

**Debating U.S. Policy Towards NATO in Richard Nixon`s Years –
Developing Ideas for NATO Post-Cold War Transformation?**

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In the course of preparation for the next summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization scheduled for July 1990 to take place in London, then NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner attended a meeting with the President of the United States George H.W. Bush at the White House. Woerner outlined a new task for his Organization to transmit a message that the Alliance was “a force for peace and European security, in cooperation with the Soviet Union¹”, seeking the partnership with the latter “in cooperative structure²”, noting that the Soviets were still suspicious towards the Alliance, especially in the military realm. President Bush suggested that the Organization could probably change its name supposedly in order to allay the fears of the Soviet authorities. However, NATO Secretary General objected that the real issue was not the name, but the substance of the Organization³.

As the North Atlantic Alliance was well-established “brand” in European security, boasting long history of successful transatlantic cooperation, the name of the Organization stayed intact. But during the historic summit in London in 1990 the heads of state and government of NATO countries issued a Declaration on Transformed Transatlantic Alliance, implying that the Organization was on the course to change dramatically from the traditional Cold War alliance emphasizing territorial defense against the known enemy into something completely different. This is how the popular story of NATO post-Cold War transformation begins.

We should note that the noun ‘transformation’ is derived from the verb ‘to transform’, meaning, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, ‘to change (something) completely and usually in a good way⁴’. When speaking of the evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance after the end of the Cold War, we may rightfully use the word “transformation” to accentuate the tremendous effort undertaken by the Organization to adapt its mission and structure to the drastically changed international environment. However, this word may conceal to some extent the fact that the post-Cold War evolution of NATO was partly based on and facilitated by the ideas developed in the earlier periods in history of the Alliance. The time of Richard Nixon’s first presidential term is the case in point in this paper.

The post-Cold War ‘transformation’ of NATO proved to be a complex process, and we can definitely provide a long list of its manifestations. However, in this paper we chose to focus on two basic things that seem to be the most characteristic of the Organization after the bipolar confrontation was over, that is the extensive broadening of its purview to non-military issues and its performing of missions ‘out of area’. In our view, the revolving debates on those issues in the

¹ Memorandum of Conversation. Meeting with Manfred Woerner, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 7 May 1990 http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-07--Woerner.pdf

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Transform. “Merriam-Webster” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transform>

United States provided a basis and contributed to creating a blueprint for the further evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance and, thus, promoted for the active role the country was able to play in the process. The study of those debates furthers our understanding of the Alliance's post-Cold War transformation.

During the presidency of Richard Nixon, the United States faced challenges in their NATO policy stemming from the changed power balance inside the Alliance and the impact of the détente, which brought about the need to re-examine some of its approaches to the relations with the Allies. In those circumstances, the issue of expanding the purview and geographic area of NATO activity was expected to raise in significance. In this paper we examine the origins, substance and outcome of the debates on the issue inside Nixon's administration during his first presidential term, as well as their role in the broader process of the United States decision-making on NATO policy.

Nixon administration came to the White House at the time when the security environment in Europe was to some extent influenced by the consequences of the Warsaw bloc's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. According to the estimates provided by the US Central Intelligence Agency, the impact of the Czechoslovak crisis on the state of inter-allied relationship in NATO was "uncertain". Nevertheless, we can describe it rather as moderate in the sense that it "generated a new impulse toward united action ... - symbolized by expanded consultation and postponement of troop reduction⁵", but did not alter the view that the "danger of Soviet assault remained low⁶". The analysts from the CIA anticipated the growing rivalries inside NATO that could be further exacerbated given the decreased Soviet threat, the overall "tendency to pluralism" and even the serious possibility that some states in the near future might choose to revoke the alliance. At the same time, they did not view all the aforementioned trends as jeopardizing the existence of NATO⁷.

The aftermaths of the crisis did not bring about the reverse of the détente, but led to the re-examination of the concept in many Western European capitals. As the authors of the Memorandum stated, previously Western European governments were rather optimistic about the prospects of détente, considering it as capable of significantly improving the atmosphere in Europe, facilitating meaningful agreements with the East in the security realm⁸. The Czechoslovak

⁵ Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency. Current Problems in NATO. Washington, January 21, 1969. // Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. P. 9-10.

