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NATO: Why, Why, Why?

[Brian Doherty](#) | March 31, 2011

As the outmoded NATO alliance builds a new castle for itself in Brussels that costs well over a billion (more than the Libyan war has cost the U.S. so far....), Joseph Harriss at *American Spectator* wonders what it's all for. Some highlights:

For an organization that's been a perfect illustration of Parkinson's Law (bureaucracies expand over time, regardless of workload) since it lost its original raison d'être when the Soviet Union collapsed, it seems a normal entitlement. "A modern NATO needs a modern building," NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen insisted at the groundbreaking ceremony last December 16. Maybe. But does it have to be this extravagant, this grand, this pricey?.....

The provocative new structure comes just when the Obama administration is pushing to trim federal budgets by some \$1.1 trillion over the next decade, along with reductions in Pentagon spending by \$78 billion. Other major NATO members are also cutting defense spending, Britain by 8 percent, Germany by some \$11.5 billion. The spectacular project at least has the virtue of symbolizing what has gone wrong with this self-aggrandizing, self-perpetuating body whose main mission often seems to be not collective defense of its members, but its own self-preservation.....

I BEGAN COVERING NATO as a young Paris-based newsmagazine correspondent in 1966,

when French president Charles de Gaulle abruptly tore up the lease on its headquarters. Belgium hastily offered to house the organization in Brussels, and I covered the opening ceremony the following year. Built in just 29 weeks -- the lavish new offices have taken a decade of planning, construction will take another four years -- the prefab headquarters was simple, but at least it looked lean, keen, and spartan-military. Not like a stately pleasure-dome for coddled fat cats....

Behind the façade of variegated non-defense activities, bigger and more complex command structures, and far-flung operations is an organization in identity crisis.....

The Alliance's eager quest for a convincing new role has led to mission creep on a grand scale. A new strategic concept formulated in 1991 tried to define a new threat environment that lacked any real dangers to its members. So security was redefined as not only a military issue, but one with political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions.....

Originally NATO concentrated on its core activity of defending the Euro-Atlantic area. Going "out of area" was verboten. That changed in the early 1990s when, as Dutch analyst Hugo Klijn of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations notes, "NATO followed the usual course of big, self-perpetuating bureaucracies: seeking new missions and linking to other big bureaucracies." What new missions? Ill-defined and far from its designated area. What other big bureaucracy? The mother of them all, the United Nations.

In December 1992 the North Atlantic Council, NATO's governing body, declared that the Alliance was "prepared to take further steps to assist the UN in implementing its decisions to maintain international peace and security." Suddenly it was in the global peacekeeping business as a subcontractor to the UN. Says François Heisbourg, special advisor at the Paris-based Foundation for Strategic Research and one of France's top defense analysts, "They said in the 1990s that NATO had to go out of area or out of business, and that was true. It did go out of area and it stayed in business...."

Well, *good for NATO!* But--good for anything else?

WITH NATO's new vocation as a global, proactive, security, crisis management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian organization, it now commits Americans to fighting and dying in any hotspot on the planet. As a Cato Institute study puts it, "The transformation of NATO from an alliance to defend the territory of its members to an ambitious crisis-management organization has profound and disturbing implications for the United States... [with] the potential to entangle [it] in an endless array of messy, irrelevant disputes."....

....a senior official at the French Defense Ministry told me....France is particularly unhappy with the way NATO spends money. "They have only a vague idea how much an operation is

going to cost when they get into it, just presenting us with the bill once it's under way...."

THE MIXED MOTIVES AT NATO's creation also marked its stepping into the Afghan quagmire. Was the International Security Assistance Force turned over to the Alliance because it was best qualified and equipped to handle the job? Or to make it appear a less American, more international effort? (Fully two-thirds of the ISAF troops are American; some countries have less than a token 10 personnel there.) Or as a costly, lethal way of modernizing NATO?....

Right now NATO is positioning itself for a lifetime job in Afghanistan. Earlier this year its then senior civilian representative there, Mark Sedwill, declared that a long-term partnership would be required even after hand-over in 2014 to Afghan forces. NATO would then be in the business of Afghan socio-economic development.....

Canadian general Rick Hillier, who commanded ISAF from February to August 2004, came away bitterly disillusioned (he went on to Canada's top military job as chief of the Defense Staff). In his bestselling book last year, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War*, he writes that "NATO itself was looking for something, anything, to do that would allow it to prove that it was still a worthwhile organization." When he took over his command, Hillier was appalled by "NATO's lack of cohesion, clarity and professionalism." There was, he writes scathingly, "no strategy, no clear articulation of what they wanted to achieve, no political guidance, and few forces. It was abysmal. NATO had started down a road that destroyed much of its credibility and in the end eroded support for the mission in every nation in the Alliance.... Afghanistan has revealed that NATO has reached the stage where it is a corpse, decomposing."

If only it were going to decompose. Yet the rest of this very detailed article lists many of its pure bureaucrat job-creation programs that ensure that without political pressure exploding out from within its members nation's high echelons, the taxpayers of the world will be paying for a bunch of jackasses to sit around all day inventing new and frequently lethal ways to grab more wealth from out of our hands forever and ever and ever, amen. As Prince sang on his neglected 2001 classic Jehovah's Witness concept album *Rainbow Children*, "the opposite of NATO is OTAN." You got that right!