

Introduction

Jan Hoffenaar and Brian McAllister Linn

Facing military challenges together

Although the original danger of a massive Warsaw Pact invasion of Western Europe no longer exists, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance continues to face military challenges. Of these, Russian imperialist aggression, manifested in its most vicious form in the invasion of Ukraine, remains the greatest. How, or indeed whether NATO will have to engage Russian troops in Ukraine or one of its newer member states is an open question. As with the Cold War, should any of these continuing challenges escalate to armed conflict, NATO's ground forces will most likely bear the brunt of the fighting. A comparative study of the impact of NATO on its respective national armies during the Cold War can thus provide important historical context to appreciate NATO's current security concerns.

From its beginning in 1949, there has existed a major imbalance in the alliance. The United States accounted almost exclusively for strategic military forces and armament, while European member states provided most of the operational forces. This book explores how some NATO member states each dealt with this capability imbalance during the Cold War, and what membership in the alliance meant for the development of their armed forces, particularly their armies. The geopolitical relationships were admittedly different then. There were two superpowers embroiled in a zero-sum rivalry and a Western Europe coalition whose members were reliant on American nuclear deterrence and often unable or unwilling to meet the alliance's military obligations. But the core of potential disagreement—the huge imbalance of capabilities and the issue of burden sharing—was as true then as now. The alliance required each member state to contribute proportionately to the bigger picture of allied defence. But as today, each of the coalition's armies reflected their nation's flexible definition of 'proportionately'.

NATO has generated an extensive analytical literature numbering in the tens of thousands of articles and books. Topics range from security-political inter-relationships to politico-military strategies and from institutional dynamics to

defence plans.¹ There are also many studies that deal exclusively with the *armies* of NATO member states. The obvious question is: why does this book provide a new contribution to understanding NATO's armies? With a few exceptions, previous studies have followed three tracks. The first were intended to inform military and political leaders of the current military balance in Western Europe. These provided detailed assessment of contemporary NATO and Warsaw Pact force structure and weaponry, but their focus on current affairs restricted both their past and future analysis.² A second, NATO-centric approach, assessed national military forces on the basis of their contribution to the alliance. Such works often focused on alliance political-strategic relations, negotiations over common materiel, or a specific NATO operation.³ The third genre were studies of an individual nation's army's involvement in NATO, often written from a nationalist perspective.⁴ This publication offers a new comparative approach to assessing NATO's military forces. Each chapter provides an analysis of how the respective constituent NATO army balanced its commitments to the alliance with other, often more pressing national priorities—in short, how it fit into NATO. Collectively, the chapters provide a unique comparative exploration of national-NATO military relationships. In the process, they address questions that remain vital to the alliance today: what were the benefits and liabilities, the opportunities, and obstacles of alliance membership for national defence and the planned deployment of the army? Such a comparative study can lead to greater understanding of past, present, and probable future problems facing the alliance and its members.

A transactional agreement

Setting aside the rhetoric of NATO encouraging democracy, economic progress, and community, it is important to recognize that national membership in NATO has always been based on a transactional agreement with the alliance. All members anticipated, and still anticipate, greater benefits by joining than in remaining independent. This realpolitik agenda was bluntly summarized by its first secretary general as keeping the Americans in Europe, the Russians out, and the Germans

¹ For a general overview of NATO's history see, among others Sloan, *Defense of the West*; Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United*; Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*; Rynning, *NATO: from Cold War to Ukraine*; Lindley-French, *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization*; Risso, *NATO at 70*; Johnston, *How NATO Adapts*.

² E.g., Isby and Kamps, *Armies of NATO's Central Front*.

³ E.g., Duffield, *Power Rules*.