⁸ Ibid. P.3.

crisis reportedly had altered this view, bringing in the new understanding of détente as merely an “interim accommodation to the existing order”⁹ even for West German government, for whom the stakes in the process were disproportionately high. Thus, the authors of the report considered NATO’s active role in the seeking of détente as being undermined.

The analysts from the CIA provided the view of the North Atlantic Alliance as a beneficial project of ever-expanding cooperation with the growing economies of Western Europe, which was to go far beyond the military realm. They cheered the progress in the development of the process of inter-allied consultations, yet largely measured its success from the vintage point of its ability to amplify the traditional purview of NATO. Here, they had to concede, “After 20 years, NATO’s consultative process on political and economic affairs still could not match the cooperation that existed in the military sphere”¹⁰. The text of the Memorandum exhibits certain extent of pessimism about following the guidelines of 1956 Report of the Committee of the Three. The CIA analysts admitted that “anything like an Atlantic community remained distant, and was probably impracticable”¹¹ and warned against setting the objectives of inter-allied consultations too high. They also quoted the failed attempts by Portugal to use the consultations to yield allied support to its policy in Africa, i.e. ‘out of area’ for the Alliance.

Given all the pessimism displayed in the CIA Memorandum about the broadening of NATO purview, its authors urged the US government for action. “The allies ... find themselves in a state of heightened activity and momentum that will be difficult to sustain so long as no new long-range goal or purpose is found”¹². The same theme of NATO re-inventing itself for the new security environment will gain extreme salience after the end of the Cold War, however, the idea of pragmatic adaptation of the Alliance’s mission was still on political agenda after the adoption of Harmel Report. Thus, the authors of the Memorandum recommended to capitalize on post-crisis settings and heightened inter-Alliance cohesion in order to carry out US initiatives that the allies might follow more reluctantly later, if the momentum was lost.

President Nixon directed the review of US NATO policy almost immediately, on 21st of January 1969¹³ and a broad “inventory” of the international situation. Among the questions posed by the President and related to the present state of the North Atlantic alliance, were those regarding the political role of the Organization and the prospects for effective cooperation among the Allies

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. P.5.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. P.2.

¹³ National Security Study Memorandum 6. January 21, 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.13.

on the settlement of hostilities and crisis management beyond Europe¹⁴. In fact, by launching those inquiries, the President did not seek for new ideas, but wanted to get some feedback and apparently, to gain support for initiatives that he planned to propose during his trip to Europe in February 1969.

It is worth mentioning that President Nixon proved to be a staunch supporter of NATO, who was “present at the creation” and regarded the Alliance as the “blue chip¹⁵” for US foreign policy. While Soviet threat might have decreased and Western Europe seemed to be stronger than in those times when the Alliance was inceptioned, Richard Nixon emphasized NATO’s function to integrate West Germany to the European security architecture. He considered the consequences of US unilateral troop reductions in Europe to be catastrophic primarily for FRG, “the strongest and most dynamic¹⁶”, but the state having serious Eastern problem¹⁷. For Nixon, NATO also was an indispensable means to negotiate détente on favorable terms with the Soviet Union and more equitable burden sharing with West European governments¹⁸.

Not surprisingly, Richard Nixon took his first presidential trip to Europe. On 24 February 1969, he gave a speech at the North Atlantic Council, where he outlined his vision for NATO. “A modern alliance must be a living thing, capable for growth, able to adapt to changing circumstances¹⁹”, he proclaimed. His view came in opposition to the widely shared knowledge on politico-military alliances of the sovereign states, who used to form alliances in order to protect themselves against enemy nations. The alliances immediately disbanded when the threat lessened or was absent. However, the vision of NATO publicly expressed by Nixon reflected the growing understanding of relationship with the Soviet Union in terms of political rivalry, rather than military threat²⁰.

In his speech at the North Atlantic Council, President Nixon vigorously endorsed the development of consultations in the Alliance as a means to share wisdom and jointly produce workable solutions to common problems as well as to give the governments allied to the United States greater voice on issues of their concern. He also mentioned the importance of rising

¹⁴ National Security Study Memorandum 9. January 23, 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.16.

¹⁵ Memorandum for the Record. The President’s Meeting with Former High Government Officials and Military Officers on the Mansfield Amendment. 13 May 1971. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.275.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 276.

