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# *Pensando lo imposible*[1]: Why Mexico Should Be the Next New Member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

David G. Haglund

This article is a speculative inquiry into the case for (and to an extent, the case against) Mexican membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). No one today—on either side of the Atlantic—is advocating for Mexico's joining the alliance, nor does this article depend on such advocacy. Rather, the question of Mexico's hypothetical adhesion to the alliance is intended to highlight interests that this country and the members of NATO have in the security realm. The article adopts a point of departure that acknowledges how "impossible," if not absurd, the prospect of Mexican membership must seem to the sentient observer of contemporary security reality. Not too long ago, it was thought impossible that some of today's current allies, including former republics of the Soviet Union, could ever join the Western alliance. The article then proceeds to analyze several "interests" that Mexico might objectively be said to have in NATO membership and examines the case for membership from the alliance perspective, as well as from the perspective of Mexico's North American Free Trade Agreement partners, the United States and Canada.

Este artículo es una búsqueda especulativa sobre el apoyo a (y hasta cierto punto el argumento contra) la membresía de México a la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN). Hoy nadie—en ningún lado del Océano Atlántico—aboga por el ingreso de México a la alianza, y este artículo no se aferra a tal idea. Se pretende más bien pensar en la adhesión hipotética de México a la alianza como una manera de realzar los intereses mexicanos y de los miembros de la OTAN en el área de seguridad. El artículo toma como punto de partida lo "imposible," si no absurdo, que podría parecer al observador sensible de la realidad de la seguridad contemporánea la posibilidad de la membresía mexicana. Hace poco parecía imposible que algunos de los aliados actuales, entre éstos las ex repúblicas de la Unión Soviética, pudieran unirse a la alianza occidental. Entonces el artículo analiza los "intereses" que podría decirse México tiene respecto a su membresía a la OTAN, y también examina dicha membresía desde la perspectiva de la alianza, así como desde la perspectiva de los miembros del Tratado de Libre Comercio de América del Norte (TLCAN), Estados Unidos y Canadá.

## Introduction

In this article, I broach a policy issue that is unusual, or even impossible to conceive. I sketch out a case for Mexico's being considered a candidate for membership in the North American Treaty Organization (NATO). The argument rests upon the alliance not so much as a collective-defense organization, because in this respect Mexico has as little need of NATO as NATO has of Mexico. It is NATO's political rather than its military dimension, especially with respect to what has come to be regarded as "security sector reform" (SSR) that provides the justification for contemplating Mexican membership. I am under no illusion about the current "marketability" of the argument that unfolds in these pages: If there are any voices—in Europe or North America—being raised on behalf of the policy idea I introduce, I have not heard them. I develop the idea in stages, the first three of which mention Mexico mostly in passing, as they are mainly concerned with the current "problem" in transatlantic relations (getting Washington to take the Europeans as seriously as they wish to be taken); the theoretical and policy debates over what NATO's purpose should be, with the Cold War receding into the distant past; and the meaning and promise of SSR as promoted through the enlargement of the alliance. I then bring Mexico more fully into the picture in the two following sections, first asking whether it could qualify for NATO membership and then discussing a set of "interests" that Mexico, its North American partners, and the European allies might have with respect to the membership question.

## A Question of "Relevance"

A geopolitical paradox seems to have worked its way into transatlantic relations in the past few years. It can be stated in the following manner: Some European countries (France in particular) have become more "relevant" factors in the foreign policy of North America—or at least of the two North American countries who have been actively involved in European security for the past several decades: the United States and Canada. At the same time, Europe has become a less-relevant strategic actor. In addition to this central paradox associated with transatlantic relations today, there is an irony: The disappearance of George W. Bush from the center of power in Washington has not wrought the radical improvement in those relations that so many assumed would be in the offing just a few years ago.

For Canada, the ending of the Bush administration has removed much of the "Euro-identity" upsurge much in evidence during the first half of this decade, and especially at the height of the Iraq crisis in 2002 and 2003. Those were years when scholars and others in Canada were searching for evidence that the country remained what they argued it had always been, a "European" kind of place (Bernard-Meunier, 2005; Mérand and Vandemoortele, 2009; Monière, 2004; Resnick, 2005). Elsewhere in the transatlantic world, the election of the much-liked Barack Obama in November 2008 has not led to a recementing of transatlantic ties; if anything, there has been a slackening of those ties, because Europe has come to feel that the new president has shown disrespect for it, and because Obama has not gone out of his way to stroke European egos by making flattering references to the crucial importance of the old continent to the United

States (Volker, 2010). Nearly the opposite, for this president is not averse to being known as the United States' first "Pacific" president, and his administration makes it clear that the country's most important challenges, and perhaps its most important interests as well, are to be found elsewhere than in Europe.

Notes one student of transatlantic relations, the story today is one of "unrequited love" (the Europeans' for Obama) and the continuing shift of wealth and power toward Asia, with the result being that, "For the first time in centuries Europe is no longer history's leading lady" (Greenway, 2010), and though no one in Canada talks of Stephen Harper as being Canada's first "Pacific" prime minister, there can be no mistaking the growing place of that region in Canada's overall grand strategy, including the economic aspects thereof, as well as the increasing Asian demographic presence in Canada, given that the continent now provides more than half of the country's total annual immigration intake (Yu, 2009).

This does not mean that dire scenarios of transatlantic rupture are waiting to unfold, because there are still many reasons for countries on either side of the Atlantic to wish to work more closely together, the mooted "rise" of China being one of these (on the assumption that China represents a threat to shared transatlantic interests). Yet for Canada and the United States, there is a sense that the Europeans have not been "missing any opportunity to miss an opportunity" to make of the old continent a more-viable strategic actor. The qualifier, "strategic," is important, for economically, no one questions that Europe possesses and wields a considerable degree of heft—notwithstanding the current crisis triggered by the fears that Greece might default on, or restructure, its sovereign debt, to be followed by similar action elsewhere among the heavily indebted or otherwise financially troubled European PIIGS (the acronym given to a group of five European Union [EU] members: Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain).

