ... and to refrain from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”

For forty years the Alliance was successful in deterring the Soviet Union from any act of aggression against NATO members. A combination of conventional forces and the ever present nuclear threat was sufficient to create a mutual understanding that armed conflict between the two opposing powers was not an option.

NATO’s overriding principle was to abstain from threatening or using force to resolve international disputes. It was this principle, backed up by military might, that secured peace in Europe. During the Cold War years the Soviet Union had no reason to fear aggression from the West because the Soviets accepted the validity of NATO’s doctrine of defence. If conflict was to break out it would be as a result of Soviet attack against a NATO member – not the reverse.

During those “Cold War years” NATO represented more than just a military organisation. It had strong moral underpinnings and symbolised the determination of the free world to stand for and vigorously defend the ideals of liberty, democracy and the rule of law, but – to do so by following the rules laid down in the UN Charter.

These rules were drafted in the closing years of the first half of the 20th century. Those fifty years that had proven to be some of the bloodiest of all time. Aggressive warfare had been the cause of the horrific slaughter and destruction of two world wars and the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan. These cataclysmic events were fresh in the memory of those who created the United Nations and NATO. These were men who realised that some form of global institution to govern the peaceful relationship among states was essential. In a nuclear world what was at stake was civilisation itself.

NATO and the UN

We hear a good deal of criticism today about the weakness of the United Nations because it gives Russia and China the power of veto over proposed actions by the United States or Great Britain, but it is easy to forget how difficult it was to get agreement among the great powers about voting rights in the Security Council. The Dumbarton Oakes Conference of July – October, 1944 had ended without agreement on this critical issue. It was finally settled at Yalta in February 1944 when provision was made for giving each of the so-called “Great Powers” the right of veto. It was this arrangement that finally got the Russians to accept the structure and working methods of the Council. Thus the veto became an integral part of the UN structure and it still is.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union at first appeared to foretell the beginning of a new age. The “evil empire” had imploded and as we approached the beginning of the 21st century hopes were raised that a Pax Americana would bring with it, peace and security to the world. These hopes were reinforced when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and the UN Security Council agreed, without a veto from any of the major powers, to authorise military action forcing the Iraqis to withdraw.

NATO as an organisation did not become engaged in the First Gulf War because its treaty did not authorise it to operate outside of Europe and North America. Instead it was a coalition of 34 nations led by the United States that participated in defeating the Iraqi armed forces liberating Kuwait. The UN system for regulating the use of force in international disputes seemed to be working.

NATO in the Balkans

The break up of Yugoslavia and the armed conflict that broke out in Bosnia between the Bosnian Serbs and the Muslims and Croats provided a new role for NATO. In June, 1992, NATO foreign ministers meeting in Oslo agreed to support peacekeeping measures in Bosnia first under the authority of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation Europe (OSCE) and later that year under the aegis of the United Nations Security Council. These activities included enforcing the arms embargo on the warring participants, providing air support to the United Nations Protection Force and eventually carrying out air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions.

NATO’s role in Bosnia was not without controversy. Despite its role in enforcing the arms embargo it was an open secret that the United States was clandestinely supplying arms to both the Muslim and Croatian forces. Later it was disclosed that President Clinton authorised the movement of several thousand veteran Mujihadeen fighters into Bosnia. These actions were at cross purposes with the NATO mandate to enforce the arms embargo but were in conformity with US policy goals of supporting the Muslim side in the civil war. This would not be the first time the Americans were prepared to use NATO as a means of achieving US policy objectives.

The US-led NATO involvement in Bosnia had demonstrated that NATO was still needed in Europe. It also revealed with clarity that the European Community nations were not in a position to undertake large scale military operations. It was United States military power that provided NATO with the punch needed to do so. Bosnia had given new life to NATO and brought an end to previous talk of dismantling the Alliance.

The significant point underlying NATO operations in Bosnia which involved using force was that they were fully in compliance with the United Nations Charter and authorised by the Security Council. It was another encouraging example of how the United Nations in the post-Cold War period could operate to secure peace and order in global trouble spots. Unfortunately such optimism was short-lived.

