

“Global NATO”, “League of Democracies”, “Union of the West”: *Complementary or Contradictory?*

Introduction: The relation of Global NATO to the League and Union proposals

NATO has in recent years been undergoing processes dubbed “globalization” or “Global NATO”: expansion of NATO missions worldwide, development of NATO partnerships around the world, and special close relations with a few far-flung countries such as Australia and Japan. The sources and implications of the Global NATO processes are examined in the articles by Emiliano Alessandri and Neil Bhatiya in the pages below.

This introduction puts Global NATO in the context of its relation to two current proposals: the proposal for a global “League of Democracies” on the one side, and the proposal for a “Union of a West” on the other side.

“Global NATO” or Global “League of Democracies”?

Proposals for a global “League of Democracies” or “Concert of Democracies” have made a large splash in the present year, finding their way into the presidential campaign. Senator John McCain has taken up the call for a new “League of Democracies” as his central foreign policy plank. Advisers to Senator Barack Obama have also advocated such a league, with minor variations. There is a domestic political momentum behind the idea.

A global League of Democracies would lie somewhere in the space in-between NATO and the UN—the same space that NATO has been entering into by its processes of “going Global”. In the 1980s and 1990s, an earlier attempt had been made to fill this space under the name of a global “Community of Democracies”. The Community of Democracies was in fact created in 2000. However, it has had little effect.

Experts evaluating the current proposals for a new League have recognized their attractiveness. They combine two of the most appealing values in international affairs: democracy and universality. Experts have cautioned that, for this very reason, expectations for them are greatly overblown. Their combination of values raises a tantalizing hope: the hope of arriving quickly at a democratic world order. This hope is however left vague, as it would not be easy to outline a realistic path for getting from a formal grouping of all democracies to an effective structure of world order in the present era. The already existing Community of Democracies raised the same hopes, and its practice since its creation has provided evidence that little can be accomplished along these lines. Thomas Carothers has elaborated ways in which the new League proposals try to get around this evidence of limited value by adjusting the Community in some details, but concluded that none of the various adjustments would affect the reasons for the limited value.³

In 2006-7 there was a very different discussion. It was not on a new League but an ongoing trend in NATO, one that came to be crystallized in the slogan of “Global NATO”. This too aimed, as we have indicated, at filling in some of the space between

³ Thomas Carothers, “Is a League of Democracies a Good Idea?” (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008). Carothers is Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment and has written extensively on democracy promotion.

the Atlantic and global systems; the name itself was evidence of that. However, its method was bottom up rather than top down: by extending the membership, partnerships, and global missions of the most powerful of the Atlantic institutions, NATO, rather than by creating a new institution likely to have few if any powers.

The two main approaches to filling the space—Global NATO on the one side, the Community of Democracies and proposed Concert on the other—have thus far been compatible in practice, even complementary. There is a huge amount of space to be filled between the Atlantic and global circles; no single institution can come near to filling it completely in this era.

Despite this compatibility to date, in the future, tensions could arise between the Community (or Concert) and the more effective structures bordering it on either side—the UN and NATO. This would happen, for example, if the Community (Concert) came to be treated as a substitute for the other institutions. A few of its proponents already view it this way. Both the UN and NATO are viewed with distaste by large, if opposite, constituencies: the UN for neutralism vis-à-vis non-democracies, NATO for militantly taking sides in the Cold War and after. A global Community or Concert of Democracies, as a verbally attractive alternative, provides a meeting ground where the opponents of both institutions can join hands behind the same slogans and talk, at least on the surface, on the same side of the fence. As such, it could someday have unintended consequences, damaging the UN, or NATO, or both. This risk will remain as long as expectations for the Community or Concert are kept at an unrealistically high level.

Global NATO, by contrast, does not aim at a perfect synthesis of Atlanticism and globalism, one that might replace them both. Rather, it aims at an extension of Atlanticism in its role as a substructure of globalism. It would be a further link between the UN system and the Atlantic system of institutions. These systems are already related, as outer circle to inner circle, or overall system to core subsystem. The looseness of the outer UN system had always led it to recognize its need for regional subsystems to fill in its missing spaces. After 1991, it began to recognize the Atlantic system as well, formally as “regional”, actually as a unique core subsystem.