⁴ E.g., Hoffenaar and Krüger, *Blueprints for Battle*.

down.⁵ The cost-benefit analysis clearly applies to NATO's most powerful and essential member, the United States, and (as of this writing) still remains. In 1949, American policymakers viewed a Soviet invasion of Western Europe as a serious threat in the very near future, and recognized that the United States could not (and politically would not) support the sustained American military presence necessary to repel it. With European economies prostrate, the only rational alternative to capitulation appeared to be stationing sufficient American forces to deter immediate attack and building up the military, economic, and political strength of anti-communist European governments until they could assume the burden of defence. That America's NATO commitment, and particularly its sustained military deployments in Europe, outlived its original goal was due less to idealism than the recognition that the United States was gaining more than it was losing. Yet a substantial body of American political and public opinion perpetually challenged this cost-benefit rationale of NATO membership, insisted European security was a European problem, believed that the US was being exploited, resented perceived constraints on the nation's foreign policy, and advocated withdrawal and a return to isolationism. Although the American debate is perhaps the most documented, other members, most notably France under De Gaulle and Greece during the Cyprus controversy, have also clearly regarded NATO membership as transactional and withdrawn from participation when they believed it suited them.

The creation of a NATO military force after the start of the Korean War in June 1950 revealed both the transactional nature of the relationship between its member states and their relative weight within the alliance. This was reflected, among other things, in the military top structure. The widely respected US General Dwight D. Eisenhower became the first Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), a post that has since then always been held by an American. An equally lasting precedent was established in making the deputy SACEUR a British officer, joined after 1978 by a West German general.⁶ What were termed the "Major Subordinate Commanders"—the Commanders-in-Chief Allied Forces North, Central, and South, were always, respectively, a British (lieutenant) general, a French (after 1967 a West German) general, and an American admiral.⁷ On water—in the Atlantic, North Sea, English Channel, and Mediterranean—the Americans and British divided the main positions.

⁵ Peter W. Rodman, "NATO's Role in a New European Security Order," at <https://www.nato.int/acad/conf/future95/rodman.htm#:~:text=Lord%20Ismay%2C%20the%20first%20Secretary,out%2C%20and%20the%20Germans%20down.>

⁶ From 1980 to 1982 D-SACEUR was a German admiral.

⁷ The first C-IC-AFCENT was a French Marshal, and the first C-IC-AFNORTH was a British admiral.

A further indication of NATO's transactional composition is that with one exception (France), its members continued to value the advantages of membership above its disadvantages. In defiance of both historic US isolationism and centuries-old intra-European rivalries, NATO grew very quickly into a close-knit community that—through trial and error and sometimes fierce disagreement—shared common interests and values. It also became a functioning practical political and military alliance, with institutions and routines that gave direction and substance to national defence buildup. This happened in the many councils and committees under the North Atlantic Council, the Defence Planning Committee (from 1963), and the Nuclear Planning Group (from 1966). Through standardized review procedures, all member states were held accountable where the force structure, readiness, and logistics of their committed military units were concerned. The intended deployment of these assigned and earmarked forces was laid down in detailed alliance operation plans, for which they trained not only at the national level but also during annual international staff and troop exercises. However, this large-scale joint allied war preparation—not forgetting the infrastructure and standardization programmes—did not alter the fact that member states retained full sovereignty over their military contributions to the alliance.

Burden of alliance

What was the impact of NATO membership for member states' armies? How did they fit into NATO? These are the central questions underlying all the contributions in this book. They reveal numerous consistencies. One is that NATO's military interests have almost always been subordinated to the interests of national policymakers. Yet somewhat contradictorily, NATO membership has been a (in some cases *the*) crucial determinant in the force structure, equipment, mission, and deployment of each member's army. Another consistency has been the European allies' ambivalent relationship with NATO's strongest member, the United States. Alliance partners have relied on American materiel assistance and atomic weapons. But they have resented both US ambivalence on its commitment to using nuclear weapons to defend the alliance and American interference in what they viewed as domestic issues. A final consistency is the difference between nations whose armies were entirely European focused and those whose commitments to NATO were compromised by participation in overseas conflicts.

National security policy

Decisive for the development of NATO and national military contributions to the alliance was the widely shared fear in the late 1940s that the Soviet Union would sooner or later invade Western Europe. These fears were ‘confirmed’ by Soviet-backed North Korea’s invasion of Western-oriented South Korea. Western Europeans perceived enemies at their northern, western, and southern borders committed to destroying their (in most cases) democratic, tolerant, and capitalist societies. Western Europeans also recognized that they were individually and collectively too weak to resist these threats. American policymakers understood that it was also in their interest to put Europe on its feet economically and militarily. They therefore took the lead in building up NATO’s defences, taking on a heavy responsibility that they could not abandon without major consequences.