When it comes to translating the EU's economic girth into the capacity to act as a coherent strategic entity, there seems always to be an inverse relationship between Europe's economic presence and its geopolitical one. Some observers go so far as to blame NATO for the scanty profile of Europe as a strategic actor, for in underwriting European security with massive outlays of (mainly) U.S. resources and tax dollars, NATO's very presence is said to be depriving European decision makers of the incentive they need to invest more of their own resources in European defense. The high expectations that many held that the Lisbon treaty would endow the EU with greater strategic significance were dashed almost immediately after the treaty's entry into force on December 1, 2009, when EU member states chose two relatively obscure political figures, Herman Van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton, to represent Europe as its permanent president and its foreign minister, respectively—a choice that was widely interpreted as having been made to protect member states' own national interests rather than to project any coherent European strategic interest. U.S. displeasure with the ongoing underwhelming strategic weight of Europe is no secret, but it should not be imagined that, in Canada, observers have been inattentive to the leadership complexities that remain characteristic of the very pinnacle of power in the EU, likened by one Canadian writer to a "three-headed monster," even though Canada looks more to the EU as an economic partner than a strategic one (Saunders, 2010).

## The Patten Challenge

North American countries do not share identical reasons for their current disenchantment with Europe's lack of geopolitical weight: Washington wants to see a growing European contribution to meeting global security challenges, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, whereas Canada (partly because it is getting set to end its own costly combat mission in Afghanistan) prefers to put the emphasis more on issues of "low" politics than of "high." In either country's case, there is a sense that Europe *qua* Europe should do more to become more "relevant" to them. In Europe, observers have not been blind to the sense that more is expected of the old continent; in Strasbourg in late April 2010, France's secretary of state for European affairs, Pierre Lellouche, bluntly acknowledged this when he complained to a group of reporters about the "continuous retreat of European influence" (Vinocur, 2010).

Long gone are the days when North Americans could explicitly style themselves as "producers" of security while Europeans were "consumers"; today, in both North American capitals, the expectation is that, as a geopolitical problem, Europe has been "solved" and that henceforth the question is not what the North American allies can do for Europe, but what North Americans and Europeans can do together to address whatever common challenges they might be capable of identifying—not necessarily an easy thing for them to accomplish. Recently, one seasoned European policy hand offered his own suggestions for redressing Europe's relevance gap. In an article originally published in the *New York Review of Books* and subsequently reproduced as an op-ed in *Le Monde*, Chris Patten, former EU commissioner of external relations, long-time British politician, and currently chancellor of the University of Oxford—in short, as much of a "Europeanist" as one is likely to find coming out of Britain (or almost any other European country, for that matter)—spelled out what Europe needs to do to get back onto the U.S. radar screen, as well as to begin to punch at its weight, if not above it.

The "Patten challenge" is primarily about Europe's becoming a more capable regional and even global partner of the United States and appears as a list of five policy recommendations. First, Europe should counter the military nuclearization of Iran and work to support democracy in Pakistan, as well as continue to fight alongside the United States in Afghanistan, because doing all these things is in Europe's own interest. Second, the EU members should cool their jets regarding just how "Venetian" they have become and work instead to develop their capacity to project military force, all the more so because of the growing relevance of Africa to their own interests. Third, Europe needs to develop a coherent energy policy to replace the pell-mell drift into even greater dependence on Russia, which now supplies 40% of its natural gas; this dependence blinds Europeans to the challenge Russia poses to certain neighbors, such as Ukraine and Georgia. Fourth, the EU needs to give Ukraine and Turkey a chance to join the club; failure to embrace the latter, "would effectively exclude us from any serious initiative in global affairs." Fifth and finally, Europe should develop a policy on Israel and Palestine that works toward achieving a viable state for the latter, on the condition that it declare a binding ceasefire (Patten, 2010).

Rising to all five items of the Patten challenge would constitute a Herculean undertaking, and accomplishing just one or two of the tasks would be inordi-

nately difficult given the current state of European thinking on security and defense, to say nothing of the ongoing aversion of some public opinion in Europe (particularly in Germany) to countenance the use of force in defense of interests (Von Renterghem, 2010). Still, if Patten might be chided for designing an agenda that is overambitious, he at least can be congratulated for getting to the crux of the problem, which is reversing the slide in European strategic standing. I am going to suggest a way in which the Europeans might, with much less difficulty than that presented in the Patten challenge, make of themselves a more relevant geopolitical actor from the perspective of North America. I use the words "with much less difficulty" in a decidedly guarded sense, for what I will be suggesting remains the kind of initiative that could easily be dismissed as crackpot at best, destructive at worst. My argument is a simple one: Europe can make itself more relevant strategically to the United States and Canada by becoming more involved in the current challenges facing democratic governance in Mexico. How might this be done? I shall attempt to answer this question by introducing into the analysis a transatlantic (and increasingly European) security institution that currently has as much to do with Mexico as the new "Tea Party" phenomenon in the United States has to do with tea. That institution is NATO. Let us see how it might play a part in making Europe (including the EU) more relevant to North American security.

## Now for Something Completely Different

Some readers might recall a British television comedy that ran from 1969 to 1974, "Monte Python's Flying Circus." Because of the general zaniness of its story lines, this creative and highly intelligent series gave birth to a new word, "Pythonesque," to refer to something that is improbable to the point of being ludicrous, although usually entertaining. It is with all due apologies to the creators of that show that I introduce in this section what might be taken as the ultimate in Pythonesque recommendations, the "completely different" thought that perhaps Mexico should be considered a potential member of NATO and that the Europeans might benefit from promoting such a consideration because it would make of Europe something it rarely if ever has been in modern times: a potential contributor to managing a *North American* security problem—a producer, rather than a consumer, of security.

