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14. ABSTRACT NATO has been searching for relevancy and an identity since the end of the Cold War. In recent years, NATO has faced a number of other challenges such as a lack of agreement among members as to the type and nature of threats against the Alliance as well as which type of missions it should undertake, and the declining defense budgets of many of its members causing them to scale back their military and monetary contributions to NATO. Now NATO must contend with its most powerful member, the U.S., shifting, or pivoting, its instruments of national power to the Asia-Pacific region. For years, the U.S. already has been trying to persuade other NATO members to take on larger roles of responsibility within the Alliance. Now, as the U.S. pivots to Asia-Pacific, there are three likely scenarios for NATO's future; NATO will follow the U.S. and focus on the Asia-Pacific region, NATO will focus almost exclusively on Europe and another member, such as France or Germany, will accept a larger leadership role, or NATO will dissolve.					
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

THE U.S. PIVOT TO ASIA-PACIFIC AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR NATO

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Executive Summary

Title: The U.S. Pivot to Asia-Pacific and What it Means for NATO

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Thesis: This paper will analyze the major challenges which NATO has been facing for some time such as the search for relevancy and a common mission, the shrinking contributions of many non-U.S. members, and the stormy relationship with Russia, within the context of the recent U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific region.

Discussion: Since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, NATO has been searching for a unifying, common purpose to bind together its members. Despite this, the military alliance that was created to defend many of the countries of the North Atlantic area from the threat of Communist expansionism and attack from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has managed not only to endure but also to grow, nearly doubling the number of members since German reunification in 1990. But NATO faces some serious challenges. There is an absence of widespread agreement among NATO members as to the main threats the Alliance faces and the types of missions that it should undertake. Additionally, declining defense budgets are causing many NATO members to cutback on their monetary and military contributions to the Alliance. The U.S., NATO's largest contributor and most powerful member, is also facing its own economic difficulties brought about by the ongoing global economic recession. The US. has been attempting for some years to persuade many of the European members of NATO to take on greater roles in the Alliance and larger burden of the funding. Now, as it shifts its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. will most likely be unable to involve itself in NATO as much as it has in the past. With decreased participation by the U.S., NATO must determine the threats against it, what types of missions it can and is willing to perform, how it will acquire the capabilities it needs, and which member(s) will take increased leadership roles. The relevance and perhaps the very existence of NATO are at stake.

Conclusion: Three futures for NATO are most likely: The U.S. retains its historic leadership role in NATO, despite the pivot to Asia, and the Alliance shifts its focus to Asia along with the U.S., other NATO members step up to fill the leadership vacuum left by the decreased involvement by the U.S., or the Alliance is unable to resolve the numerous challenges it faces, which are exacerbated by the U.S. pivot to Asia, and becomes irrelevant and eventually dissolves.

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Preface

So often those of us in the national security realm focus on the ‘shiny object.’ For over a decade, U.S. national security has focused on terrorism, insurgency, the Middle East, and drones. Prior to that, the Cold War (and the ensuing problems caused by its quick and surprising ending) was the focal point of U.S. national security. Now that the war in Iraq is over and the conflict in Afghanistan is quickly drawing to a close, the U.S. has begun a “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific to strengthen its engagement in that very vital region of the world. As the U.S. looks to enhance its partnerships and potentially build new ones in Asia-Pacific what will become of its strongest and most enduring alliance, NATO? Already facing questions regarding its relevancy and role 20 years after the end of the Cold War along with declining defense budgets of most of its members, can NATO survive if the U.S. reduces its role in the Alliance?

I chose this topic because as the U.S. focuses its instruments of power on Asia-Pacific, it is important to remember not to neglect its longtime allies in the North Atlantic. Can NATO serve as a shining example for other nations wishing to become a part of a successful military-political alliance? Or has NATO’s time come and gone?

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The Pivot to Asia-Pacific

On January 5, 2012, the United States released *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities For 21st Century Defense*, the Defense Strategic Guidance outlining the priorities and direction for national defense policies in a new era of post-Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, reduced defense budgets without a corresponding reduction in potential threats, and the rise of military and economic powers in Asia. This document formalized a shift that had been taking place since the beginning of the Obama Administration and which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote about in the November 2011 edition of *Foreign Affairs*: the U.S. “rebalance” to Asia.¹ In her article, the Secretary of State introduced the more widely used term “pivot.”² While experts and analyst rushed to figure out what this major shift for U.S. foreign policy would mean for Asia, in Europe others wondered what would happen to NATO, the successful alliance of 28 European and North American countries largely responsible for winning the Cold War.