There were European countries that joined the alliance almost without hesitation (Canada, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Portugal, followed by Greece, Türkiye, and the Federal Republic of Germany) and countries that were more or less reluctant (France, Denmark, Norway, and much later Spain). The latter countries struggled more with the ‘alliance dilemma’.⁸ Once the member states went down the road of NATO membership, there appeared to be hardly any way back for them without major political loss of face. A credible deterrent became the goal, a conventional and soon a nuclear arms race, and constant material and doctrinal adjustments of national armed forces were the result.

That the key component of NATO strategy was the extended deterrence resting on US nuclear weapons created a separate dynamic within the alliance. On the one hand, there was a constant fear among the European allies that the US would not come to their aid at the supreme moment. The Americans tried to allay these fears by taking concrete steps, such as permanently stationing military units in Europe. On the other hand, US military superiority within the alliance led some smaller European member states to lose sight of the urgency of their NATO commitments. As the contributing authors make clear, they regarded their military contribution to allied defence mainly as an “insurance premium” (the Netherlands),⁹ “the minimum entrance fee for membership” (Canada),¹⁰ a “symbolic solidarity fee”

⁸ “(...) the alliance dilemma consists of the choice between alliance solidarity and relative independence. The former choice involves the ‘good’ of avoiding abandonment and the ‘bad’ of possible entrapment by the alliance leader. The latter choice involves the ‘good’ of political autonomy and the ‘bad’ (risk) of abandonment.” Cited in chapter Petersen on Denmark in Rosso, *NATO at 70*, p. 131, reference 1 (= paraphrasing from: Snyder, “The Security Dilemma”).

⁹ P. 135.

¹⁰ P. 24.

(Portugal),¹¹ an “entry ticket to collective security” (Denmark).¹² This is a drastic manifestation of what is referred to in academic literature as the ‘arms-versus-allies trade-off’.¹³ In fact, Denmark outsourced its security so much that in many circles it was considered effectively ‘free riding’.

Member states took different positions towards and within NATO that influenced the quantity and quality of their military contributions to allied defence. The UK viewed allied defence on the European continent as a forward contribution to its homeland security. Moreover, it considered itself a liaison between the Americans and the Europeans and therefore wanted to contribute enough to assure its allies of its confidence in the collective security effort and keep the US motivated to continue its crucial share of deterrence. The need for credible deterrence was felt even more acutely in West Germany, which would become Europe’s main battleground in the event of a full-scale war. Therefore, when other member states reduced their contributions, the *Bundeswehr* in particular sought to fill the gaps. France was a “reluctant Atlanticist”.¹⁴ Its determination to pursue an independent course led it to both withdraw from the NATO military structure and continue military cooperation.

The importance of national priorities was a constant even in those nations that joined as a result of American insistence. Greece and Türkiye were brought into NATO mainly at the urging of the US, but their mutual hostility and internal security problems lessened their contribution to the alliance. Greece also had the disadvantage of being considered of relatively low strategic and operational value within the alliance. Spain’s relationship with the alliance was complicated during the Cold War. It could not become a member as long as it was a dictatorship, but for military strategic reasons, the Americans in particular did involve it in allied defence from the beginning, mainly in a facilitating role. However, this de facto American support for the Franco regime ensured that when Spain was finally able to join NATO, the population was at best reserved about it, and accession only took place under restrictive conditions.

Member states remained sovereign when it came to making troops available to NATO. Although NATO—and especially the USA—could exert considerable pressure, it could not force members to provide their promised troops. Over the course of the Cold War, there were three primary sources of friction: a member state’s disagreements with NATO strategy and force requirements; a member state minimizing its contribution; a member state impelled by other challenges to

¹¹ P. 164.

¹² P. 49.

¹³ See, e.g., DiGiuseppe and Shea, “Alliances, signals of support, and military effort.”