When thoughts turn to NATO, sober analysis has often been known to fly out the window, and my article may well be no exception. Sometimes, as during the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, we have been told that NATO itself would follow the Soviet Union into oblivion, as it no longer had a purpose. Sometimes we were told just the opposite, that NATO was going to become a fully "globalized" institution and in the process would supplant the United Nations as the only "universal" security organization worth its salt. One eminent U.S. specialist in international relations wrote in an issue of *Foreign Affairs* that NATO must reach out and embrace as its next and final new member none other than Russia and thereby bring to an end its decades-long process of enlargement (Kupchan, 2010). Perhaps the Mexico-in-NATO question that I broach in this article looms as even more of an oddity than any of the above three policy assertions. After all, in an alliance that constantly ties itself into knots trying to figure out what its "area"

is, Mexico would certainly seem to be a geographical as well as strategic outlier, residing in that conceptual never-never land that in NATO parlance gets styled, "out of area." Besides, countries cannot be dragooned into the alliance; they have to want to join, and one would be hard-pressed to find enough Mexicans who have ever given serious thought to NATO to fill a small seminar room.

But let us suspend disbelief and simply treat the postulation of Mexico-in-NATO as a "thought experiment." At the very least, in probing why the prospect of Mexico's joining NATO may be tantamount to thinking the impossible, we might be able to shed some comparative light on two matters that are of immediate relevance to those interested in security relations between North America and Europe. The first concerns the nature and purposes of NATO in the two decades since the ending of the Cold War, and the second highlights some security challenges of a country that happens to be, apart from Canada, the only next-door neighbor of the world's number one power. Because of its geographical setting, Mexico shares with the United States a variety of economic and societal challenges, and to some in Washington, it even looms as the next great "failed state" on the U.S. security horizon. According to a study produced by the U.S. Joint Forces Command, there are two plausible, albeit worst-case, scenarios requiring policy consideration, and both concern an important U.S. partner turning into a "failed" state. One is Pakistan, and the other is Mexico, and with respect to the latter, the study's authors foresee that "any descent . . . into chaos would demand an American response based on the serious implications for homeland security alone" (Debusmann, 2009).

Although the nightmare scenario of Mexico's "failing" looks highly unlikely, there can be no question that the United States' southern neighbor has been emerging increasingly as a security problem in a way not glimpsed since the Mexican Revolution during the early decades of the 20th century. Notes one of the best known of foreign correspondents from the United States, Thomas Friedman, "We take the Mexican-American relationship for granted. But with the drug wars in Mexico turning into Wild West shootouts on city streets and with our own immigration politics turning more heated, what's happening in Mexico has become much more critical to American foreign policy and merits more of our attention" (Friedman, 2010). It may not be Pakistan or Afghanistan, but Mexico is not showing signs of becoming the kind of country that is consistent with modern conceptions of regional zones of peace shared by cognate liberal democracies.

What I said above about Mexicans' attitudes toward NATO membership—namely that there is no policy advocacy for it—applies just as much to attitudes within NATO member-states: No one on either side of the Atlantic is plumping for Mexico's joining the alliance. Few would even mention Mexico and NATO in the same breath. That being said, my argument here does not really depend on any such advocacy being voiced. Nor should the apparent absurdity of Mexico's hypothetical adhesion to the alliance be grounds for cutting short the inquiry. It was not many years ago that the idea of Soviet allies someday becoming U.S. or Canadian allies looked to be equally silly, if not even more unthinkable. Since this article can be taken to be a thought experiment, let us simply proceed to conjure up a set of "interests" in Mexico City and Brussels (where NATO is headquartered) that might be served through Mexican mem-

bership in the alliance. In short, let us weigh some pros and cons of a policy idea that, to date, simply has no constituency because it has never been articulated. As a backdrop to such a cost–benefit articulation, we need first to make a conceptual and theoretical detour through the post-Cold War decade's debate about what NATO should be "for" and how it might function as a central institution of international security.

## What Should NATO Be "For"?

In his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy challenged his fellow Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." We might paraphrase this enjoinment and apply it to NATO's predicament in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War's ending, a time when it very much appeared that the alliance needed to find an alternative means of sustaining ongoing relevance. Among the options bruited as a way to endow NATO with a new lease on life, and one of great centrality to the hypothetical matter of Mexican membership, was a concept that would come to be known as SSR. Regarding this emerging rubric, more than a few theorists and policy makers alike were beginning to ask in the early 1990s, "What can it do for NATO?"

Their curiosity was piqued at a moment when the alliance was casting about for new roles to replace a collective-defense mandate whose salience was rapidly diminishing. Into the yawning conceptual void would appear a new mandate of a sort, taking shape around the growing recognition that NATO might find a vocation in helping spread democratic practices throughout a part of Europe that had until then been considered "outside" of its area of interest and operations. In fairly quick order, the alliance would evolve a set of SSR norms that would manifest themselves as key guidelines for its partnership and enlargement programs. Admittedly, it would take until 1998 for the emerging concept finally to be baptized as SSR, in a policy address given by a member of Tony Blair's cabinet, Clare Short (Law, 2004). Nevertheless, the deeds that the name depicted had been becoming ever more widespread during the first few years of the post-Cold War decade, a time when NATO was acting more and more as a promoter of SSR, albeit doing so in the manner of Molière's *Monsieur Jourdain*—doing something without exactly being able to name what it was doing.

SSR would evolve through two "generations" (Edmunds, 2002). The primary objective of the first was to ensure civilian control over the military in a variety of recent Soviet allies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), countries that the Western democracies would somehow need to embrace; at this time, SSR was virtually synonymous with "civil–military relations," and CEE countries such as Romania were among the earliest testing grounds for the concept (Yusufi, 2004, p. 16). The second generation witnessed a conceptual evolution, with SSR moving out of the civil–military orbit and increasingly concerning itself with assuring effectiveness in "governance" across a wide variety of sectors that might bear little relation to the military but did have a link with security broadly understood (especially the judiciary).