Since its creation, the U.S. has contributed the majority of funding and forces for NATO. For many years U.S. administrations have been urging the Europeans to contribute a larger share of the burden of funding and operating NATO, with little success. But now, with the U.S. facing significant defense budget constraints brought about by the global economic crisis and with the focus on the Asia-Pacific region, NATO faces the future with an American partner that will not be able to contribute as much to the Alliance as in the past. The U.S. shift to the Pacific only adds to the difficulties facing NATO has since the end of the Cold War such as the search for relevancy and a clear mission, the reluctance of most European countries to spend adequately on their military forces, and what it wishes its relationship with Russia to be.

This paper will analyze the major challenges which NATO has been facing for some time such as the search for relevancy and a common mission, the shrinking contributions of many

non-U.S. members, and the stormy relationship with Russia, within the context of the recent U.S. pivot to Asia. Then three possible future scenarios for NATO will be presented with the issues examined above as the background.

NATO will need to make significant changes if it is going to survive and remain relevant in the 21st century while the U.S. concentrates its defense policies on Asia. The non-U.S. NATO countries will have to increase their role and contributions to the Alliance. NATO operations in Libya in 2011 are regarded as a successful beginning to the Europeans, the U.K. and France in particular, taking on a greater responsibility. But the Libya operation also exposed many limitations. The U.S., while seeking to act in a largely supporting role, still needed to provide much of the aerial refueling and electronic warfare aircraft and cruise missiles.³ NATO must determine what role it wants to have and what kind of missions wants to take on given its constrained funding and capabilities. NATO will need to decide if it will follow the U.S. lead once again and increase its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. Russia is a wildcard that NATO will need to determine if it will be a partner or an enemy going forward.⁴

NATO already has been dealing with a number of challenges. Now, the alliance must contend with its most powerful member shifting its focus away from Europe and toward Asia. In addition to the substantial challenges that the Alliance faces already, the U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific region will cause significant changes for NATO. The Alliance faces three possible futures; America will remain the dominant power and NATO will become more engaged in the Asia-Pacific region, another country will assume a leadership role and NATO will focus primarily on European security, or NATO will be unable to overcome the American leadership vacuum and eventually dissolve. The members of NATO must decide if they are truly “committed to preserve its effectiveness as the globe’s most successful political-military

Alliance” and if they are prepared to make the necessary changes for NATO to remain at the forefront of collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.⁵

NATO Today

Today NATO consists of 28 member states in Europe and North America. Twelve countries originally signed the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949. NATO has grown tremendously since the end of the Cold War, adding 12 new member states since that time. Four more states, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia, are working toward NATO membership.⁶ France became a full member of NATO again in 2009. France had not been a part of NATO’s integrated military command since 1966 when French President Charles de Gaulle pulled French military forces out of NATO over objections about U.S. dominance of the Alliance and the wish for independent French military policies that included having its own nuclear deterrent.

For the first forty years, the main mission of the Alliance was to protect its members from attack by the Soviet Union. For the last twenty years, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War, NATO has struggled for relevancy and to agree on its main reason for existing. Since the 1990s, NATO members have participated in numerous military operations including those in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya. NATO forces participate not only in military operations but in humanitarian activities, as well. NATO has a very close relationship with the European Union. Indeed, out of the 27 countries in the EU, 21 of them share membership in NATO. According to NATO’s Strategic Concept, “NATO and the EU can and should play complementary and mutually reinforcing roles in supporting international peace and security.”⁷ The global economic crisis and shrinking defense budgets of member states has led NATO to adopt a major initiative called Smart Defense where NATO countries cooperate

closely to coordinate their capabilities according to NATO's core tasks. This effort reduces or eliminates redundancy and allows members to specialize in areas of national strength.⁸ At the most recent NATO Summit, held in Chicago in May 2012, Smart Defense was one of the major items on the agenda, along with operations in Afghanistan and Libya, Russia, and ballistic missile defense.⁹ Smart Defense will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

The centerpiece of NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty, which consists of 14 Articles. The Article perhaps most commonly associated with the NATO and the one that gets to the basic reason for its existence is Article 5, which states in part, "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North American shall be considered an attack against them all." Four others, Articles 4 and 10, are important to mention here. Article 4, which states "The Parties shall will consult together whenever, in the opinion of one of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened" was used to justify military operations in the Balkans in the 1990s. Article 10 is used to add new members to the Alliance, starting with Turkey and Greece in 1951 and most recently with Albania and Croatia in 2009.¹⁰ Finally, as a testament to the success of NATO, no member has ever invoked Article 12, which calls for a review of the Treaty, or Article 13, which allows members to exit the Treaty.¹¹

The Relevancy of NATO

NATO's relevancy has been called into question since the end of the Cold War. The reason for its creation, and indeed its overarching mission, was to defend the western democracies against the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union dissolved in the early 1990s, NATO lost its most important reason for existing. The history of NATO could have ended there but like many large, bureaucratic organizations employing thousands of people, it found new missions,

new reasons to exist. Rather than having one single common enemy, the Alliance began to branch out and take on other roles. These included peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and crisis management. More recently, NATO has become involved in international efforts that cross continents and take NATO forces far from the North Atlantic area such as countering cyber attacks, counterterrorism, organized crime and drugs, and energy policy.¹² There is concern that by involving itself in these types of missions, NATO is treading into areas historically handled by diplomats, law enforcement, civilian government agencies, and the commercial sector.¹³ But if these types of missions are the future of NATO, then it serves the Alliance well to become more deeply involved with the “broader international community.”¹⁴ Operations in Afghanistan have already provided valuable experience in this area.