¹⁴ P. 75.

downgrade their NATO commitments. Two clear cases of friction between national and NATO priorities are instructive. In the first, NATO commanders questioned the Netherlands' assertion that its territorial units qualified as its contribution to alliance defence. In the second, General Charles de Gaulle determined that France must follow an independent strategic and doctrinal path and withdrew from NATO. Major disagreement also existed between Greek and allied plans for the defence of Greece, though this problem was overshadowed by the Greco-Turkish conflict. Although all member states had shortcomings and could never fully meet all military wishes from NATO, Denmark, which was one of the few member states with hardly any commitments elsewhere, was perhaps the most notable shirker.

Most member states did have permanent or periodic other military challenges in addition to their contributions to allied defence. As the leader of the 'free world', the United States entered into alliances elsewhere as well, feeling a responsibility to fight communist regimes around the world, even to propping up authoritarian regimes inimical to NATO's core values. How damaging these other commitments were for NATO became clear during the Vietnam War, when American forces in Europe became the 'replacement depot' for Southeast Asia, with disastrous effects on their readiness. Even without the demands of Vietnam, its worldwide commitments resulted in consistent US calls for fewer troops to be stationed in Europe and for the European member states to contribute more.

For some member states, the drive for independence in their colonies outside Europe or parts of their territory posed the greatest threat to fulfilling their NATO commitments. They were forced to send often long-term troops that were diverted from their contributions to NATO defence. In this context, special mention should be made of France (Southeast Asia and Algeria), the United Kingdom (Cyprus, the Middle East, Malaysia, and Northern Ireland), the Netherlands (Indonesia and New Guinea) and Portugal, which in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s was unable to honour almost all of its NATO commitments because it needed all of its troops in its African colonies.

The national armies

What impact did this officially non-mandatory but in practice mandatory NATO military framework have on the nature and qualities of the armies of individual member states? Without exaggeration, it can be said that NATO membership determined the development of the armed forces—in this case armies—of all allies. However, NATO's armies were also products of their pre-NATO traditions, doctrines, and composition. Besides strategic considerations, geographical location, forces already in place at the outset, and historical experience guided the tasks which they were given and the way that they acted. For example, Portugal came

out of World War II with an overmanned and underequipped army that had to be reduced and modernized before it could be of any use to allied defence. The Netherlands, based on its experience with German airborne landings, dedicated half of its army to a fairly static territorial defence. The Federal Republic of Germany's unwillingness to be a nuclear battlefield pushed its army, and NATO, towards a forward defence of its territory that eventually resulted in a radical shift in NATO strategy and doctrine.

For the US Army, the NATO commitment provided a rationale for existence in a Cold War strategic environment dominated by proponents of strategic nuclear weapons. The permanent deployment of forces in West Germany and the assignment of stateside units as reinforcements justified a large, permanent standing army. NATO contingencies also served as the inspiration for much of US Army doctrine, equipment, and training. But prioritizing NATO came at considerable cost to the Americans' ability to honour other overseas commitments, particularly in Asia.

Surveying the totality of national defence efforts for NATO defence, it can be concluded that the military tasks assumed by member states in the early 1950s proved to be mostly permanent. A more far-reaching division of labour never got off the ground for several reasons. Member states gained new (nuclear) tasks as a result of the arrival of new weapons systems rather than being able to shed tasks without leaving a hole in allied defence.

Their location on the European continent and permanent inferiority to the US in nuclear armament and other strategic items such as command-and-control, strategic lift capability, and aircraft carriers meant that the armies of most member states were at best suppliers of units and implementers of integrated allied operation plans. The armies of the southern European member states and Denmark often proved unable to meet NATO manpower requirements. Other nations, such as the Netherlands, Canada, and West Germany struggled to keep their armies technologically up to date, ready to face a large-scale conventional and perhaps immediate nuclear attack with little warning time. Although there were some brief periods—the early 1960s or late 1980s—when NATO military leaders believed that their conventional forces could defeat a Warsaw Pact invasion, for much of the Cold War, the ultimate deterrent remained American and British strategic nuclear weapons.

