

Toward Atlantic Representation

Popular democracy must be extended to the Atlantic level, where vital decisions are being made, if self-government is not to lose its meaning and NATO is not to lose all its political foundations. There have been halting steps in the direction of Atlantic representation. They must be renewed.

Almost since the inception of NATO, people have been working for an Atlantic Assembly. Practically unknown to the people, this could prove to be the centerpiece of the struggle for the future of democracy in this era.

Rise of the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA)

It was the Association to Unite the Democracies, then known as Federal Union, that initiated the idea of a consultative assembly of Atlantic parliamentarians in *Freedom & Union* magazine in 1951. Its friends in Congress and in Allied parliaments agreed that this was necessary to recover the proper legislative supervision of military affairs that was being dissipated by the exclusively inter-executive and military functioning of NATO. They got together in 1955 to set up the NATO Parliamentarians' Conference. They sought at this point only one slight power: to require NATO to consult with them.

The Parliamentarians fought long and hard for this "consultative authority", but the governments and NATO bureaucrats were less than enthusiastic. In 1962 an Atlantic Convention, spearheaded by the AUD movement, recommended the formal establishment of a North Atlantic Assembly that NATO would be obliged to consult. In 1966 the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA) was finally established, but in watered-down form, without the proposed consultative authority. For another decade the NAA leadership fought on for consultative authority. The problem was that, at any given time, there were always a few governments against it, and the majority allowed them a veto.

Crisis of the Atlantic Assembly

Tiring of beating their heads against a wall, many in the NAA leadership gave

up in the 1970s on even seeking consultative power, and have concentrated on doing what little is already in their power to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the NAA. However, with all democratic goals shelved, the idea spreads that the NAA should just get congressmen and parliamentarians together to learn what was being done for their peoples by NATO, and then go home and try to teach the national parliaments to be good and not upset the NATO line.

This idea had an understandable origin in the fact that national parliaments have little contact with NATO but much power to undermine it. However, it is a top-down, pedagogic conception, the exact opposite of democracy. Its spread should be a cause for concern.

Geoffrey de Freitas, a British Member of Parliament and one of the NAA's main founders, showed 25 years ago where this was leading. He saw

"a parallel in English history. The Tudor idea of parliament was of men coming together from all parts of the country to learn what the government was doing and to return to their cities to explain what was happening. It was not until the Jacobean period that Parliament began to think of itself as a body of men coming together to criticize the government and to suggest alternative policies. In our conference the Tudor conception has prevailed."¹

If this situation were to become permanent it would literally mean a setback of 500 years in some of the most vital aspects of democracy. Already there has been a decay of public belief in the meaningfulness of national democratic institutions in European countries. NATO's effect on democracy has been

paradoxical. NATO has secured democracies and rendered them once again competent to cope with their problems by taking over the worst problems collectively. It has thereby ended the open crisis which shook democracy to the core in the first half of this century, stabilizing existing democracies and making democracy once again attractive to peoples who do not have it

However, NATO has also made sharply visible to European publics the irrelevance of their national democracy to international problems. It has thus actually transposed the crisis to a new level.

For Europeans NATO covers the most important questions of security. And to Europeans it seems that NATO decisions are for practical purposes made in America. Thus Europeans cannot help but feel that their national governments have little relevance to the highest questions of politics.

During every U.S. presidential election, Europeans are heard to say that "the Americans are electing the person who will be, in a sense, the President of us all." The jocular suggestion that they should have a share in electing the President only thinly veils a bitter truth: Europeans have lost confidence in the importance of their own democratic elections, and do not know how to regain it except by self-destructive displays of independence of America.

Yet there *is* a serious procedure by which Europeans could regain their democratic self-determination without throwing out the benefits of interdependence. It is: to elect an Atlantic Assembly together with America and give it due authority over the business that is common to Europe and America.

This is the only real way, also, to end the recurrent feeling of injustice about

"burden sharing" in NATO. America's incessant demands that Europeans pay more taxes to share the burdens of common defense have a lot in common with Britain's demands after the French and Indian War that the Americans pay more taxes to cover the war expenses. Americans then raised the slogan, "No taxation without representation." If America is to prove wiser than Imperial Britain, she must heed her slogan and undertake to build Atlantic representation. Only on this basis can the sense of mutual loyalty and responsibility grow cumulatively and the mutual resentments fade away.

Democracy cannot stand still amidst the transformations of the arenas of political choice in the world; it must move forward with the changes or fall behind. Issues have moved beyond the national level, and democracy must move with the issues if it is to retain its vitality. It is not enough to talk about democracy as the spirit that unites the Allies; it is necessary to practice democracy on the Alliance level as the specific form of unity among free peoples.