How NATO managed to insert itself into the new SSR world I cover in the following section; here, I wish to revisit the theoretical and policy debates that

were triggered over whether NATO could be expected to have much of a future at all once the Soviet Union had become a thing of the past. Those debates exposed a cruel, even existential, dilemma confronting an alliance that was soon to find its *deus ex machina* in SSR. As a result, over the course of the 1990s, and largely due to its increasing involvement in CEE political and military affairs, NATO established itself as the central cog in Euro-Atlantic SSR initiatives. In so doing, it benefited SSR—but so, too, did SSR benefit it, by endowing the organization with ongoing utility, and therefore relevance.

Quite a few pundits failed to foresee such a beneficial harvest in NATO's short- to medium-term future when they turned their attention to the prophetic arts in the early part of the 1990s. Some well-known international relations theoreticians were effectively pronouncing NATO as dead as its quondam Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) adversary, with the only difference being that the leaders of the Atlantic alliance did not yet realize it. In the trenchant words of Josef Joffe, an alliance without an enemy must quickly begin to resemble "a plant without water" (Joffe, 1995). In the realm of theory, none were more pessimistic than adherents to a school known as "structural realism." Among their ranks no one sounded as much doom and gloom for the alliance as Kenneth Waltz, who so memorably characterized the future in a 1993 quip that "NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are" (Waltz, 1993, p. 76).

The manner in which Waltz described that future left him with some wiggle room, in that he never specified the number of years he expected it to take for NATO to disappear. This epistemological shortcoming he later sought to remedy when, in 2000, he announced that, in reality, NATO had died as a multilateral collective-defense institution and was merely surviving as an adjunct to U.S. grand strategy; henceforth, it would exist "mainly as a means of maintaining and lengthening America's grip on the foreign and military policies of European states" (Waltz, 2000, p. 18). Waltz was only partly correct: NATO might have ceased being an effective institutional provider of what none of the original European member-states thought they still needed by the 1990s, namely U.S. protection against a great power threat, but it had not ceded pride of place in Euro-Atlantic security. Instead, it loomed as the indispensable institution for the provision of a variety of other public goods in the area of security that would be subsumed under the SSR rubric.

If Waltz might be taken to represent the dominant tendency within structural realism to minimize the significance that institutions *qua* institutions can have in transatlantic security relations, it should not be imagined that all international relations theorists were steeped in the same pessimism. As a foil of the structural realists, a group of "institutionalist" theoreticians appeared who evinced much optimism about NATO's future during these same years. Their ebullience would help provide the intellectual buttress for NATO's subsequent embrace of SSR, enabling alliance and member-state policy makers to understand and contextualize the institution's new role as professor in the SSR classroom.

"Institutionalism" is a term that covers a variety of theoretical approaches, and I employ it here primarily to refer to the neoliberal institutionalists, who vigorously dissented from structural realism's pessimism about NATO's future and instead stressed the various ways institutions affected the manner in which member-states perceived their own interests. Like the structural realists, these

theoreticians were "rationalist" in the sense that they too assumed actors to be utility maximizers, and they showed themselves to be just as committed as the realists to the "positivist" pursuit of generating predictions based on knowledge of past behavior (Hellmann and Wolf, 1993). Nevertheless, the institutionalists turned value-maximizing assumptions against the structural realists and argued the ease, not the impossibility, of the alliance's making the transition from collective defense to some other mandate. They did so because they held states to be well suited, on rational grounds, to cooperation, so long as institutional conditions were right. The neoliberals cherish institutions (including "regimes") as the devices by and through which obstacles to cooperation are reduced, or maybe eliminated altogether. In this formulation, NATO plays a key role in inducing cooperation by increasing everyone's incentive to abide by the rules.

If the neoliberal institutionalists are correct, then it follows that worries about NATO's survivability were misplaced all along. Neoliberal predictions regarding that question, made in the early years of the post-Cold War decade, have stood up better than structural-realist ones did, but to address the specific topic of NATO's involvement in SSR, we must bring into the analysis a second theoretical school, for we need to know not only that states might cooperate, but also what it is they choose to cooperate on, and why. Presumably, the institutional inertia that the neoliberals foresaw could have taken the cooperating partners in any number of directions. Why, then, did those cooperating partners within NATO settle upon SSR as a primary function? To answer this, we have to introduce a second major group of optimistic theorists, the social constructivists.

In many ways, this second group of optimists differed profoundly from the first, especially in their rejection of the objectivity of interests and the "primacy of material factors over ideational factors." Rather than seeing states as utility maximizers, social constructivists maintained that, "international actors are committed in their decisions to values and norms and choose the appropriate instead of the efficient behavioural option" (Ratti, 2006, p. 90). But even though they parted company from the institutionalists on value maximization, the constructivists were every bit as committed (some say even more committed) to the idea that institutions have the power to influence outcomes and affect the preferences of states; in their view, organizations such as NATO are nothing less than "constitutive institutions that contribute to shaping actors' identities, values and interests" (Schimmelfennig, 1998/99, pp. 210–211).

Perhaps the most optimistic of all the NATO theoreticians has been Thomas Risse, whose liberal perspective on the alliance is sufficiently constructivist to warrant his being included in this part of the discussion. To Risse, the effect on NATO of its having lost its great Soviet adversary was hardly a profound one. In fact, he said that those such as Joffe who relied on the plant-without-water simile come close to missing the point altogether, namely that the Cold War's ending, far from signaling the end of the alliance, constituted an occasion for it to express its true nature and vocation: as an alliance of liberal democracies with a bright future ahead of it as the primary agent in expanding the transatlantic zone of peace. "The end of the Cold War," Risse asserted in the mid-1990s, "does not terminate the Western community of values, but potentially extends it into Eastern Europe and maybe into the successor states of the Soviet Union, creating a 'pacific federation' of liberal democracies" (Risse-Kappen, 1995, p. 223).