NATO membership had other consequences for national armies. For instance, for the armies of smaller countries like the Netherlands, their subordinate role in determining allied strategy and operational planning and the almost total focus on supplying the required units led to a collective failure to study military strategic topics. With the introduction of US tactical nuclear weapons on the European battlefield in the late 1950s and early 1960s, European commanders were faced with an ongoing dilemma. They had no say in the deployment of these weapons, but they were expected to adapt their organization and doctrine to nuclear war. In

some cases, their adjustment was carried out over such a long time and with such limited resources that the actual change was difficult to determine.

The combination of participating in allied defence buildup and simultaneously sending troops to colonies resulted in two different developments within national armies. The Netherlands and Portugal gave absolute priority to their colonies and sent almost all of their units there, with the result that they merged there with the colonial forces already present, and very few usable units remained at home. In the UK and France, having to act in two types of conflict zones led to a split of the army into heavy units preparing for high-intensity war in the NATO context and lighter expeditionary units acting against less heavily armed, usually irregularly fighting opponents. The latter deployment, incidentally, was more prestigious than the former.

The US, Canada, and the UK had to send large numbers of military personnel overseas to fulfil their NATO commitments. Western European member states also had to station army units in West Germany. The long-term stationing of military units abroad already in peacetime was a costly affair and demanded a lot from the soldiers concerned and their families. In particular, maintaining commitment to the task, a sense of urgency and discipline required constant attention.

NATO

Finally—and here we step somewhat outside the central theme of this publication—what does all this teach us about the meaning and functioning of NATO? The alliance was a “pluralistic security community”, which offered its member states more security—and therefore more room to develop economically—than if each of them had had to manage this for themselves.¹⁵ Until recently, NATO was often analysed as an organization that dragged itself from crisis to crisis—and always recovered from it. Recent literature points much more to the unifying nature of the organization’s functioning. By cooperating, consulting, and engaging in dialogue in hundreds of committees and working groups on a daily basis, NATO has developed into a well-functioning, mutually trusting forum, in which member states keep each other on track.¹⁶ In the military sphere, the overarching command structures, integrated operational planning, joint exercises, the intensive review process, and the joint infrastructure programme are particularly noted in this regard.¹⁷

¹⁵ “Pluralistic security community, which embedded in NATO, reflects three conditions: compatibility of values; responsiveness to each other needs, messages and actions, without resort to violence; mutual predictability of behavior,” Davidzon, *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Rosso, *NATO at 70*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁷ Hoffenaar, “The engine that keeps NATO running militarily.”

However, this study also shows that there were limits to NATO cooperation and that inherent weaknesses of the alliance came out in the open. In practice, NATO was and is no more or less than a ‘coalition of the willing and the able’, formed by sovereign member states that could each decide for themselves whether, how, and what they wanted to contribute to the alliance. If they set other priorities, allies could put great pressure on them—sometimes successfully—but NATO as an organization lacked the power to enforce its requirements. In the end, national interests remained paramount, as they do today.

The contributions

When the editors conceived of a project to compare the NATO experience of its constituent armies, they recognized that each chapter would not only be unique, but should be. We were determined not to impose any template or social science model on this book. Beyond keeping to a narrative format and emphasizing each nation’s land forces NATO role, each contributor’s analysis would be guided by their research. Unfortunately, the contributors for Belgium, Norway, and Italy reneged on their commitment to contribute an acceptable chapter. Even more unfortunate, they delayed informing us of their failure to deliver the promised chapters until after the deadline, preventing us from finding alternatives. Fortunately, the authors who did honour their promises surpassed our expectations.

John Keess’ study of Canada’s NATO experience argues that once committed to a permanent European military presence, successive governments regarded the Canadian brigade as a sunk cost, a necessary buy-in for NATO membership. Over four decades, policymakers proved unwilling to either withdraw or adequately support the brigade. Instead, they compromised with numerous defence reviews, whilst tinkering with the force structure and materiel, with little concern for the brigade’s rationale, mission, effectiveness, or morale. Without enough strength to determine a distinctly Canadian role in NATO, the organization and roles of Canadian land forces came to reflect allied priorities more than the Canadian national interest.