The question of NATO’s relevancy in the post-Cold War world was already an important one for the Alliance even before the U.S. announced its pivot to Asia. But the U.S. cannot be everywhere all the time. And with defense budgets tight throughout Europe and North American, and the U.S. focused on Asia, NATO will simply not be able to be involved in as many operations as in the past. This puts the Alliance in a difficult position, as there seems to be no shortage of threats, conflicts, and humanitarian crises to respond to. Current events in Syria and Mali, for example, have the potential to affect NATO interests. But as the operations in Libya in 2011 showed, NATO is still needs significant military assistance from the U.S. to successfully complete even a small military operation. The hard truth for the non-U.S. members of the Alliance is that “From now on, America will behave like any other ally, sitting out some of NATO’s wars” as it shifts its national security focus to the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁵

The one mission that appears to take NATO back to its roots as a defensive military organization is ballistic missile defense. The U.S. is working through the Alliance to build a

ballistic missile defense system that will defend members from ballistic missiles fired from rogue states or terrorists. Russia objects to parts of the system being deployed in European countries so close to its border and feels that the system neutralizes its own nuclear deterrence forces. But NATO leaders, however, believe the potential for a ballistic missile threat against the one or more members of the Alliance justifies the cost and the strain on NATO's relationship with Russia. A single missile launch would most likely lead to Article 5 consultations and possibly even military operations against the source of the missile.¹⁶

In November 2009, in a speech in Beijing, former NATO Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero told the audience "NATO does not wish to play the role of global policeman."¹⁷ Given the declining defense budgets of its members and fact that its most economically and militarily powerful member has decided to focus on Asia, it is unlikely NATO would be able to perform the role of global policeman even if it so desired. But there may be another explanation for what some see as the decline of the West in general and NATO in particular. Simon Serfaty argues that the world may be entering a "post-Western" era, where a "consensus has emerged about an inevitable and irreversible shift away from the United States and the West."¹⁸ This is due not so much to a decline of the U.S. and other Western countries, but more to do with the rise of other economic and military powers such as China, India, Brazil, and Turkey.¹⁹ If this is true, it appears that that U.S. is shifting to Asia at the right time to take advantage of the economic and security opportunities. Where this leaves NATO and its European members is unsure at this time.

Questions about its relevancy have surrounded NATO since it won the Cold War and the Soviet Union was no more. Over two decades later, those questions have not been fully answered and the issue has only become more complicated. Missions that NATO currently performs, such

as defending members against cyber attack and countering piracy off the coast of Africa, could hardly have been imagined when the original twelve members signed the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. How will the Alliance retain its relevance in the years ahead since the “NATO allies have fewer security interests in common now that the Soviet threat is gone?”²⁰ Add to this, the fact that there are now 28 countries that must work together for common security interests makes it even more difficult. And now the U.S., NATO’s largest and most economically and militarily powerful member is turning its attention to the other side of the world. And as will be presented next, NATO has a host of internal challenges to overcome as well if it is to remain relevant and solvent in the years ahead.

Threats to NATO

NATO faces a number of what could be best described as “internal threats,” what Phillip Cuccia defines as an event or political decision that “threatens the integrity of the alliance.”²¹ These types of threats include the unwillingness or inability of many members to contribute their fair share monetarily or operationally, demographic and political factors, and the overreliance on the U.S. by many NATO members. Many of these challenges were difficult enough to attempt to overcome and now the Alliance, particularly the non-U.S. members, must determine a way forward with a diminished American presence.

Of all the internal challenges that NATO must deal with, the one with the most potential to strain relations among members is the unequal contributions and declining defense budgets of members. In his last speech as Secretary of Defense in June 2011, Robert Gates, speaking in Brussels, took the opportunity to stress to NATO members that the Alliance faces “the very real possibility of collective military irrelevance” and if other members do step forward to take on more of the burden, he predicts “a dim, if not dismal future for the transatlantic alliance.”²²

Simply put, NATO currently has more members that consume security rather than produce it. Interestingly, it is in this same speech that the former Secretary of Defense mentions that the U.S. was going to engage and invest in Asia more in the coming years.²³ Less than two months after Mr. Gates' speech, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy echoed similar sentiments. France is one of only a handful of NATO members (Greece, Turkey, the U.S. and U.K. being the others) which consistently spends the agreed upon 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense spending.²⁴ Additionally, France, along with the United Kingdom, took a greater leadership role in the military operations in Libya so Mr. Sarkozy felt empowered to speak from a position of leadership as well as having experienced first hand the lack of participation on the part of many NATO members during the Libya operation when once again, the U.S. had to provide vital capabilities the other members lacked. Why is NATO having this problem?