Although it would be a mistake to assume that a desire to enlarge the liberal-democratic zone of peace motivated all NATO watchers, there can be no minimizing the degree to which pursuit of that aim would lead the alliance into the area of SSR, even though it began to embrace the latter in the manner of M. Jourdain, speaking the prose of SSR without really realizing it. Alliance leaders understood what they were trying to achieve, namely to "reinvent" their organization, and they began early in the 1990s to develop the programs that would enable them to fulfill their aims and would come to characterize NATO's SSR profile.

## NATO's Enlargement and SSR

It is hardly possible to overstate the manner in which NATO enlargement inspired the development of first-generation SSR. There is nothing hyperbolic in the observation made by two students of the concept that, "in many countries SSR processes are NATO or NATO Enlargement related" (Matser and Donnelly, 2003, p. 134). In this section, my task is to review how enlargement provided the alliance with a set of policy levers with which it was able to make its important early inroads into SSR and to hint at the most important way in which NATO membership might be of relevance to Mexico's future. In particular, and notwithstanding that they would evolve somewhat between the initial and the most-recent rounds of enlargement, these SSR norms figured centrally in the alliance's declaratory policy governing its own growth, and also established the parameters of first-generation SSR. It is not easy to imagine how SSR would have appeared at all in the Euro-Atlantic region absent the enlargement of the alliance, from its late Cold War membership of 16 to its current one of 28.

NATO's quest for transformation began in earnest when it became obvious by 1990 that the Cold War truly was at an end. The transformative energies ultimately found their source in a refusal by policy makers and (some) theoreticians alike to accept that the demise of the foe to which it owed its existence need render the alliance irrelevant. Soon the search was on for ways in which NATO might reconfigure itself. Quite accurately, one scholar observed that, with the end of the Cold War, "finding something for NATO to do has become a cottage industry in its own right" (Clarke, 1994, p. 42).

For NATO to *do* was for it to continue to *be*. The existential itch was being scratched as early as the alliance's London summit of July 1990, which resulted in what at the time looked to be an extraordinary declaration of intent to reach out to the recent adversaries of the WTO and, in so doing, transform NATO from a predominantly military to an increasingly political organization, whose new "cooperation" mantra and mandate would clear the epistemic track for the alliance to become the powerful locomotive of SSR. The process received a boost toward the close of 1991, with the Rome summit of November and the following month's inaugural meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) (Yerex, 1994).

Although the NACC sought to foster dialogue and cooperation with recent adversaries in the vanished Warsaw pact, this objective proved less easy than it might have originally seemed. Reflecting this difficulty was the adoption at the Rome summit of a new "strategic concept," emphasizing the twin goals of dia-

logue and crisis management (NATO, 1995a, pp. 235–248). Within half a year of that meeting, the alliance would embark on a tentative journey into the world of peacekeeping. Alliance foreign ministers, meeting in ministerial session in early June 1992 in Oslo, announced their conditional willingness to assume peacekeeping assignments on a case-by-case basis under the responsibility of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). A year and a half later, dialogue would be given firmer institutional meaning through the launching of the Partnership for Peace (PfP). The two undertakings would embroil NATO in a new set of challenges and opportunities, as well as contribute to the gathering momentum of 1994 on the alliance's enlargement, the indispensable means by which NATO was eventually to establish its credentials in SSR.

There had been nothing in the first three years of the alliance's transformation dictating that dialogue or crisis management need result in, or even require, an expansion of its membership. When the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin, announced the PfP at Travemünde, Germany, in October 1993, and when the alliance officially embraced it at the Brussels summit of January 1994, it was widely regarded as a means of putting off the issue of enlargement rather than making it an inevitability. More generally, there was nothing in the alliance's entire transformative quest that obliged it to take the decision to enlarge to the east.

To understand why enlargement would become by early 1995 the main issue within alliance councils would require more space than I have available here. Briefly, two member-states—Germany and the United States—each of which came to understand that it had an abiding "national interest" in NATO's growth, largely drove the expansion agenda. They were not the only states to urge NATO to resume a pattern of expansion well established during the Cold War, but they were out in front of the rest in shaping an alliance consensus on the issue, one that the contributions of theorists nourished. It was easy enough to understand why the Germans should desire an alliance presence in the former communist countries lying to the east of the Federal Republic's own "Río Oder" (Mesjasz, 1993, p. 32)—a presence that the defense minister, Volker Rühe, called for in the spring of 1993 in an important address to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London and that the German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, who pithily declared that the "eastern border of Germany cannot forever remain the eastern border of NATO," reiterated the following winter (Kohl, 1994; Rühe, 1993).

What of U.S. interest in expanding NATO? We might almost say that U.S. interest in NATO's enlarging was "overdetermined," in the sense that numerous factors accounted for the decision of the Clinton administration to push ahead with the project. There were domestic ethnic interests to be considered, but their influence has been overstated given the broader geopolitical and ideological stakes involved. The United States wanted to preserve NATO as the premier institutional embodiment of its commitment to multilateralism; it wanted to bow in the direction of German preferences at a time when it seemed the Federal Republic was going to remain the principal security partner of the United States; and it felt an ideological commitment to the newly democratizing countries of Central and Eastern Europe, whose incorporation into the transatlantic community of liberal democracies would do much to spread the Western "zone of peace."

Ensuring that, in enlarging, NATO could secure these geopolitical and ideological objectives required careful consideration of conditions to be imposed on the aspirant membership of the alliance. It would be in the context of that consideration that the regulatory norms of SSR would first see the light of day. The principle of conditionality itself was easy enough to grasp: There were going to be some club dues extracted from the aspirants to membership, which in the first flush of enthusiasm about enlargement was a large group indeed, extending virtually to any "European" state that sought to join, including for a time even Russia. As Charles Pentland wrote apropos conditionality, "Notwithstanding the aura of technical novelty surrounding the term . . . the idea it expresses is as old as politics itself. It captures a bargaining relationship in which one party is in a position consistently to extract disproportionate concessions from another," resulting in the aspirants' being given an offer they "cannot refuse" (Pentland, 2000, p. 64).