Iben Bjørnsson’s examination of Denmark’s NATO experience explores how competing demands for funding continuously undermined military obligations. Denmark faced a clear and present danger from the Warsaw Pact on its southern border. In common with other smaller nations, Danish politicians accepted NATO membership as a necessity for American military aid to rebuild their armed forces and to deter a Soviet invasion. But they often found it necessary to sacrifice the

strategic benefits of a strong NATO military presence to the tactical demands of public expectations. The rebuilt postwar Danish armed forces were designed to integrate with NATO: conscription was imposed, and military leaders prioritized the alliance even to the extent of weakening national defence. But although successive governments passed legislation that emphasized the centrality of NATO membership, in practice they allocated less than the minimum equipment and personnel to fulfil their NATO obligations. The result was an army with a NATO-centric force structure, doctrine, and mission, but whose resources reflected a Danish-centric desire to prioritize domestic concerns.

Dieter Krüger argues that despite a contentious later admission to NATO, the Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG) army benefited from the fact that its divisions were indispensable for an allied defence. The republic held the unhappy position of being both the Warsaw Pact invasion route and a nuclear battleground. It was also unhappy with the wavering American commitment to risk Soviet attacks on US cities by defending Western Europe. But unlike many alliance members, the magnitude and character of the Soviet threat allowed the FRG to build its army solely as part of a NATO committed force. As the republic's military posture improved, so too did its influence on NATO strategy. FRG political and military leaders insisted that NATO commit to a militarily risky forward defence of its territory and an American commitment to employ tactical nuclear weapons to repel invasion. By the 1970s, the FRG's army had emerged as one of the most, if not the most capable of NATO's ground forces. But the nation's strategic position appeared to diminish in the late Cold War as the US sought to weaken its nuclear guarantees and the German public increasingly questioned its leadership binding national defence to nuclear weapons.

Olivier Schmitt details France's often fraught relations within NATO. One of the original signatories from the beginning, French political leaders, and much of the public, remained suspicious of both America's influence in Europe and its commitment to allied defence. As was common with the United States and Great Britain, France's army inherited a historic division between 'metropolitan' (NATO) and overseas ('colonial') obligations. Although the magnitude of overseas commitments declined after Algerian independence, throughout the Cold War, the French army's force structure remained bifurcated between its European and overseas units. To this was added the further complication of creating a national nuclear deterrent as insurance against the alliance's failure. Ultimately, the tension between French and NATO (or in French eyes American) interests proved too contradictory, prompting De Gaulle to withdraw France from NATO's integrated command structure in 1966. Thereafter, French military personnel cooperated with NATO but rejected strategic,

doctrinal, or equipment integration unless it appeared to suit national interests. Subsequent French governments faced strong internal challenges to their adherence to 'national' (Gaullist) security, challenges that increased as the French perceived NATO and European defence capabilities to be declining in the 1980s. Ironically, this belief led to *Force d'Action Rapide*, a mechanized rapidly deployable force to bolster West Germany's southern flank. Thus, despite an often antagonistic relationship, the French army ended the Cold War more committed to NATO than ever.

Dionysios Chourchoulis explores the Greek army's experience within the alliance. Greece faced a unique strategic dilemma facing threats from Warsaw Pact invasion, alliance member Türkiye, and internal dissent. As an essential member of the Southern (Mediterranean) Flank, Greece's army benefited from NATO membership in the access to more modern equipment and strategic resources which the nation could not otherwise afford. But Greece's political instability, economic weakness, and weak strategic location limited its ability to fulfil its NATO military commitments. Further complicating the strategic picture, NATO justifiably recognized Türkiye as the essential alliance partner, and Greece less so. With good reason, Greek leaders believed that NATO did not provide sufficient protection from invasion and inhibited Greek interests in the region. The tension manifested in the abortive intervention in Cyprus, prompting incessant war scares and confrontations with Türkiye that, in turn, tied up much of the Greek army in defending against Turkish invasion. Like France, Greece's inability to reconcile national military goals with NATO priorities led to it briefly withdrawing from the alliance's integrated command structure.