The global economic crisis hit Europe especially hard. In many European countries "voters are typically ambivalent about defense spending even in good times" so during a global recession defense budgets will surely shrink even more.²⁵ According to Tomas Valasek of the Centre For European Reform, "Many Europeans seem to lack in their DNA the sense of global responsibility that drives US foreign policy; they simply want to be a big Switzerland: prosperous and safe, but reluctant to worry about problems in other parts of the world."²⁶ The shrinking defense budgets, lack of participation in operations and generally negative attitudes by some members even while engaging in operations (Germany in Afghanistan, for instance) seem to back up these views. NATO has become a "two-tiered alliance," one in which some members bear most of the heavy burdens and do the hard work while the others choose not to share in the risks and the costs.²⁷

NATO has developed a major initiative to help ensure it retains all of the capabilities it needs to perform its core tasks of collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security, despite the strained defense budgets of many of its members. The program is called Smart Defense. Established at the NATO Lisbon summit in 2010, Smart Defense is based on aligning national security priorities of the individual members with those of Alliance. This ensures NATO, through cooperation and coordination of its member states, possesses the required capabilities to meet its obligations while minimizing duplication and maximizing cost effectiveness. It is a way for NATO members to contribute to the Alliance by leveraging existing national strengths. States that already possess or specialize in a certain capability will retain it and share it across the Alliance, saving other members from having to spend the time and money to develop and operate it themselves. One example of Smart Defense is the Czech Republic's taking the lead role for the Alliance's defense against nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.²⁸ As of October 2012, there were 24 Smart Defense programs in various stages of development.²⁹ NATO has also aligned Smart Defense with a similar program within the E.U. broadly called pooling and sharing.

There is little doubt the Smart Defense program will enable NATO to retain key capabilities in a more efficient and cost-saving manner, but there are also some concerns that come with it. Some U.S. diplomats accuse the Smart Defense program simply of being a “smokescreen obscuring defense cuts” and a method for some NATO members to get around having to raise defense funding.³⁰ Defense spending by the European members of NATO has declined by 20 percent since the end of the Cold War.³¹ Former Secretary of Defense Gates, in his speech in Brussels, said, “While it is clear that NATO members should do more to pool military assets, such ‘Smart Defense’ initiatives are not a panacea. In the final analysis, there is

no substitute for nations providing the resources necessary to have the military the Alliance needs when faced with a security challenge.”³² It is unclear what role, if any, the U.S. will play in Smart Defense.³³

Another way NATO is hoping to develop and retain its capabilities is by allowing member states to use the Alliance’s common funds to pay for their acquisition. Normally, the common funds are used for common-owned infrastructure and operational expenditures.³⁴ But as operations in Afghanistan wind down, there is a push to use those funds to assist to acquire the needed capabilities. The idea was gaining support within the Alliance but no decision had been made as of October 2012.³⁵

Ultimately, each and every member of NATO will have to make the conscious decision to increase defense spending if the Alliance is to possess all of the capabilities it needs perform its missions. This may be very difficult, as “most Europeans still don’t see a threat that justifies increased defense spending” and are not comfortable with NATO’s involvement in operations like those in Afghanistan and Libya.³⁶ Old fashioned politics and commercial interests can get in the way as in the case of the seemingly beneficial merger between the Franco-German aerospace giant EADS and BAE, the U.K.’s largest defense contractor. The merger collapsed in October 2012 over objections by business leaders associated with EADS through the German government. The failure of the merger was seen by many as a failure by NATO’s three most important European members to lead the way in integrating and sharing the acquisition of defense capabilities and reducing redundancy.³⁷ In the end, in this case, the best interests of shareholders overcame those of national security. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen summed up best the challenges the Alliance faced acquiring the necessary military capabilities when, in October 2012, he urged members of the Alliance to increase defense

spending as soon as the economy begins to recover “[B]ecause security is the basis of prosperity. Some argue that we cannot afford it. But I say that we cannot afford to be without it.”³⁸