The alliance's terms, which in retrospect we now understand to have been the first elaboration of its SSR norms, appeared in the "enlargement study" that was launched in late 1994, nearly a year after NATO leaders made the decision to embark on expansion. Between December 1994 and September 1995, NATO officials pondered how the alliance might increase its membership without at the same time decreasing its effectiveness as a regional security entity. How to do so without weakening the alliance? How to ensure that enlarging NATO contributed to unifying and not dividing Europe? The study's six chapters contained guidelines that were rather general, meaning that there could be no specific thresholds or criteria presented to potential members; this was to be a reality not only of the first post-Cold War round of enlargement, in which Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined, but also of the two subsequent rounds, which brought into the alliance fold Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Still, the study dropped some broad hints as to what NATO expected from any new member. At the very minimum, its military would have to be "interoperable" with that of existing members, which, in view of the legendary problems the original (i.e., Western) allies have had trying to become more interoperable, would turn out not to be much of a hurdle. Much more important was a political condition imposed upon aspirants to membership: that they settle any ethnic, external territorial, or internal jurisdictional disputes in which they might be involved by peaceful means and in accordance with principles established by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the name given to the former CSCE in 1994). The study's authors hinted, none too subtly, that "Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance" (NATO, 1995b, paragraph 6).

Although the political condition was objectively the more important of the two, the interoperability criterion, tempered as it was in the study, would end up generating an intriguing yield of its own because it was going to engage the allies with the aspirants in an ongoing dialogue within the context of the PfP. It was an issue largely if not entirely military in nature, and naturally the uniformed side of the NATO house would take a lead role in "working" it. As a result of a growing culture of dialogue between NATO and aspirant-country military officials, initially constructed around the interoperability issue, it became easier for the alliance to make inroads under the broader rubric of civil–military relations,

which effectively was what SSR was during the concept's first-generation stage. Whereas enlargement of NATO provided the context for the alliance's early successes in SSR, the partnership corollary of expansion itself played a key role. As John Barrett explains,

> In fact, an important element in new members' military contributions will be a commitment in good faith to pursue the objectives of standardization that are essential to alliance strategy and to achieve the minimum level of interoperability required for operational effectiveness. The study advises that new members should concentrate, in the first instance, on interoperability and accept NATO standardization doctrine and policies to help attain this goal. These standards will be based in part on conclusions reached through the PFP Planning and Review Process (PARP). The importance of these points is that they underscore both that the level of interoperability will be particularly relevant in demonstrating preparedness to join NATO and that the PARP will identify and effectively set the criteria in this regard. This is despite the fact that in all other areas the study resists defining fixed criteria. Thus, there is a fairly clear indication that interoperability will be an important first step in a country's advance preparations—at least on the military-technical level. (Barrett 1996, p. 98)[2]

NATO has very much functioned as a political organization, despite (or perhaps because of) its having come into existence mainly as a military organization dedicated to collective defense. With the ending of the ideological struggle against its erstwhile Soviet adversary, NATO began to figure centrally in the reform of the security sectors in a variety of newly emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. It is in the context of SSR that a case can be made for Mexico's joining the alliance. Let us now turn to examining that case, fully cognizant of the reality that there has been absolutely no constituency, on either side of the ocean, in promoting Mexico's adhesion to the Atlantic alliance.

## Is Mexico in NATO's "Area"?

We can begin responding with the apparent constraints that exist to make any Mexican membership in NATO virtually a moot point. Following a presentation of these constraints, I turn matters around and try to establish some reasons why Mexican membership might not be such an outlandish proposition. Let us start with what looks to be the highest barrier to any Mexican membership in the alliance: a "constitutional" prohibition on NATO's part that effectively bars from new membership any countries that do not happen to be physically located in Europe (with the stress being on *new* members, for the non-European signatories of the Washington treaty that established NATO in 1949—namely the United States, Canada, and Iceland—are all "grandfathered").

The alliance has expanded on a half-dozen occasions since 1949, respectively bringing in Greece and Turkey; the Federal Republic of Germany; Spain; Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary; Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria; and most recently, Albania and Croatia. All have been European nations, a fact that is only fitting because the Washington treaty's article 10 extends the welcome mat only to states located on that continent. The relevant passage comes in the first sentence of the article: "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede

to this Treaty" (NATO, 1995a, pp. 233–234). This restriction alone would seem to close the book on any further discussion of Mexico as a future NATO member were it not for one recent development within the alliance: the trend toward creatively interpreting the meaning of the geographical entity known as "Europe." In particular, the development has been associated with controversial discussions as to whether Ukraine and Georgia might be added to the ranks, now that the last two on the list of suitable invitees (Albania and Croatia) have joined. The controversy has swirled largely if not exclusively around the issue of Russian opposition to Ukrainian and Georgian membership, but in the case of Ukraine, at least it can be maintained that it fulfills the geographical criterion.

Things look different when it comes to Georgia, however. The geographical limits of Europe to the east are the Urals; to the southeast, they are the waters separating European Turkey from Asia Minor (the Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles), as well as the line formed by the highest summits of the Caucasus mountains (with lands to the north of that line being in Europe and to the south being in Asia). Save for a small and sparsely populated sliver of territory, Georgia lies entirely to the south of the geographical boundary separating Europe from Asia (i.e., its population resides, as does that of its fellow Caucasian republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, on Asian soil). In one respect it might be said to be like Turkey, "transcontinental." But Turkey's membership in NATO "Europe" has much less to do with its tiny landmass outside of Asia Minor and much more to do with the fact that Europe's largest city, Istanbul, happens to be in Turkey. Things are different with Georgia, meaning that, if Georgia ever were to be admitted to NATO, article 10 would have to be interpreted in a very flexible manner, so that European "culture" and not territory would become a guiding criterion. If so, Armenia would be eligible to join, given that this republic's inhabitants consider themselves Europeans.