Kosovo

Armed rebellion in the Serbian province of Kosovo by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in 1998 provided the United States with the opportunity of again demonstrating the importance of NATO in maintaining peace in Europe. This time it was allegedly to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population in Kosovo by the Serbian security forces of Slobodan Milosevic.

The United States realised, because of the Russian and Chinese veto, that the Security Council would not authorise the use of force in Kosovo. The Americans, therefore decided to ignore the UN and use NATO to intervene militarily. The refusal of President Milosevic to sign the Rambouillet Agreement⁴ was the trigger to begin air strikes against Serbia.

This was the first time that NATO operated without UN approval and in so doing not only violated its own Treaty but was in contravention of the Charter itself and of international law. It was a historical turning point and a serious blow to the framework of world peace and security. NATO was converted from a purely defensive body acting in accordance with the principles of the United Nations into an organisation that could use force to intervene whenever and wherever it deemed it necessary to do so.

NATO's new role was officially announced on its fiftieth birthday in Washington by President Bill Clinton. The announcement came as NATO warplanes continued their air strikes against Serbian targets. Curiously, the President's announcement caused little comment either from political leaders or from a generally sympathetic and compliant media. NATO's bombing campaign was justified because it was intervention for humanitarian reasons.

Almost ten years after the bombing of Serbia there is growing evidence that the KLA was armed, trained and equipped by US and British intelligence agencies with the purpose of creating instability in Kosovo and of provoking a situation that would provide an excuse for NATO's intervention. The accusations by NATO leaders about genocide have been proven to be completely false and to date only about 2,000 bodies including Serb and Albanian have been discovered. In addition, the Americans have admitted they deliberately set the bar high at Rambouillet to force Milosevic to reject its terms.

The bombing of Serbia had little to do with humanitarian issues or with events taking place on the ground. It had everything to do with NATO credibility and the desire of US leaders to change the very nature



of the Alliance. In this they were successful NATO. However, was not as successful in bringing peace and good government to Kosovo. The Alliance refused to implement or comply with any of the key features of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 that brought an end to the conflict.

The KLA were not disarmed and almost all of the non-Albanian population was expelled from Kosovo. Under the watchful eyes of NATO troops over 120 Christian churches and monasteries were destroyed. As required by 1244 Resolution, Serbian security forces were not allowed back to Kosovo to guard religious institutions and to patrol the borders. Finally, under the terms of 1244 Resolution, Serbia's sovereignty was reaffirmed but this provision was also breached when, in February 2008, the US and most of the NATO countries including Canada, recognised Kosovo independence. In doing so they violated Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Accords.

Broken promises and expansion

NATO's performance in the Balkans has been marked by duplicity, double standards and hypocrisy. Looking back, its overall performance since the collapse of the Soviet Union has left much to be desired.

In November, 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall immediately raised the question of the unification of the two Germanys. The Russians, as to be expected, were opposed but the United States and its NATO allies wanted a united Germany with membership in NATO. In February, 1990, at an "Open Skies" conference in Ottawa, the NATO foreign ministers met with their counterparts from the Warsaw Pact countries and decided that the leaders of Britain, France, The United States and Russia should meet with the leaders of the two Germanys and settle the issue.

The result was the signing of the so called "Two Plus Four Treaty" in September, 1990, that among other things

⁴ It is now generally understood that fearing Milosevic might sign it the Americans attached at the last moment an appendix "B" which provided for among other things access to all of Yugoslavia by NATO troops and a referendum on independence for Kosovo within three years. This appendix was designed to ensure that Milosevic would not sign the agreement and hence the bombing could begin.



authorised the reunification of Germany and membership in NATO. There remains controversy about the promise that was made to President Gorbachev by President George Bush senior that in return for obtaining Russia's consent to the Treaty there would be no expansion of NATO eastward. Gorbachev and others at the conference swear the promise was made not only by President Bush but also to the Russian Foreign Minister by US Secretary of State, James Baker. In any event, the Russians believe it was made and have deeply resented that the promise has been broken.