¹⁹ Nixon R. Remarks to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. 24 February 1969. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2411>

²⁰ Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency. Current Problems in NATO. Washington, January 21, 1969. // Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.2.

challenges of environmental pollution that deserved attention within the context of transatlantic cooperation²¹.

The encouragement of further development of consultations evolved into proposal to conduct periodical meetings of Deputy Foreign Ministers and create a special planning group. Both institutional arrangements provided opportunities for the inter-Alliance discussions on long-range problems. The new agenda for transatlantic cooperation with additional focus on environmental protection, based on the ideas attributed to Nixon's counsellor Daniel Patrick Moynihan²², expanded to encompass the problems of technically advanced societies. This developed into the initiative to establish the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society responsible to the Deputy Ministers. On 10 of April 1969, President Nixon attended the ceremonial meeting of the NAC Ministerial meeting and voiced the proposals.

According to the Memorandum from Elliot Richardson, the Under Secretary of State to President Nixon, the U.S. allies expressed interest at implementation of aforementioned proposals. West Germany and Denmark were enthusiastic about the discussions on problems of modern society²³. Nevertheless, Richardson noted that there was some resistance from some states. Reportedly, some of the allies had reservations about the expansion of NATO structure, the others were skeptical about the expediency of broadening the scope of consultations inside the politico-military alliance to include the environmental issues²⁴. In Richardson's view, it required that US representatives in West European capitals work on bilateral basis in order to gain support to presidential initiatives. There was also a need to create an ad hoc group of allied representatives of the level of Patrick Moynihan, Arthur Burns or James Allen to contribute to the launch of the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society²⁵.

In later Memorandum to President Nixon, authored by his Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger, the latter admitted that the process of the implementation of presidential proposals in NATO was slow. According to Kissinger, the reaction of allies to the idea of the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society was positive, yet cautious; while they were generally negative on developing Deputy Foreign Ministers meetings and the establishing special planning group²⁶. Kissinger listed primarily bureaucratic reasons for allies' slowness and skepticism. First

²¹ Nixon R. Remarks to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. 24 February 1969. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2411>

²² Berlind A. NATO and the Environment. American Diplomacy. March 2009. http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2009/0103/comm/berlind_nato.html

²³ Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State (Richardson) to President Nixon. May 6, 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.61.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon. 2 June 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P.65.

and most important, in his view, the United States mistakenly advanced the proposal through NAC. The Permanent Representatives at that body viewed the creation alternative structures in the Alliance as challenge to their prerogative and indication that they did not do their job properly. Second, the initiatives suggested the NATO role for Agencies of Allied Governments outside Foreign Ministries. Third, the allies were suspicious about the new structures if there were no clarity on their purpose and use²⁷. Interestingly, Kissinger`s Memorandum gives the idea of the absence of principled political opposition to broadening NATO`s purview and, thus, strengthening the Alliance.

Richard Nixon presented his initiatives as a move to “modernize” NATO²⁸ and to display the US interest in the Alliance. The views expressed in the National Intelligence Estimate, prepared in December 1969, testified for some rightfulness of presidential approach. The report stated, “There does seem to be emerging ... a growing belief, particularly among younger people, that the established ideologies, the traditional patterns of political activity, and the historic rivalries among nations are obsolete, artificial, and irrelevant to the real concerns of the individual and the major goals of society²⁹”. The environmental initiatives launched in NATO apparently were to give the Alliance a new appeal especially among the younger generation in Europe; as well as to some extent an attempt to detract public attention from US policy in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the U.S. intelligence community had rather low expectations about the impact that the new Committee on Challenges of Modern Society would have on transatlantic cooperation in general. “The effort to give NATO a social role through the creation of a Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society has met with a polite response, but it will not materially tighten the already strong bonds between Western Europe and the US³⁰”, stated the authors of the Estimate.

The Committee on Challenges of Modern Society began operation in December 1969. The first appraisal of its work was provided by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, President`s Assistant for Urban Affairs, in his Memorandum to President Nixon dated July 1, 1970 highly appreciated the work of the Committee. Given that Moynihan was probably the person who had contributed the most to its establishment, it is not surprising that he was very positive on the progress of that body, naming it “probably now the most active and productive activity of that kind³¹”. According to Moynihan, the Committee largely derived its success from the fact that the North Atlantic Alliance

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nixon R. Remarks to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. 24 February 1969. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2411>

²⁹ National Intelligence Estimate. Europe, the US, and the USSR. 4 December 1969. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 77.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 89.