Realistically, the entry of Georgia into NATO any time soon must be regarded as a long shot in view of the opposition to its joining expressed by so many of the European allies. But at least the discussion of Georgia highlights the interpretive leeway that exists with respect to article 10. Perhaps the point can best be made with reference to a political cartoon drawn by Patrick Chappatte that appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* on April 4, 2008. Depicted are representatives seated around a NATO table, clearly identifiable by the prominent "Atlantic Alliance" banner displayed on the wall behind them. Seated next to each other at one end of the table are representatives from Georgia and Ukraine; the latter turns to his neighbor and asks, apropos the banner, "What is Atlantic?" (Chappatte, 2008, p. 75). Let us return to article 10 for help in answering a related question, namely "What is NATO's geographic area?" The article in question includes some phraseology that could clear away a geographical obstacle to any future membership bid from Mexico, because in listing as an apparent prerequisite for membership that aspirants must be in a "position . . . to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area," article 10 draws our attention to one geographical asset that Mexico certainly possesses: it, more than many current NATO allies, qualifies as being a *North Atlantic* country.

The waters of NATO's "ocean" (i.e., the northern half of the Atlantic) abundantly wash Mexico's entire eastern shoreline, which is more than can be said for perhaps a dozen of the so-called "North Atlantic" allies, whose relationship to

the alliance's geographic epicenter is tenuous at best and in some cases nonexistent. Sixteen allies can claim to have a coastline on the North Atlantic, interpreted to include the Baltic extension thereof: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Another four member states are clearly in Europe, but are landlocked: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, and Slovakia. There are six member-states whose connection with the North Atlantic can only depend upon the Mediterranean's being considered an extension of that ocean (if so, Syria would be a North Atlantic country as well): Albania, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, and Turkey. This leaves a pair of member-states whose connection to the North Atlantic is even more abstract, as they front not on the Mediterranean but on the Black Sea: Bulgaria and Romania. Although most of the members of NATO can be said to have a connection (direct or indirect) with the ocean that is so closely associated with the alliance's area and its purposes (the latter in the context of the value system called "atlanticism"), there are several for whom establishing a strong connection with the North Atlantic requires imaginative leaps.

Article 10 need not be an insurmountable barrier to Mexico's joining the alliance. Much more relevant are the political "interests" of the NATO membership and Mexico when it comes to thinking about the latter joining with the former. Since there has not been any debate about Mexico entering NATO, discussing interests on either side of the Atlantic requires a bit of induction.

## Mexican, European, and North American "Interests"

We can postulate three categories of advantage that NATO membership might bring to Mexico. First would be the democracy-enhancing credentials of an alliance that has become increasingly associated with the rubric of SSR in the aftermath of the Cold War. The cases of Bulgaria and Romania, regarded as the two most corrupt member states in the alliance and maybe even in all of Europe, should disabuse anyone of the notion that NATO membership is an instant remedy for the ills afflicting crime-ridden political bodies. The case for NATO, and even more so for the European Union, is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary one and rests upon improving the governing "arts" of aspirant states, initially through tapping "conditionality" as a means of levering state decision makers to go in a direction that they might not wish to go in or might not wish to go in so quickly. In this sense, the SSR function of NATO would not in and of itself solve the chronic corruption problem of Mexico, but it would at least constitute a step in the direction of solving it, one that could be followed up with other means of providing alliance and European support to Mexican judicial and law-enforcement entities.

Second, among the interests that motivate states, whether members of NATO or not, is the enhancement of their prestige, or what Charles de Gaulle liked to regard as *rang*. I bring into the discussion the French case advisedly because we often associate de Gaulle with having taken France "out of" NATO, which of course he did not; he merely wanted to use the alliance in such a way as to cut for France a special figure therein, and he thought he accomplished this with his 1966 decision to take France out of NATO's integrated military structure. Nicolas

Sarkozy, France's current president, recently reversed this act (Bozo, 2008). In the society of sovereign states, NATO allies are usually regarded as being among the most-favored participants, and part of that status flows simply from the fact of their membership in the world's most prestigious security club. If this is so, then Mexican prestige on the world stage could only be expected to increase pursuant to NATO membership.

Third, there is the more-important matter of where Mexico chooses to locate its geopolitical "identity": is it primarily a North American country, or is it a Latin American one? If Mexican elites should eventually decide that the country is more North American than anything else, and if there is to be some potential for converting what has been an apparent "regionalization" into something stronger, namely a regional identity, then it could be argued that being a member of the most important security organization to which its other two North American partners belong, NATO, would constitute a means of helping to "complete" Mexico as a North American country.[3]

What can we say of NATO members' interests in allowing Mexico to join? At the very least, they would find the idea more than a bit odd. Still, if Europeans believe NATO should continue to enlarge, they might prefer it to move southward in North America so as not to generate the controversy that expanding it eastward in Europe would stir up. Whatever else Moscow might think about NATO's adding Mexico to its ranks, it certainly could not claim that its security was being put at risk by such an expansion or that it was somehow being "encircled." This alone would allay the anxieties of the Germans and other European allies so eager not to upset Russia and should enable the allies to regard with equanimity NATO's hopping across the Río Grande, and though the Europeans tend to contemplate the alliance in a geographically egocentric way as being primarily "about" Europe, the reality is that, since its very inception, NATO's "area" of coverage has embraced more territory on the North American continent than on the European one. Adding Mexico would not upset a geographical balance that has been a constant feature of the alliance but rather would reconfirm the original balance as between North America and Europe.

