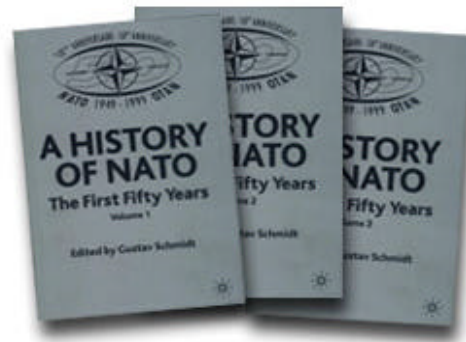


Book review

Improbable survivor

Nicholas Sherwen reviews Gustav Schmidt's edited three-volume magnum opus "A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years".

A fine compilation of articles, transcripts of oral presentations, conference papers and extracts from larger studies, beautifully packaged and presented, *A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years* (Palgrave, New York, 2001) contains riches that any student of the politics of international security will be delighted to get his or her hands on. It is a fascinating collection, and, for anybody wanting to begin to understand what it is about the first fifty years of NATO that has made such an indelible stamp on world affairs, what implications this has and what responsibilities it carries for the future, all three volumes are a source of stimulation. But they are not a history of NATO.



In his advice to contributors at the 1999 conference to launch this project, the compiling editor, Gustav Schmidt, evokes a theme that can serve the reader well as a navigational aid. Citing Sean Kay's work on *NATO and the Future of European Security*, he attributes the longevity of the Alliance to two facts. The first is awareness on the part of Western leaders that: "The removal of NATO from the region would expose the weakness of other institutions." The second is NATO's proven ability to change with the times and to survive internal strains and external threats, emerging with "a sort of institutional wisdom which helps to master forthcoming problems".

What is it about NATO that has enabled it to adapt — so far — without fundamental damage to the principles that hold it together? Many authors offer pointers. Perhaps it is the simplicity of the Washington Treaty itself and the creation of a single institution — the North Atlantic Council — with the authority to build the mechanisms needed to fulfill its task. Or is it the removal of any hierarchy in the levels at which the Council meets and therefore any room for doubt about the validity of its decisions and the degree of national commitment they represent? Is it the successful marriage between short and longer-term interests of member countries that has discouraged any of them from seeking divorce? Or is it the sub-conscious recollection that, whatever current frustrations and difficulties may be experienced, the Alliance's very existence has banished the prospect of generalised conflict among members, only a few decades after several were engaged in mortal combat? Or finally, is it pragmatism of the "not broke, don't mend it" variety? NATO works — don't meddle with it.

Whatever it may be, the reader does well to have such considerations in mind when trying to unravel the multiple layers of the Alliance tapestry. There are more than 60 contributors to these volumes, their offerings ranging from academic doodling to trenchant analysis of issues with roots in earlier periods but continued relevance to today's agenda. Whether we are discussing the influence of military spending on economic performance in the 1950s or tracing the course of the transatlantic burden-sharing debate, there are useful pointers to developments that have had lasting effect on the way the security business is managed today.

Alan S. Millard tells us early in the first volume that: "There was no battle plan for winning the Cold War other than guaranteeing the allegiance of populations to the capitalist state." However, he draws attention to a fundamental change attributable to the Alliance with regard to military economic planning. From 1949, it was no longer a case of raising war chests for foreign military

campaigns or for territorial defence in the knowledge that the fund-raising would end with the action. Alliance members would henceforth need to raise public revenue for defence budgets "with no definite time horizon by which they would be cut".

Jack L. Granatstein examines NATO's relationship with the United Nations, exploring the unrealistic early hopes placed on the United Nations to deliver collective security; the years of vetoes in the Security Council; and the transition of the 1990s. The extent of the early hope placed in the United Nations should not be underestimated. Lester B. Pearson, whose name as an Alliance statesman adorns the door of one of NATO's conference rooms, initially saw NATO as a second-best solution, only needed if the United Nations failed to shape up. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the die had been cast. Stalin's miscalculation convinced Western leaders that they had to look beyond the United Nations and build a strong, militarised NATO to meet the Soviet threat.