Jan Hoffenaar's contribution shows that after a difficult start due to large-scale military deployments in Indonesia, the Dutch army soon focused almost entirely on its NATO tasks within the Northern Army Group in Germany and later in host nation support. In doing so, it enjoyed the passive support of the vast majority of the population. Even the major protests against nuclear armament in the early 1980s did little to change this. In time, it did prove difficult to maintain the NATO commitment, partly because the Netherlands had also taken on relatively large commitments for its fleet and air force in the early 1950s. The temporary deployment of troops in New Guinea and Lebanon was therefore extra disruptive. An ongoing concern for allies (but also for the Dutch military) was the small number of combat-ready troops on the front lines in Germany and the high percentage of conscripts that had to be mobilized in case of war.

Jorge Silva Rocha's study of the Portuguese army and NATO focuses on the tension between that nation's NATO-European and overseas commitments. Membership in

the alliance provided legitimacy to the dictatorial regime and brought previously isolated Portugal into the Western European defence network. NATO, and particularly American, assistance helped modernize the Portuguese army with equipment, professional education, and participation in higher staff planning. At least theoretically, a decade after joining NATO, Portugal provided one of NATO's larger military forces. But in the 1960s, the Portuguese contribution to NATO was circumscribed by long, frustrating, and controversial colonial wars in Africa. The armed forces' overthrow of the government in 1974 initiated a slow and difficult reintegration with NATO's organization, command structure, doctrine, and materiel. By the end of the Cold War, the nation had a smaller but more efficient and effective army.

Ignacio Fuente Cobo's overview of the Spanish army's NATO experience provides a unique case. European abhorrence of the Francoist dictatorship denied Spain admission to the alliance until 1982. But by the early 1950s, American policymakers and military leaders had concluded that Spanish bases were essential as launch sites for nuclear weapons to defend NATO.

American aid was equally essential in modernizing the Spanish armed forces. Spain was integrated into, or more accurately subordinated to American strategic interests (and thus indirectly into NATO) until the mid-1970s. By then, Spain's position vis-à-vis the rest of the alliance had improved due to its own prosperity, the end of its colonial wars, and the weakening of NATO's southern front. Franco's death in 1975 removed many of the European objections to Spanish membership, but by then, the Spanish public saw little to be gained, and much to be risked in membership. In common with Portugal, keeping up with NATO in the 1980s required the Spanish army to cut much of its personnel, develop expertise in combined arms operations, and reequip with modern weaponry. By the end of the Cold War, Spain was a full-fledged member of an alliance that it had been a quasi-partner with since its inception.

The chapter by **Ayşe Ömür Atmaca** and **Zerrin Torun** emphasizes the difficulties which Türkiye experienced fulfilling its NATO obligations. Türkiye's geographic position and large army made it essential to the alliance's (and especially American) strategic goals in the Mediterranean, Balkans, and Middle East. It benefited from American largesse in equipment, but soon found, as did other NATO members, that US support came at a heavy price and could change quickly. In particular, the Turks were unhappy with the perceived American reluctance to guarantee applying nuclear weapons. Moreover, Türkiye has security priorities in the Middle East that required it to balance NATO commitments against threats from neighbours such as Iran. Equally important, Türkiye's domestic difficulties consistently undermined its contribution to alliance security. Legally mandated as a pillar of

secular republican government, the Turkish armed forces provided leadership in several governments, overthrew two others, and were required to engage in internal security. Its defence of ethnic rights in Cyprus drew Türkiye into open confrontation with fellow alliance member, Greece, and prompted an American arms embargo. Although Türkiye remained a committed and valuable member of the alliance, its national priorities were paramount, much as they are today.