There are demographic and political factors at work that also threaten NATO from the inside. Many countries across Europe face a rapidly aging population, likely altering their societies in significant ways. The most obvious effect of an aging population is the states will have to find a way to pay for the generous social welfare benefits enjoyed in many European countries. Once the global economy recovers from the crisis of the last 5 years, many countries are likely to continue having a difficult time raising defense budgets while they pay for the large numbers of seniors. In addition to the financial concerns, there is the question whether many of these countries will have the amount of men and women with the right skills to adequately staff their military forces.³⁹ Many countries in Europe are experiencing a large wave of immigrants, both legal and illegal, from Muslim countries. Since many of the current conflict areas in the world are in predominantly Muslim countries, there is the potential for the Muslim immigrants to play a large role in how some of the NATO members respond to a crisis involving Muslim countries. Turkey, NATO’s important secular Muslim member, could play a significant leadership role in such a situation or conversely be put in a very difficult position between its NATO responsibilities and a Muslim country.⁴⁰ As NATO continues to expand, the potential for disagreements among member states increases. Coming to agreement on defense policy between 28 sovereign states is a tremendous diplomatic challenge. The fact that Greece and Turkey, NATO members since 1952, can put aside their substantial differences for the common good of the Alliance is a testament to the values and solidarity on which the Alliance was built.

As the U.S. pivots to Asia, NATO, and the non-U.S. members in particular, must solve some of its internal problems. Presently, many NATO members lack the will and the capability

to operate in the security environment in which NATO finds itself today. The U.S. has made it very clear that the majority of members must contribute more to the Alliance. NATO has the ability to solve many of its internal problems if it has the will. And it must because there will be no shortage of external threats in the future.

The external threats to NATO can come from anywhere at any time, from states and non-state actors alike. Cyber attacks, terrorism, piracy, and transnational criminal organizations are just a few of these threats. But over twenty years after the end of the Cold War, NATO is still trying to determine if Russia is a threat to it or not. For its part, NATO wishes for “a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia.”⁴¹ But Russia continues to provide mixed signals as to its actual intentions. One of the early initiatives of the Obama administration was to “reset” relations with Russia, essentially a diplomatic “do-over.” For a number of reasons, the “reset” changed very little. So NATO and Russia are left to decide whether they are friend or foe and just what kind of relationship they will have in the future.

The most contentious issue between NATO and Russia is the matter of the former’s development of a ballistic missile defense system and the placement of components of that system in eastern Europe and Turkey, right on Russia’s doorstep. Despite NATO’s insistence that the missile system is purely defensive and is to counter missile launches from rogue states or terrorists, Russia objects to this system because it feels the system can potentially counter Russia’s own ballistic missile deterrent force. The disagreement over the missile defense system threatens to begin a new arms race in Europe that no one can afford, financially or politically. In June 2012, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said, on the subject of NATO’s missile shield, “You must understand that if a soldier gains a shield, this his opponent has two options: to gain a shield also or to gain a larger weapon.”⁴² Russia has also threatened to deploy

the Iskander mobile ballistic missile system to the Kaliningrad area, a part of Russia situated between Poland and Lithuania.⁴³ While these moves very well be only political posturing by the Russian, NATO must figure out what, exactly, are Russia's goals regarding the missile defense question.

There are areas where common interests have brought cooperation between NATO and Russia. For its part, Russia has been mostly supportive of NATO's efforts in Afghanistan, even allowing non-combat supplies heading to Afghanistan to travel through Russian territory. Russia also has to deal with Muslim extremists in Chechnya and in the bordering central Asian and Caucasus areas and it considers NATO's operations in Afghanistan as part of the larger effort against Islamic insurgents. But even this topic has brought disagreements as Russia has criticized NATO's "artificial 2014 exit timetable" as potentially dangerous and NATO should stay until the Afghan national forces are fully prepared to defeat the insurgents on their own.⁴⁴

It is proof of the very high level of distrust that built up between the Soviet Union, dominated by Russia, and the West during that Cold War that over twenty years later, NATO and Russia are still unsure of each other's intentions. As it has watched as NATO has welcomed new members that were once part of the Warsaw Pact or part of the Soviet Union itself, Russia must still believe that NATO is "an anti-Russian alliance."⁴⁵ For its part, Russia has done little to earn the trust of the West. It has consistently gone against the interests of the West in the United Nations (U.N.), occupies parts of Georgia, criticizes but contributes little to the operations in Afghanistan, and threatens to deploy offensive missiles on NATO's doorstep. In some ways, Russia acts like it wants to be a cooperative partner with NATO and the West. In June 2011, Russia offered a solution to the missile defense question by where Russia and NATO would

share information and be responsible for certain sectors in case of a rogue ballistic missile launch.⁴⁶ As of October 2012 NATO had not responded to the Russian offer.