With the evolution of the United Nations as a point of reference for conflict resolution but not necessarily a catalyst for action, NATO itself underwent a parallel but almost imperceptible transition from a body that could consult about "out-of-area" threats to one that could act upon them. The process is central to understanding NATO's role today, but is passed over superficially. Nevertheless, the reader is left in no doubt that it was the experience of operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the United Nations that convinced Alliance members of the need for a different approach.

Today, Hall Gardner points out, NATO legitimacy depends on UN principles, not UN procedures. It is significant how far the debate about reinforcing the United Nations actually went and which individuals — UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie, Albert Einstein and Senator Robert A. Taft among others — were initially opposed to NATO's creation. Some wanted language in the Washington Treaty explicitly listing the articles of the UN Charter that would govern NATO's actions. They lost out to those who saw the dangers and insisted on near maximum freedom of manoeuvre for the Alliance.

Having grappled with the way in which the Treaty was set up and how things might have turned out differently, the reader is obliged to shift focus early in the first volume to juggle with more recent developments. Mats Berdal's chapter is one of several devoted entirely to the 1990s, but offering some basic truths that can legitimately be regarded as part of the historical legacy. Intra-Alliance disagreements, for example, are no longer automatically attenuated by the unifying influence of a common external threat.

In subsequent chapters, history is more or less abandoned in order to investigate such matters as the role of "cultural interoperability" in determining NATO's effectiveness in the Balkans, and the implications of differences between NATO and UN chains of command.

Douglas T. Stuart gives an enjoyable retrospective on George Kennan's proposal for a three-tier membership. This was designed to bring a global dimension to NATO, described by Robert Lovett as "resident members, non-resident members and summer visitors". How, one wonders, would he have described today's members, aspirants, Partnership for Peace participants and special or distinctive partners? Kennan's idea was soon abandoned and every time the enlargement debate has surfaced, the notion of different classes of membership has been effectively squashed. The notion of a global dimension, however, continues to lurk under the surface.

Stuart's analysis of 31 tests of NATO solidarity in relation to out-of-area disputes also turns up much interesting material. These are listed in five categories: distaste for out-of-area policies of another Ally; intrusions into a *domaine réservé* of another Ally; exploitation of the Alliance for independent, out-of-area initiatives; disagreements over burden-sharing resulting from out-of-area activities; and differences in defining threats. This is highly recommended reading. Not least, it shows at least one historical event in its correct context. The Gulf War is depicted as the last out-

of-area issue of the era, not the first test of NATO's post-Cold War missions.

In examining why out-of-area disputes did not fatally damage the Alliance, even if they caused divisions among groups of Allies, several authors point out that most contentious issues — Korea, Indochina and so forth — were not played out on the NATO stage. Holding consultations on out-of-area issues without contemplating action that might jeopardise cohesion on tasks closer to home provided a safety valve. Frode Liland illustrates this with a well-argued piece shedding light on the factors at play in the 1986/87 Gulf crisis. These included consultations without commitments, pragmatic solutions to find a non-NATO framework (the Western European Union) for cooperation among Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom; and arrangements to enable others (Denmark, Germany and Norway) to pick up slack created in NATO. The upshot: no dilution of NATO effectiveness in-area and no serious drain on NATO resources.

In a more authentically historical piece, Lawrence Kaplan leads us through NATO enlargement. He identifies six phases, two of which took place before the signing of the Washington Treaty. First, the addition of Canada added credibility to the notion of a truly Atlantic Alliance, as opposed to one designed to facilitate US involvement in European affairs. Second, five nations absent from the 1948 negotiations — Denmark (including Greenland), Iceland, Italy, Norway and Portugal (including the Azores) — joined the process. In each case, geo-strategic reasons had much to do with this. Germany, Greece and Turkey had been countries-in-waiting from the outset and it was just a question of time before circumstances enabled them to join. Spain would have joined earlier but for Allied hostility to Francisco Franco. Kaplan's essay also looks in well-informed detail at the post-Cold War enlargement process and suggests that its future pattern will follow precedent — full integration of aspirants into the fabric of Europe being as important a contribution to the Alliance's objectives as their contribution of military assets.

