

NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the European Non-aligned, 1949-75:

Threat Assessments, Doctrines and War Plans

Organized by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo, as partner in the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact

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Keynote Speaker: Lt Gen (US Army, ret.) William Odom

On June 12-16, the PHP convened its first major international conference: "**NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the European Non-aligned, 1949-75: Threat Assessments, Doctrines and War Plans.**" Organized by the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies as partner in the [Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact](#) (PHP), the conference met at Longyearbyen, Spitsbergen (Svalbard). 41 persons participated at the organizers' invitation.

26 papers had been prepared in advance of the conference in draft form, commented upon by the organizers, revised, and distributed to all participants by e-mail prior to the opening of the conference. During the two-day sessions, the authors of the papers made 10-minute presentations, followed by discussion. For the program of the conference, [click here](#).

Assistant Governor of Svalbard Unni Lineikro spoke on the contemporary issues of the archipelago, Sven Holtsmark of the [Norwegian Institute of Defence Studies](#) on Svalbard history. Lt. Gen. William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency, delivered the keynote speech.

The concept of the conference called for addressing the old issues of threat perceptions, military doctrines, and war plans during the Cold War from a new perspective, informed by the availability of previously inaccessible archival material and the post-Cold War perspective, including not only the two alliances but also Europe's neutrals and nonaligned.

The archives from which new material was presented in the conference papers included those of NATO, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Finland, and

Sweden. Many of these materials became available through the efforts of the PHP and of the project on the security policy situation of Denmark during the Cold War, conducted by the [Danish Institute for International Affairs](#), a PHP associate.

The most obvious gaps included the absence of new documents from Russian military archives from the Cold War period, which remain effectively closed for research, as well as from France and NATO's "southern tier." The conference was organized on the assumption that the lack of Soviet military records could be effectively substituted for with the generally available documents from other countries of the former Warsaw Pact. The assumption proved correct to a large extent though not entirely; there is no substitute, for example, for the records of the Soviet General Staff, where war plans were drawn and usually not shared with the Warsaw Pact allies. The discussion at the conference, however, showed that Soviet plans and intentions can be gleaned to a significant degree from the voluminous records of exercises, especially command post exercises, that are readily available in Eastern European archives.

The discussion showed that differences rather than similarities between NATO and the Warsaw Pact defined each of the Cold War alliances. There were fundamental differences in threat perceptions, doctrines, plans and, not the least, the roles of the "minor" allies.

As a result of the conference, we now know much more about how and why the perceptions of threats differed from the realities. This was particularly true in the early stages of the Cold War, when military threats were often exaggerated or misread—more by NATO than by its Soviet adversary. The Soviet perceptions of the NATO threat were generally more accurate than vice versa, namely, in the perceived threat consisting in the nature of the Western political and social system rather than in the military capabilities or intentions of the Western governments.

Compared with a similar conference that would have been held during the Cold War, nuclear weapons did not figure most prominently in the Longyearbyen discussions. Several papers, as well as Gen. Odom's recollections from his experience at the National Security Council during the Carter administration, gave a sense of the futility of the discussions about the role of nuclear weapons that used to be so much part of the Cold War scene. Viewed in retrospect, it is difficult to imagine any political circumstances that would make their use justifiable, not to mention beneficial.

By comparison, the relations within the alliances loom larger in retrospect than they did at the time. They have become more interesting for historians as the recent crisis in US-European relations developed. Rather than NATO's military functions, which happily were not put to test during the Cold War, the new patterns of cooperation forged within the alliance during that period appear as its most lasting and timely legacy.

Two papers on out-of-area topics addressed NATO's significance within a wider geographical setting, extending beyond Europe and North America. The repercussions of the Cold War in the Third World, studied more extensively by Americans than by

European historians, showed the limitations of the superpowers better than did their competition in Europe. Two forthcoming [conferences](#) co-sponsored by the PHP will be concerned with non-European aspects of the Cold War.

The importance of the neutrals and nonaligned in shaping the course of the Cold War also appears greater in retrospect than it did at the time. The CSCE provides the best framework for the study of multilateralism-not only because the widely recognized significance of the human rights issues but also because the role the CSCE played in broadening and redefining the substance of security by including in it the new nonmilitary dimensions that became prominent after the end of the Cold War. As the number of international problems that do not lend themselves easily to military solutions is likely to grow, so will that of the multilateral perspective originating in the Cold War's final years.

Selected papers from the conference will be published as a book, others on the PHP website.

Vojtech Mastny, July 2003