While Russia is part of European and Asian continents, Russia has historically been a European power. But it has often had “an odd mixture of mistrust of, reliance on, and attraction to the West.”⁴⁷ What Russia seems to want most is for NATO and the West to treat it as an equal in the national security and economic arenas. The West, however, still does not trust Russia as it sees too many areas where their policies and values diverge. Russia protests as NATO includes states formerly in Russia’s sphere of influence but it strongly opposes joining NATO because it feels membership in the Alliance would restrict its sovereignty and independence in foreign policy.⁴⁸ And to complicate the situation further, Russian President Vladimir Putin in September at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok, Russia, on the Russian Pacific coast, announced Russia’s own “pivot” to Asia. While Mr. Putin’s comments were kept strictly to economic matters in line with APEC’s focus, the fact that his announcement was made in Vladivostok, the location of Russia’s largest Pacific naval base, the same year as the American “rebalance to the Asia-Pacific” begins to take shape is not a coincidence. Add to this the fact that the city of Vladivostok is undergoing a number of massive development and improvement projects, it is easy to see that Russia is already preparing for increased contacts in the Pacific.⁴⁹ Is Russia turning away from the West and toward the East for its security? Is Russia’s “pivot” a counter to the U.S. focus on Asia or China’s growing strength, or both, or neither? What will be NATO’s response to Russia’s own “pivot” to the Pacific? While Russia may not pose a direct threat to NATO as the Soviet Union once did, its relationship with NATO and the West in the future will go a long way toward the security of the North Atlantic area as well as the Pacific.

A Closer Look at the Pivot

To determine potential affects on NATO of the U.S. “pivot,” it is necessary to analyze it further. While it will take many years for the U.S. to reposition its diplomatic, economic, and military assets toward the Pacific, the moves that have already been made can begin to show how they will affect the nearly 64-year-old alliance. The U.S. “pivot” actually began with the election of President Barack Obama, a man born in Hawaii and having stronger personal ties to Asia than Europe. But the Asia-Pacific region had already been growing in important for quite some time before the 2008 U.S. election. China has been a rising economic and military power for nearly two decades but the world outside East Asia hardly noticed as the focus was on the Balkans, the Middle East, and the global battle against terrorism.

It is not only China, but India, Indonesia, and Singapore are among the Asian countries currently helping to drive the world economy. The U.S. sees vast untapped potential for markets and goods in the Asia-Pacific region. And while much of the U.S. interest in Asia-Pacific is economic, those interests must be defended with a military presence. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote in her November 2011 *Foreign Policy* article, “Asia’s economic growth over the past decade and its potential for continued growth in the future depends on the security and stability that has long been guaranteed by the U.S. military.”⁵⁰ This became the military “rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region” in the January 2012 U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance.⁵¹ In both cases, care was taken to ensure that the U.S. would remain engaged with its European partners, its “traditional allies” and “partner[s] of first resort.”⁵² But considering its own current and future defense budget constraints and the range of potential threats in the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. simply may not be able to meet all of its commitments in both Europe and Asia.

The U.S. has already announced some of the moves as the military “rebalances” to Asia. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, in his statement following the release of the Defense Strategic Guidance, said “The U.S. military will increase its institutional weight and focus on enhanced presence, power projection, and deterrence in Asia-Pacific.”⁵³ To that end, the U.S. has already begun these moves. The Navy will position 60 percent of its ships (up from 50 percent) in the Asia-Pacific region by 2020. It also is stationing a number of its new Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) in Singapore to lend a consistent U.S. military presence in the vital Strait of Malacca area. Also, the Marine Corps will deploy a contingent of 2500 Marines to Darwin, Australia, in addition to its already strong presence in the region.⁵⁴ The Army is looking to increase its footprint in the Asia-Pacific, as well. As the Army rotates out of Afghanistan and begins to drawdown its size, Army leaders have positioned it to use the valuable experience it gained during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan to work with U.S. partners in the Pacific.⁵⁵ In Europe, the Army has announced plans to reduce its permanent presence from four to two brigades.⁵⁶

The Air Force along with the Navy and Marine Corps developed the Air-Sea Battle (ABS) concept to counter the anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities of potential adversaries. The ABS concept would most be most likely used against a country like China that possesses significant A2/AD capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. There is concern, however, that the U.S. moves will lead to an Asian arms race or make an already tense security situation worse. Many of the countries in Asia-Pacific already have been increasing defense spending for years, going against the trend in many other parts of the world, such as Europe, for example, that have been decreasing defense budgets since the start of the global recession or even earlier. In fact, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, military spending in Asia is

likely to overtake that of Europe for the first time in history.⁵⁷ The U.S. claims that defense cuts will not affect its force posture in Asia. If this is true, then one can assume that the cuts will come elsewhere, in areas like the Middle East and Europe.⁵⁸