³¹ Memorandum from the President`s Assistant for Urban Affairs (Moynihan) to President Nixon. 1 July 1970. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 175.

generally united technologically advanced countries who shared similar views on the pollution that that set it apart from other international for a dealing with the same issues. The scope of cooperation in the framework of the Committee went beyond the projects on environmental protection and included joint action on such issues as disaster assistance, traffic safety, and narcotics³². The United States benefited from practical cooperation with West European countries, who boasted advances in some of the areas of the Committee`s activity. While noting that almost all NATO countries participated at different projects, Moynihan admitted that the Committee on Challenges of Modern Society “was sustained by American energy and initiatives³³”. In his view, it would probably take long for the program to become self-sustaining. “Any relaxation of American effort during that interval is likely to be fatal³⁴”, he warned. Thus, while gaining the momentum, the new Committee still much depended on US willingness to invest its energy in its activity.

According to the provisions of Article 6 of the Washington Treaty of 1949, the geographical zone of responsibility of the North Atlantic Alliance is limited. Initially, the US government who wanted to avoid drawing into colonial wars that the European countries waged promoted this approach. It was not until the US involvement in Vietnam that the US diplomats raised the question about NATO`s role “out of area”. However, in vain. The West European governments were generally reluctant on the issue of expanding the organization`s reach³⁵.

The problem of NATO`s role beyond Europe gained additional salience in the light of the debates on burden sharing in the Alliance. The growing perception in the US of Western Europe getting more consolidated and stronger encouraged Washington to look for the ways to make allied governments to do more. Though this search was to some extent constrained by the clear understanding that despite its economic success Western Europe remained a pigmy in the military realm because the governments there could not “sell security to their own people³⁶”.

During Nixon presidency, the issue of NATO activity beyond its traditional geographical zone of responsibility raised in significance in terms of US foreign policy in the Mediterranean. The definition of the region was based on conceived interrelation of Washington`s interests there, including the stability of the Southern flank of Southern Europe, the security of Israel and oil

³² Ibid. Pp. 176-177.

³³ Ibid. P.175.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Stuart D.T. The United States and NATO Out-of-Area Disputes: Does the Cold War Provide Precedents or Merely Prologue? A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years. Ed. by G. Schmidt. Palgrave, 2001. Vol. 1. Pp. 123-127.

³⁶ Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting. June 17, 1970. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 174.

shipments from the Middle East³⁷. The concept of the Mediterranean as the broad region uniting the South European states of NATO with the countries of the Middle East provided the basis for the search for the meaningful Alliance's role there. The Mediterranean became the scene of the geopolitical rivalry with the Soviet Union, who at that time expanded its military presence in the region. It provided military aid to radical Arab regimes that was the issue of United States concern. Furthermore, it expanded friendly ties with Greece and Turkey that also provoked certain apprehensions in Washington.

When the discussion of possible contingencies in the Middle East took place at the US National Security Council in summer 1970, the issue of possible engagement of NATO allies was on the table. As President Nixon considered that the events in the region had gone non-controllable, he wanted both NATO and the United States to take "stronger view" on it³⁸. From the perspective of Henry Kissinger, the developments at the Middle East could affect the security in Europe if the United States chose to redeploy its troops from there in reaction to any contingency in the neighboring region. Joseph Sisco, who at that time held the office of Assistant Secretary, expressed the opinion that in case of opening hostilities from the part of Syria against Lebanon or Jordan and the request from one of the latter to provide US troops for its defense, the multilateral intervention by NATO countries would be a favorable option. However, he was sure that the allies would not support such proposal and that would make, in his opinion, the United States itself to hold back³⁹.

At the same time, when asked by President Nixon about the practicability of seeking support from other NATO countries to the US contingency plans in the Middle East, his Secretary of State William Rogers did not deem reasonable to exclude this option. His Assistant Joseph Sisco added that the United States had to do it discreetly and not count much on positive outcome⁴⁰.