A further five chapters take up the enlargement theme. Karl-Heinz Kamp was writing at a time when the indicators suggested that further enlargement decisions would be postponed and recalls the role played by the cost factor, as opposed to political or strategic considerations, in the ratification debates in the US Congress. Kay sees enlargement as a winner's game for the United States, for European Allies, for new members themselves, and also for Russia, but perhaps not for an over-stretched NATO. A Europe decoupled from the United States and a NATO unable to cope with too much too soon, and with reduced military credibility, is a spectre which concerns more than one author.

The editor reveals by omission that he does not consider the influence exercised by the Alliance's secretaries general as significant. He is wrong, but can be forgiven, for it is much harder to analyse the exercise of influence than to investigate the exercise of power, and power has always remained in the hands of the nations. Nevertheless, there are clues to the true nature of the Alliance to be found in studying its leadership that cannot be found elsewhere, so it is a pity that not one chapter looks at this aspect.

Clarity and sharpness are early victims in the second volume, where some offerings recall lecture notes that have been accidentally dropped minutes before delivery. But with Robert P. Grant we get closer to the heart of what constitutes the barometer of the US commitment to NATO. His chapter is well argued, cruelly uncompromising and worth studying for its restatement of the options concerning a parallel weakening of transatlantic security ties and of European security cooperation, or a strengthening of both.

Frédéric Bozo recognises the difficulty of establishing a meaningful separation between collective security, UN-style, and collective defence, NATO -style — but tries. This is another contribution that neither draws on what proceeds it, nor sets the scene for what follows. It is, nevertheless, a well-written and valid analysis. Looking back at the influence of the 1967 Harmel Report, the author does well to remind us that the search for an appropriate balance between NATO's functions remains key.

The second volume includes a rather tortured look at the interplay between French/German, German/US and French/US attitudes, aspirations and policies. The centrality of the German issue to the Alliance from its earliest days features strongly, but the contributions lack coherence. Vojtech Mastny's investigation of Eastern European efforts, under impossible constraints, to loosen the Soviet grip on the Warsaw Pact is, by contrast, fascinating. It is followed by a doctrinal discussion (Michael McGwire) of shifts in Soviet military thinking and a more pertinent historical look (John G. McGinn) at the impact of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Flagging Western enthusiasm for NATO was more than once indebted to Soviet actions during the course of four decades.

John English and Charles G. Cogan walk us through some North American perspectives on NATO's origins and meaning, often using the views of contemporary personalities on the international stage — Harold S. Truman, Pearson and others — to convey a sense of the times. They lead us back to the origins of the Cold War. Cogan finds the US influence on Western Europe less coercive but no less pervasive than that of the Soviet Union on Eastern Europe. However, once it had become clear that Stalin only had one agenda, and regarded the 1945 peace as a temporary lull before the inevitable conflict, they demonstrate there was never really any alternative to NATO.

The third volume begins with defence industrial relations. The risks from the lack of a "cooperative portfolio of activities" in this sphere and European/US competition in markets across the globe are spelled out — again — as are its political and practical consequences. NATO's 1999 Defence Capabilities Initiative is shown to be one in a long line of attempts to address these problems. Will a new Prague capabilities initiative come closer to solving them? Trevor Taylor's chapter, exploring different episodes in the saga of transatlantic armaments cooperation, makes painful reading. Jacqueline MacGlade looks at the 1950s and identifies the same problem — lack of reliable mechanisms to harness national interests. Both the problem and the diagnosis, it seems, remain largely unchanged.