The U.S. “pivot” leaves NATO facing a great deal of uncertainty. Nearly every NATO country, including the U.S., is cutting its defense budget. The 2011 Libya operation, while successful, exposed the reality that the Alliance cannot engage in such an operation without its largest and most important member. The U.S., for its part, has ended the conflict in Iraq and is preparing to drawdown operations in Afghanistan. Budget realities are forcing the American military to cut force levels and cut programs. And in this time of tight defense budgets, the U.S. has begun its pivot, or “rebalance” to the military, shifting additional forces to the Asia-Pacific region while pledging no defense cuts will affect its Pacific forces. Where does this leave NATO? The Alliance has been struggling to find a core mission since the end of the Cold War, has always relied disproportionately on the U.S., and has been dealing with the affects of the global economic crisis for a half decade. What is the future of NATO during and after the U.S. pivot? Three scenarios seem most likely; NATO follows the lead of the U.S. and increases its engagement in Asia-Pacific region, the Alliance “rebalances” itself to focus primarily on Europe and a country other than the U.S. take on a strong leadership role, or NATO, lacking leadership, a mission, and political will, simply dissolves.

NATO in the Time of the Pivot

Philip Cuccia, in his 2010 monograph *Implications of a Changing NATO*, presented four possible scenarios for the future of NATO; U.S. leadership would increase, U.S. leadership decreases, E.U. leadership increases, or the Alliance breaks apart.⁵⁹ But Mr. Cuccia was writing

before the release of NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, before the U.S. officially announced its pivot to Asia, and before the full effects of the global recession were realized. The U.S. is unlikely to increase its leadership role in NATO while it focuses on the Asia-Pacific. Likewise, the E.U., particularly while the global economic crisis continues to hit Europe hard, is in no position to take on a leadership role in the Alliance. Where does NATO go in the future? The three scenarios presented above will be discussed in further detail.

There are conflicting views as to whether NATO will follow America's lead and become more engaged in Asia-Pacific with the U.S. With Europe mostly peaceful and stable, NATO will need to take on a more global role if it is to remain a force for democracy and freedom. Many of the missions that NATO has expanded to include over the years, such as cyber security, piracy, and counter-proliferation, bring NATO forces outside of its traditional European operating area. A further shift to Asia-Pacific would not seem to be completely out of character if the Alliance were to do such a thing. In 2009, former NATO Secretary Claudio Bisogniero discussed the potential for closer cooperation between NATO and China as well as NATO's increased efforts to "deepen our dialogue and cooperation with countries here in the Asia-Pacific region."⁶⁰ NATO is prepared to adapt to the American pivot with a more flexible and global approach.⁶¹ And what better way to counter Russia's own pivot to Asia but with the alliance that knows Russia better than anyone else? But it is debatable whether the fiscal and political realities will allow the Alliance to become involved in Asia-Pacific along with the U.S. There seems to be little political will on the part of many of the NATO members to adequately fund their defense budgets for operations closer to home and it is therefore unlikely NATO will increase engagement in Asia-Pacific except in cases where it may affect directly member states, such as piracy or terrorism. But NATO, and by extension much of Europe, may not be able to afford not

to become more involved in Asia, as the economic interests and security challenges may simply be too great to ignore.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has argued since taking office that NATO must be more global. He has pushed NATO to embrace missions that force it to engage with partners around the world and with initiatives like Smart Defense he has positioned NATO to become more expeditionary than static.⁶² Current NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow has made similar claims, remarking that better connectivity with Asia is in the best interests of both the U.S. and Europe.⁶³ NATO already has strong relationships with many partners in Asia including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Many of NATO's Asian partners have played significant roles in operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Therefore, increased engagement by NATO in Asia in the future would not be totally incongruous with its past. But while the U.S. and NATO leaders look toward Asia-Pacific as part of NATO's future, it will be up to the other 27 non-U.S. members of the Alliance to muster the political will and appropriate defense funding to make such a shift a reality. This may be impossible to do given the poor economic state of many of NATO's members. In the end, NATO may decide that its best course of action is to go back to its roots as a purely defensive organization for the security of its members in the North Atlantic area.

Considering the current economic and political environment, NATO may ultimately choose to go back to the mission it was founded on, that of guarding the security of its members in Europe and North America. Granted, much has changed since then. The Soviet Union no longer exists and there are now 28, not 12, members to defend. But NATO has been engaged in Afghanistan for a number of years. There is still the potential for conflicts in Europe. And while the Soviet Union does not exist, the very unpredictable Russia, the engine of the Soviet Union, is

still very much alive. But while the U.S. pivots to Asia, what country would fill the leadership vacuum left by the U.S.? Would one of the historical European powers such as France, Germany, or the U.K. be able or willing to take on such a role? Perhaps another NATO member, such as Turkey, would step up into a leadership role.⁶⁴