The West faces a choice: to begin to practice democracy on the Atlantic level, or to permit the spirit of bureaucratic authority and scholasticism to seep down from NATO into national governments.²

Governments and bureaucrats will be slow to see this problem in its true and fundamental colors. They like to think that it is enough that they are themselves elected. They relish their opportunity to meet and work things out in an Alliance peer group, far removed from accountability to the people.

The consequences of this, however, are extremely serious. NATO is not responsible to the NAA, and the NAA is not responsible to the people. The people are not represented in the NAA except indirectly, by members of Congress and parliaments who are chosen to attend without asking the people. No legislator is elected with the NAA in mind; no one reports to the people on NAA decisions. The NAA fails to establish any organic link between NATO thinking and public thinking in the NATO countries, such as national legislatures establish between national governments and the public. The Alliance is left to hover above an unsteady equilibrium of national political tendencies and passions, while the public foundations of Alliance solidarity suffer a long term secular decay. The diplomats

and bureaucrats of the Alliance can do little but try to manipulate national trends and maneuver frantically to keep NATO from falling between the cracks.

This is what their freedom to work out policy together reduces to in practice! This is the price they pay for the conceit that it is safer and more sophisticated to keep things in their own hands and to exclude the people!

Renewal of the Atlantic Assembly

Ironically, governments do recognize and decry the deepening crisis caused by the erosion in public attitudes toward NATO, even if they are unable to recognize the source of this in their own attitudes. They may therefore see the value of upgrading the NAA if this is presented as a way to involve the legislatures and the public more closely in Alliance thinking.

The NAA certainly stands in need of improvement and reform. In some respects its formalization and bureaucratization in 1966, absent all power, actually detracted from its initiative. It faces a continuous crisis as a result of its lack of a significant role. Members of national legislatures, who were elected by the people to represent the power of the people, are understandably not enthusiastic about being treated pedagogically. The NAA has had recurrent difficulties in getting enough high quality MC's and MP's to come, and then to take its proceedings seriously.

¹ *The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentarians' Conference, 1955-1959*, London, Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, 1960, introduction by Geoffrey de Freitas, M.P., pp. 3-4.

² Scholasticism is a fault which some NATO officials were willing to concede to Perle's critique.

Atlantic scholasticism results from taking too seriously the formulations by which the Alliance tries to reconcile the necessities of a dozen different political and public relations situations.

The problem does not end with NATO's communiques. Scholastic modes of thinking have been filtering down from NATO into pro-NATO public circles as well as into governments. The consequences are already severe.

Today, the Soviet Union is pruning its own scholasticism and learning to think more quickly. In face of this, it will not do for NATO to continue to limit itself to slow scholastic revisions of its formulations; this would be a formula for diplomatic as well as public relations disaster. NATO must speed up its thought processes through majority rule if it is to meet the challenge of Gorbachev.

More generally, there could be no more self-

There is an almost infinite variety of transitional possibilities for reforming and strengthening the NAA. (The European Parliament has illustrated comparable possibilities in its own evolution and strivings.) Among the most basic possibilities are:

1. Authority to require consultation from NATO on general plans and budget, and to require answers to questions posed by the NAA.
2. A role in framing and approving the NATO budget.
3. A share of the decision-making role in new areas that might be brought within NATO, e.g., out-of-area diplomacy and deployments, or common arrangements for procurement and trade of arms.
4. Direct popular election of a new second chamber of the NAA.
5. Authority to approve nominations of the top NATO officials and to dismiss them on a vote of no-confidence.

Any of these steps would help NATO manage its dilemmas. Together, they would give it a sturdier public foundation as a loose confederacy of free countries and not a purely military arrangement.

This would still not be enough to solve the full problem. But it would set the stage for the North Atlantic Assembly to lead a struggle for true Atlantic-wide democracy. Only when that struggle has succeeded and the Alliance has reached the goal of its Founders will Atlantic unity finally rest on permanently solid ground.

defeating approach to problem of sustaining solidarity among the public and the successor generation than a scholastic approach. The present trans-Atlantic educational dialogues and conferences (including, sadly, even the NAA in its present status) are not enough to sustain solidarity. They cannot be spurned, since they are practically all that the Alliance has as yet for this purpose. Indeed, they should be multiplied. But they must above all be transformed and transcended.

True political solidarity is built by participation in a common dialogue which gains a sense of muscularity through a link to common democratic decision-making. Such dialogue remains today almost exclusively confined within the bounds of the nation-state. The national democratic processes, for all their complications, are structured to link the national dialogues to national decision-making. Thus there is a sense, however imperfect, of responsibility and relevance in the national dialogue.

The trans-Atlantic dialogues have no such link and no such sense. This dooms them to scholasticism, and to an image of elitism and manipulateness. They are slender reeds in the face of the onrushing developments in national thought and policy.