There are the questions of cost and downside political risks associated with bringing Mexico into the fold. Since the entire point of the exercise would be to tap whatever SSR assets NATO (and perhaps the EU) might possess, adding Mexico to the alliance would entail no major military commitments and therefore would be unlikely to strain anyone's defense budget. Moreover, since France and some other European allies stress that NATO and the European Security and Defence Policy—or as it has become known since the treaty of Lisbon came into effect, the Common Security and Defence Policy—should no longer be regarded as competing but rather as complementary organizations, Mexico would provide an interesting arena for the two Brussels-based institutions to demonstrate collaboration; SSR is all about "soft power," the currency in which the EU prefers to trade when it deals with security matters.

Insofar as concerns any downside political risk, this would only show up if European involvement in North American political life were to take on the kind of anti-Washington coloration it did in the 1980s, when France and certain other European countries indicated a desire to become more active in the Central American crises of that decade and thereby stirred up the wrath of a

Reagan administration that looked uncharitably on Europeans meddling in what it considered the strategic "backyard" of the United States (Cirincione, 1985; Ledeen, 1985; Pierre, 1985). Such a competition would be unlikely to develop with respect to Mexico for several reasons, not the least of which is that the United States would not only tolerate, but would welcome the support of allies in Europe who evinced an interest in helping Mexico reform its judicial and constabulary organs. By showing support for Washington, the Europeans would go a considerable distance in muting U.S. criticisms of a Europe that did not "get it" when it came to responding to challenges elsewhere than on the old continent. Also, engaging in Mexico would provide an incentive for some European allies to reengage diplomatically with the alliance; one thinks in the first instance of Spain, which would almost certainly be designated the lead agent among the European allies for promoting the cause of Mexican membership.

As for the North American allies, Canada and the United States, what has been said about a North American regional identity for Mexico might also be said for them; should they increasingly interpret their geopolitical identity in terms of regional North American considerations (hardly a foregone conclusion, for Canada or the United States), then it would follow that a Mexico in NATO would be, for them, a better North American partner, one with whom it might become easier to resolve a variety of collective problems of an economic and political nature. Most important for the two North American NATO members, when they assess the implications of Mexico for their own security—an assessment that occupies U.S. attention more than it does Canadian—they tend to put a premium on potential reforms that could enable Mexico to overcome its chronic difficulties with state corruption, especially in the security area, including the law-enforcement and judicial systems. As one analyst recently put it, apropos SSR: "For the safety and prosperity of Mexico and the United States, Washington must go beyond its current focus on border control to a more ambitious goal: supporting Mexico's democracy" (O'Neil, 2009, p. 64).

To anyone from the United States or Canada, interest in Mexico as a member of NATO must depend on the alliance's being valued, south of the Río Grande at least, more for what it promises in the area of SSR and less for what it might provide to the collective defense of North America—at least as such defense has traditionally been imagined, as a response to great-power threat. It is unlikely that Mexico's public and political class would show itself any more disposed to collective defense in the future than it has in the past. Given Mexico's well-earned reputation for "isolationism," its interest in joining NATO can be compared, to take NATO's first round of enlargement after the Cold War, more to Hungary's than to Poland's, in the sense that considerations removed from immediate security worries would be driving whatever impetus existed to join.

## Conclusion

No one should be under any illusion about the "debate" regarding Mexico's possible adhesion to the Atlantic alliance. There has not been any such debate, in Europe or in North America. From the point of view of a public such as Mexico's, which regards the United States and its alliance structure with the same

skepticism, if not abhorrence, as it regards military tools of statecraft in general, the idea of suddenly joining the West's preeminent collective-defense organization would appear to constitute the height of scandal, as well as of absurdity. Similarly, for all the current allies (with the possible exception of Spain, which might be expected to welcome a second Spanish-speaking country joining the alliance), Mexico entering their midst would convey few apparent benefits, and if it did not also carry with it any major threat, it would still appear to be an unusual proposal.

Whatever might be said against the idea, Mexico as a NATO ally would have significance for the future of North America, if that region is indeed to have any future as a "community" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2005), and it would do so primarily for two reasons. First, by holding out the prospect of membership conditional upon improvements in Mexico's security sector, NATO as a vehicle for SSR could be expected to assist in "helping" Mexico look more like the "we" of the developed industrialized world and less like the "they" of the developing world. Second, and flowing directly from the first point, Mexico would appear to its crucial North American North American Free Trade Agreement partners as a better bet for a continuation of regionalization and possibly even for the forging of a regional identity. This would mean that, for the first time, NATO would become less an organization marked by a division of labor in which North Americans were regarded as producers of security while Europeans were consumers. With Mexico as a member, NATO would resemble what it so often is regarded as being but has never really been: a more genuine "transatlantic bargain" from which both sides could derive more proportional gain.

It is sometimes asserted, usually with respect to China, which is held widely these days to be "rising," that embracing a country thought to be problematic by bringing it into Western institutions constitutes a big step toward achieving fruitful cooperation and thus toward eliminating future problems. This is not a particularly novel idea (think of the original purpose of European integration, namely to "lock in" Germany to a new institutional order and thereby render it less of a challenge to continental and global stability), and there is considerable merit in what one scholar argues to be the "binding" properties of Western institutions: "Today's Western order, in short, is hard to overturn and easy to join" (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 24). It is ironic that the logic these days usually is said to apply in the case of a country like China but not one like Mexico. Neither China nor Mexico could be considered "Western" countries if that term implies being developed liberal democracies, but at least Mexico has to be regarded as more of a democracy than China is—and certainly as more of a democracy than Portugal was when it joined the alliance as an original member state back in 1949. Moreover, Mexico is unambiguously a North Atlantic country, one whose integration into that region's leading security organization promises to bring in its train considerable advantage—to Mexico itself, to the North Americans, and to the Europeans.

## About the Author

**David G. Haglund** is a Professor of Political Studies at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

## Notes

[1]*Pensando lo imposible:* "Thinking the Impossible."

[2]Barrett headed the policy planning section on the international staff at NATO headquarters during the time the study was being undertaken.

[3]For the argument that North America is characterized by "regionalization" but not by regional identity, see Capling and Nossal (2009).

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