The heightened role of the USSR in the Middle East and its growing military presence there contributed to the increased attention paid to the security of the Mediterranean in NATO. The perceived danger of Soviet actions against allied states based on the North Africa Littoral made the security problems of the region more acute. The NATO Secretary General at that time Manlio Brosio found the position of the Alliance on that matter "anomalous", since it "had responsibility for the Mediterranean area but no direct responsibility for the Middle East or North Africa⁴¹". Nevertheless, he did not support the idea of extending NATO's geographical zone of

³⁷ Ibid. P. 169.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 171.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 172.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 174.

⁴¹ Report on a NATO Commanders Meeting. September 30, 1970. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 193.

responsibility, but instead suggested strengthening consultations on the Middle East and Africa in the Alliance⁴².

In order to sustain some interest from the part of its allies to “out of area” issues, the United States encouraged discussions on the security problems of Middle East and on strengthening NATO defense in the Mediterranean. Moreover, in his Memorandum to President Nixon, dated 18th February 1971, Henry Kissinger supported the development of consultations on political issues in the framework of the European Community. In his view, “it could lead to greater European interest outside the NATO area⁴³”.

However, the efforts of the United States during the presidency of Richard Nixon to bring NATO “out of area” did not have much success. The later events of the 1973 Yom Kippur War proved that conclusion. Most NATO countries denied base access and overflight rights for US aircraft who provided resupply by Israel.

After his trip to Europe in November 1971, Nixon’s Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird prepared a Memorandum for the President, where he claimed that the issues of defense were losing in significance at that time for West European populations⁴⁴. With the decreased salience of the danger of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, “they, particularly the young, do not favor for defense against the threat they do not perceive⁴⁵”. Thus, the popular attitudes impeded the West European governments to raise the funds for their armed forces. In his view, those developments would further undermine the strength of US allies⁴⁶.

The authors of the National Intelligence Estimate, prepared in December 1972, envisioned certain limits to West European efforts at provision of defense. From their standpoint, the European governments “would do just enough to convince the US Congress and electorate that Europe ‘deserved’ continued American protection, but not so much as to give the US excuse for further reductions in its role in European defense⁴⁷”. Needless to say that the mentioned political strategy of West European governments was timely in early 70-s when the issue of US troop reductions in Europe was high on political agenda of transatlantic relations. West Europeans were also suspicious about the possible bilateral agreements between the superpowers and even the United States’ return to ‘isolationism’.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon. February 18, 1971. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 244.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 321.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ National Intelligence Estimate. Problems in US-West European Relations. 14 December 1972. Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976. Vol. XLI. Western Europe; NATO 1969-1972. Washington, 2012. P. 356.

National Intelligence Estimate of December 1972 emphasized that the West European economies had obvious interests in the Middle East, related to oil procurements that could even lead to some rivalries with the United States. At the same time, it accentuated that the Western Europe was getting more inward looking, downplaying the involvement with the US in global scale. “On the whole, the states of the EC display a certain indifference to US relations with countries which do not directly affect themselves. This reflects the introspection of the Europeans as they turn with some relief from trying to keep up appearances of a ‘world role’ to concentrate on Europe’s own development⁴⁸”.

All the above observations provide some clues on the reasons of failure of the United States’ efforts to expand NATO’s geographic zone of responsibility during the presidency of Richard Nixon and on prospects of their revival in future.

In our view, the general understanding of transatlantic cooperation as the one based on a broad web of mutually reinforcing institutions, i.e. NATO, OECD, World Bank, etc. gave the United States the opportunity to expand the traditional purview of the North Atlantic Alliance by introducing the “social dimension” of its activity and contribute to “out of area” debate. Those issues had little chance to gain exceptional priority on the agenda of NATO policy of Nixon’s administration. The problems of mutual force reductions, preparation for the East-West conference, and the development of the European Community had greater significance in the US policy towards Europe. Those steps facilitating NATO’s gradual evolution required much effort from the part of the United States; their outcomes were at its best mixed. However, this policy of Nixon’s administration by strengthening the image of the Alliance as of living and evolving institutional organism, further gaining and analyzing the experience of NATO reform and facilitating the debate on the Alliance’s organizational development, contributed much to creating the basis for the post-Cold War “transformation” of the North Atlantic Alliance.

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 366.