Examining whether defence industrial conflict automatically translates into corrosion of Atlantic solidarity, David G. Haglund concludes on a more optimistic note — the resulting friction is a minor inconvenience rather than a serious strategic risk. He, nevertheless, believes that the realignment of NATO's defence industrial base remains "the major unfinished task". Some authors conclude that there is little governments can or would be willing to do. If there is a solution, it will come from the private sector. Other authors attribute the limited success of the DCI to its perception as a strike against Europe's embryonic defence industry — a perception that will have to be altered if the DCI successor is to have a chance. There is also the suggestion that European competition in this sector merely makes it easier for the United States to walk away with the contracts.

Joachim Rohde's *sine qua non* for success is a harmonised or even joint European arms export policy, achieved through a series of practical steps initiated at the government or at the private industrial level. But there are reminders throughout this discussion that any adjustments governments are willing to make in their attitude to their defence industries inevitably have a knock-on effect on security, defence, foreign affairs, foreign trade, technical, industrial and economic policies. So that, it would seem, would kill off that possibility. Keith Hayward is equally gloomy, ending a detailed look at globalisation convinced that unless governments play a more robust role in directing matters, the European industrial pillar will wither on the vine.

Discussion of nuclear policy reveals more about the process than the results. Despite the leading role of the United States as provider and facilitator of NATO's ultimate resort, the US view has had to be modified on many occasions to take account of the interests of its Allies. Sean M. Maloney adds a Canadian perspective but reinforces the impression that the United States has not had it all its own way. What is clear is that at least up to the end of the 1960s, nuclear matters dominated and were central to practically every larger intra-NATO debate.

Nor is the issue of non-proliferation new. The principle was enshrined in US policy even in 1945 and applied at least in theory to France and the United Kingdom. Maurice Vaisse contributes a balanced chapter on the divisiveness generated by this issue in the period from 1957 to 1963 that is well worth reading. The tension between traditional collective defence and collective security "of a holistic, humanitarian, post-national kind" is well identified.

Klaus Wittman provides an authoritative account of the process leading to the adoption of the 1999 Strategic Concept. Rare among analysts, he highlights continuity. The new concept is in fact Harmel taken one stage further. The more cooperation, the less need for deterrence. He is eloquent too on some of the dilemmas. How was flexible response to be abandoned without implying that both flexibility and the need to respond were to be jettisoned? And for those who argue that the new Concept makes the Alliance more political, he provides the appropriate correction. The Concept represents a return to the political objectives of the treaty after the 40-year diversion occasioned by the Cold War.

Wittman also reminds us that for much of its existence, NATO policy has been based on demonstrating that the cost of war to an aggressor will be greater than the potential benefit and that aggression would not therefore be a rational option. When we ask the question "What has really changed?" it is perhaps here that we have to pause for thought. In the context of terrorism, the rational option does not apply. Yet at the Prague Summit, the validity of the 1999 Strategic Concept will be reaffirmed, for no one has yet worked out how to design a strategic or security concept based on the irrational.

Final chapters broach the long-standing question of what NATO does or should do when two members are at loggerheads. The only factually accurate but limited answer relies on two planks. First, NATO was not and is not constituted to resolve internal disputes but to deal with external threats. Second, although it is not the Alliance's primary role, it has conferred on its Secretary General a watching brief which enables him — and by extension the rest of the Alliance — to keep an eye on things and to offer mediation if all parties so wish. Sometimes they do; more often they do not. But the option is there and exerts a restraining influence. What is almost more important but for which empirical evidence is harder to obtain, is that the chemistry of the Alliance has played a decisive role in preventing open conflict between Allies.

This bumpy journey ends by examining the prospect of a future Alliance which does not just exercise a restraining influence but adopts measures making the resolution of internal disputes a fundamental task. It is significant that aspirant countries dutifully implementing the Membership Action Plan have made great strides in resolving regional disputes as a condition of membership. For this NATO can take some credit. However, this is a long way from establishing internal conflict resolution as a *raison d'être* of the Alliance in a manner that would call into question the daily reality of consensus politics. And if there is one clear decision made by Allied governments in anticipation of the reforms to be initiated at the Prague Summit, it is that the consensus principle is set in concrete. However tempting to imagine the achievements possible were it to be otherwise, there may be considerable wisdom in that decision.

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