In March, 1999, despite Russia's misgivings, the first three former Warsaw Pact countries became NATO members: Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Since then the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia have all been given membership. In effect, NATO has encircled Russia with former members of the USSR and is seriously considering adding Ukraine and Georgia to this list. Should it come as a surprise that Russians interpret this expansion as a hostile threat to Russian security?

The decisions by NATO to abandon its adherence to the UN Charter by using force to resolve international disputes and to operate "out of area" have not served to reassure Russia of the Alliance's peaceful intentions. The United States decision in June, 2003, to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Treaty and more recently to establish antiballistic missile shield systems in Poland and the Czech Republic have confirmed Russia's belief that the United States continues to see it as the primary obstacle to the US desire for global hegemony.

CONCLUSION

Russia's show of strength in repulsing the Georgian attack against South Ossetia has introduced a new dimension to NATO-Russian relations. At a time when Russia was staggering from the shock of the Soviet Union's collapse it was in no position to counteract the expansionist ambitions of a US-led NATO. In the 1990s and early 2000s Russia had no choice but to accept a number of humiliating provocations from the Western powers. That has now changed and a resurgent Russia is back in business. How the United States and the other NATO countries react to this new reality will have a critical impact on world peace and security.

The initial reaction by the US and by other NATO countries has been disappointing. There have been

stridently hypocritical protests about the violation of Georgian territorial integrity. In this, the western mainline media have been equally vociferous and seem to have forgotten entirely the violation of Serbia's sovereignty a few months previously. Despite Russian concerns, NATO spokesmen have announced that plans are going ahead to admit Ukraine and Georgia to the Alliance. President George Bush Jr. has rushed to provide Georgia one billion dollars to rebuild its military. These are not helpful developments.

One can only hope that the bombastic protestations are not serious and that cooler heads within the Alliance will prevail. Can the leaders of NATO really believe it worth satisfying the political ambitions of a Mikhail Saakashvili to run the risk of a military conflict with Russia or worth causing a civil war in Ukraine?

The Georgian-South Ossetia conflict has served a useful purpose and it has come at an opportune time. It has shown NATO that further expansion of the Alliance may do more harm than good and it has happened on the eve of the collapse of the financial structure of the United States. Furthermore, the recovery of Russia and the rise of China and India as world powers have brought an end to the unipolar world dominated by American military prowess.

These new realities call for a reassessment of NATO's role in the world. I would suggest two possible approaches. *First*, if NATO is sincerely dedicated to peace and security as their leaders continue to profess, then it should invite Russia to join the Alliance. It was former Soviet President Gorbachev who in 1989 first proposed the creation of a common "European House," with Russia as part of it. His proposal worried the Americans at the time and may have been premature, but today NATO with Russian membership would be a more powerful Alliance in forwarding and securing peace in the world.

Russian membership would finally end the Cold War and be a powerful move towards establishing global peace and security – not to mention bringing Russia into the orbit of the West. The question is whether Russia would accept the invitation – but if it did not then we (the West) would know where we stand. I believe it unlikely that Germany or France will accept Ukraine into the NATO alliance despite US pressure. With the election of Obama who knows what might happen? A rapprochement between the USA and Russia is overdue, given the emerging threat from radical Islam and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The argument that Russian democracy has not evolved satisfactorily to meet NATO standards does not hold, when borderline democracies like Ukraine and Georgia are being touted for NATO membership. Furthermore, NATO's primary role is to preserve international peace, security and stability. The admission of Russia would strongly reinforce the Alliance's capacity to accomplish these goals.

The second suggestion and linked to the first above, would be to return NATO to its original role as a purely defensive organisation and to reaffirm the validity of the first Article of its Treaty – that is – never to threaten or use force to resolve international disputes and always to operate in accordance with the principles outlined in the United Nations Charter. In other words we need a "retro" NATO. ■