Germany would seem to be the logical choice for a country other than the U.S. to take a leadership role in NATO. Germany's economy is stable as any in Europe and militarily Germany has been more involved in expeditionary military operations since the 1999 Kosovo operations after purposely avoiding them since the end of World War II. Germany has been a valuable contributor to NATO's operations in Afghanistan, as well. The rest of the Eurozone has looked to Germany for assistance with stabilizing some of the more troubled economies such as Greece. However, Germany also seems to be following a foreign policy somewhat separate from NATO and the rest of Europe. Germany did not participate in the operations in Libya. Germany has requested a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. While Germany remains a world economic power, its defense budget continues to decline. At least in terms of economics, Germany may be outgrowing Europe and looking to other areas of the globe for markets. History may be against Germany taking more of a leadership role in NATO. Lord Ismay, the first NATO secretary general, said NATO was created "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."⁶⁵ A more assertive Germany would likely make many countries in Europe, including Russia, very uncomfortable. And, at least militarily, it "hardly seems as if Germany wants to become a great power again."⁶⁶ Germany is likely to play a large role in shaping NATO's future, whether it becomes more engaged in the Alliance or less engaged. As George Robertson and Tomas Valasek of the Centre for European Reform write, "Germany makes the crucial difference between Europe being a middle military power or a great one."⁶⁷

The success of 2011 NATO operation in Libya could vault France or the U.K. into greater leadership roles within the Alliance. These two countries “by virtue of their military might, are the most likely leaders” and “have inherited America’s old job of haranguing other allies to reform their militaries.”⁶⁸ France’s success seems to have validated former President Nicolas Sarkozy’s decision to have France rejoin NATO’s military command in 2009.⁶⁹ France is one of only a handful of European NATO members to meet the agreed upon 2 percent of GDP for defense spending. But France has a new government, and there is uncertainty whether new President Francois Hollande will continue his predecessor’s policies regarding NATO and national defense. The U.K. is often seen as more closely aligned with the U.S. than with the rest of Europe. While the U.K. may have the capability and the will to take a larger leadership role in NATO, it seems unlikely that it would stray too far from U.S. policy to do such a thing. Perhaps NATO won’t need another country to fill the leadership void left by a U.S. focused on Asia. NATO may be less likely to be drawn into U.S. conflicts if there is more separation between the two. But what if NATO must conduct a military operation without the U.S.? The Libya operation proved that the Alliance isn’t prepared for that eventuality. Time will tell if NATO needs the U.S. more or the alternative.

The last and most drastic scenario is NATO cannot overcome the lack of a clear mission, meager defense budgets, and the U.S. shift to the Pacific and simply dissolves. How could this happen? First, the national security interests of the U.S. and the rest of NATO diverge to the point where their differences outweigh their common interests.⁷⁰ This may be happening already with the U.S. pivot to Asia-Pacific. What follows may be a “hub and spoke system” in which the European countries rush to establish strong bilateral ties to the U.S.⁷¹ The different, and occasionally competing foreign policy goals between the 28 NATO members could be enough to

drive a large enough wedge between them to break apart the alliance. What if Germany takes a leadership role? What if Germany does NOT take a leadership role? While Germany cannot simply pick up and leave central Europe, it can take its strong economy and find other strong economies with which to do business. If NATO dissolved, it is possible the E.U., with its own security and defense policy, would pick up the mantle of collective European defense.⁷² But the E.U. is not on strong ground, either, and is at risk itself of falling apart.

Conclusion

For now, NATO continues to move forward and attempts to find solutions to its many ills. The strong bond between the 28 members of NATO endures. America is rebalancing to Asia, although slowly and cautiously. NATO, and in particular France and the U.K., is pleased with the success of the Libya operations while also accepting that there are many areas for improvement. The Alliance continues to search for the right mission(s) to give it the strong feeling of purpose that it felt for 45 years during the Cold War. In the U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance, the same document that announced the U.S. rebalance to Asia-Pacific, are these words: “The United States has enduring interests in supporting peace and prosperity in Europe as well as bolstering the strength and vitality of NATO, which is critical to the security of Europe and beyond.”⁷³ While the U.S. may be shifting its focus to Asia, it is unlikely to abandon its commitments to NATO. But it may not be able to lead and participate in every NATO operation as it has in the past until Libya. The U.S. has made very clear to the other NATO members that they must take on their share of the security burden, for in the end “NATO will be as strong or as weak as the Europeans choose to make it.”⁷⁴

APPENDIX A

Table 1. NATO Member Countries and the Year Each Gained Membership

Country	Year
Belgium	1949
Canada	
Denmark	
France	
Iceland	
Italy	
Luxembourg	
Netherlands	
United States	
Norway	
Portugal	
United Kingdom	
Greece	1952
Turkey	
Germany	1955
Spain	1982
Czech Republic	1999
Hungary	
Poland	
Bulgaria	2004
Estonia	
Latvia	
Lithuania	
Romania	
Slovakia	
Slovenia	
Croatia	2009
Albania	

Source: Stanley R. Sloan, *Permanent Alliance?: NATO and the Transatlantic Bargain from Truman to Obama*, (London: Continuum, 2010), xiii.

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