Hew Bennett's study of the British Army in NATO emphasizes the British Army of the Rhine's (BAOR) experience. Evolving from the army's postwar occupation duties, the BAOR both demonstrated the nation's commitment to the alliance and inspired modernization, doctrine, materiel, operational planning, and strategy. British intelligence provided essential information on the Warsaw Pact. British officers developed imaginative concepts to manoeuvre and counterattack with mechanized units. But, as with other NATO armies, until the 1980s, the British contingent lacked the equipment and personnel to execute these concepts. Moreover, British military commitments overseas and in Northern Ireland placed a premium on light units, forced redeployment of NATO-designated troops, and led to terrorist attacks on British installations. In the 1980s, the British Army undertook an impressive recovery, developing an air-ground doctrine and operational competence that convinced its commanders that it would be able to repel a Soviet attack.

Brian McAllister Linn's exploration of the US Army's experience reveals a military organization that saw in the NATO mission a relevant role in the atomic age. What was initially viewed as a legacy occupation force assumed much greater strategic importance when American policymakers decided to defend Western Europe against a perceived global communist menace. In the 1950s, the NATO mission served as the engine to develop army concepts of tactical atomic warfare, disperse-concentrate-disperse manoeuvre, and combined arms operations. But the Vietnam War, the ensuing decline of US Army effectiveness, and American policymakers' opaqueness about using nuclear weapons led to profound scepticism about their army's effectiveness that continued for a decade after that war. The 1980s witnessed a revival of the US Army enhanced by better personnel, materiel, and a new doctrine (AirLand Battle) that offered the possibility of defeating the Warsaw Pact without recourse to atomic weapons. The subsequent success of the US Army—and its European contingents—in the Gulf War appeared to vindicate the post-Vietnam reforms.

And lastly

We no longer live in a bipolar world now, where, in the words of Glenn Snyder, “minor policy differences may be resolved by consensus norms [and] major differences tend to persist because there is little structural pressure towards their solution. And their persistence does not seriously threaten the existence of the alliance [because] the alliance cannot break up”.¹⁸ This is a worrying observation when we consider that after the end of the Cold War, the armed forces of NATO member states were greatly reduced in size and subsequently, the major military commitment of the leading member state was no longer taken for granted. Hopefully, policymakers will take to heart the following words of Colin Gray that “History is the (only) archive of human experience that must serve as the database from which theory as explanation can or may be derived for the education of contemporary defence planners”.¹⁹

Works cited

- Davidzon, Igor. 2021. *Regional Security Governance in Post-Soviet Eurasia: The History and Effectiveness of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- DiGiuseppe, Matthew R., and Patrick E. Shea. 2021. “Alliances, signals of support, and military effort,” *European Journal of International Relations* 27 (4): pp. 1067-1089.
- Duffield, John S. 1995. *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gray, Colin S. 2014. *Strategy & Defence Planning: Meeting the Challenge of Uncertainty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoffenaar, Jan. 2026. “The engine that keeps NATO running militarily,” in *NATO during the Cold War and After: The First 75 Years*. eds. Mark Kramer and Daniela Şişcanu. London: Bloomsbury Academics (to be published).
- Hoffenaar, Jan, and Dieter Krüger, eds. 2012. *Blueprints for Battle. Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948-1968*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Isby, David C., and Charles Tustin Kamps. 1985. *Armies of NATO's Central Front*. London: Janes.
- Johnston, Seth A. 2017. *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Kaplan, Lawrence S. 2004. *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance*. London: Praeger.
- Lindley-French, Julian. 2023. *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization: The Enduring Alliance*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Risso, Linda. 2019. *NATO at 70: A Historiographical Approach*. London and New York: Routledge.

¹⁸ Snyder, “The Security Dilemma,” pp. 494-495.

¹⁹ Gray, *Strategy & Defence Planning*, p. 14.

- Rodman, Peter W. 1995. "NATO's Role in a New European Security Order," at <https://www.nato.int/acad/conf/future95/rodman.htm#:~:text=Lord%20Ismay%2C%20the%20first%20Secretary,out%2C%20and%20the%20Germans%20down>.
- Rynning, Sten. 2024. *NATO: from Cold War to Ukraine, a history of the world's most powerful alliance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sloan, Stanley R. 2nd ed. 2020. *Defense of the West: Transatlantic Security from Truman to Trump*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Snyder, Glenn H. 1984. "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36 (4): pp. 461-495.
- Yost, David S. 2014. *NATO's Balancing Act*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.