Significantly, both approaches have been received coolly by some European countries. The Community of Democracies has long suffered from lack of support from the core European cohort of democracies, with France as its sharpest critic among this number. The “Global NATO” proposal in turn has been resisted as a possible dilution of the close links Europeans had with the U.S., but this view is more susceptible to change.

Late in 2007 Nicolas Sarkozy became President of France. He has taken a widely-remarked pro-Atlantic posture, doing much to reinvigorate trans-Atlantic relations. Edouard Balladur, long the mentor of Sarkozy and the mainstay of the Atlanticism of his wing of the Gaullist movement, has in his new book endorsed the extension of the field of action of NATO, past if not necessarily future extensions of NATO membership, a new global strategic concept for NATO, and rules for use of NATO resources out of area without full consensus among the allies.

The central argument of Balladur’s book, *For a Union of the West*⁴, is the need for a trans-Atlantic union in the sphere of foreign policy, one capable of dealing with all global issues. It is a proposition that is considerably more substantive, if less popular,

⁴ Edouard Balladur, *Pour une Union occidentale entre l’Europe et les Etats-Unis* (Paris, Fayard, 2007).



than the League of Democracies. And “Global NATO”, despite French reticence about some aspects of it, would seem a necessary element for the success of his plan.

“Global NATO” as a key to Balladur’s “Union of the West”

A union of the foreign policies of the Western countries is—excepting the courageous use of the word “union”—part and parcel of the mainstream evolving Atlanticism of the era of the war on terror. Balladur speaks of the need for a foreign policy union of the West on the entirety of global affairs in this era, in contrast to earlier periods when it was enough for the Atlantic Alliance to defend free Europe against other European powers. This is the crux of his argument.

The greatest weakness of Balladur’s book is that it does not in fact suggest a path to a foreign policy Union. It makes specific and realistic proposals for completing the economic union that already halfway exists between Europe and America, adding a U.S.-EU Council as an institutional support. However, for his core goal of a foreign policy Union, all that it proposes—perhaps all that can be proposed on the U.S.-EU level—is additional consultations in the same U.S.-EU Council.

In economics Balladur has the advantage of a substantial “acquis” (cumulatively acquired integration) to build on. The acquis was developed over the course of half a century by the complex, two-tiered system of Western unity—EU and OECD—that grew out of the Marshall Plan and constitutes a sort of split-level common home. In security and foreign policy he could build similarly on the acquis of NATO, but has been reluctant to do so.

Nevertheless, the globalization trends in NATO are already gradually developing, not a complete foreign policy Union by any means, but a much wider scope of foreign policy cooperation among the Atlantic countries than they ever had before. These processes are already putting some of the missing flesh on the central goal of Balladur.

What is problematic in his book is the almost uniform darkness of the picture it paints of present-day Atlantic relations. The result is a lack of filler for the vast space between the goal of Union and the immediate proposals; one is left with a sense of a lack of support structures for the goal of Union, apart from the support provided by the need for it.

The need for Union is not an unimportant support, to be sure: it can motivate the will. However, much more support is available, and could provide the sense of realism that is so important for giving confidence to people that it is safe to proceed along this line.

This support can be found in the very existence of NATO and of a number of other Atlantic institutions such as OECD and G-7; in the expansion of NATO membership and partnerships since 1991; and in the global extension of NATO missions. Significant progress has been made since 1991, through NATO, on the goal of Atlantic unity on global foreign policy issues. It is progress that, despite its many insufficiencies compared to the current and future need, is quite impressive when compared to the entire previous century.

Prior to 1991 the Atlantic countries, despite intense alliances for defense of free Europe in World Wars and Cold War, remained divided on wider global issues, American opposed the European empires, leading the NATO Treaty to avoid including the colonial territories of free Europe in its defense perimeter, and Europeans reciprocated with reluctance to sign on to American policies around the world. This began changing

with the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s, and more so with the war on terror after 2001. The changes are still slow and small when viewed statically against what is needed for dealing with the global problems and challenges to the West; yet are rapid and huge when viewed historically against the failure for the previous hundred years, despite frequent efforts, to arrive at such common policies. Balladur’s proposal can be seen as one for carrying this trend farther and faster, as is objectively needed, and for giving it a goal of completion in the sense of becoming commensurate with the need.

—*Editor*



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