

LXV. The rationale of NATO founding and N.J. Spykman's geopolitical example

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“The successful termination of the war against our present enemies will find a world profoundly changed in respect of relative national military strengths, a change more comparable indeed with that occasioned by the fall of Rome than with any other change occurring during the succeeding fifteen hundred years. This is a fact of fundamental importance in its bearing upon future international political settlements and all discussions leading thereto.” [...] “After the defeat of Japan, the United States and the Soviet Union will be the only military powers of the first magnitude”.

(M. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 1943-1944, Washington D.C. 1959, 128)

1. Introductory Remarks

The foundation of NATO on April 4th, 1949 marked in the most exquisite manner the disintegration of the alliance of the US, Great Britain and USSR which lasted during WWII. At the same time it coincided with the introduction of a new post-war system of power equilibrium, with the Cold War as its main characteristic. This total geopolitical

confrontation of the two superpowers and their respective satellites extended around the globe, begun in the ruins of post-war Europe, where the long-standing geopolitical ambitions of both sides manifested themselves, reinforced through the reproduction of established myths and stereotypes, as well as national interests.

This power equilibrium was based on the framework of values and principles put forth by the UN Charter in 1945 as the bedrock of the postwar international system. The guiding principles of the UN Charter prescribe the delegitimization of the use of violence in international relations as an accepted way of solving international disputes (Articles 2.3 and 2.4), respect of the domestic jurisdiction of any state (Article 2.7), and the right of self-defense, even in its version of collective self-defense, as defined in Article 51 (and thereafter in the corresponding Article 5 of the NATO Charter and the corresponding provisions of the Warsaw Pact¹). The new post-war world order was built amidst an atmosphere of insecurity, fear, distrust and even hate, emanating from both sides².

As a consequence Germany was divided between two states, while the whole of Europe was divided between two blocs. The so-called West and the USSR came to a confrontation through the blockade of Berlin by the Soviets (1948-1949). It was during that period that NATO was created.

2. Spykman's theory and predictions

Nicholas J. Spykman, Professor of Yale University, died on 26th June of 1943, 49 years old, and did not live enough to see the end of WWII or the implementation of his theory concerning the containing dimension of Rimland by the Truman administration and the other naval Western

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1. The Warsaw Pact (formally, the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance), was a military alliance of defensive nature forged by the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. It was founded on 14 May 1955 and signed in Warsaw one month later, on 14 June 1955. Its motto ran as "Union of peace and socialism" (Союз мира и социализма).
 2. Calvocoressi, p. 32.

powers. Spykman's theory became the dominant geopolitical doctrine of national security for the US during the period of the Cold War. Spykman made the following remarks.

1) “[...] only if the British fleet were in complete control of the Atlantic and the Pacific, and if we [the US] were able to use the British Isles as an advance base against the continent of Europe, could we be at all sure for our chances of survival”.³

2) “The principal lesson is clear. the most important single fact in the American security situation is the question of who controls the rimlands of Europe and Asia”.⁴

3) “Any proposal for the unification of Europe would tend to put them in a subordinate position to Germany (regardless of the legal provisions of the arrangement) ⁵ since Germany, unless broken up into fragments, will still be the biggest nation in the continent”.⁶

4) “It is equally improbable that the United States, after having made such tremendous sacrifices to help free these countries from the German yoke, would consent to the restoration of German domination”.⁷ “Any such unification could only be brought about by aggressive action”.⁸

5) “One other power, Soviet, Russia, might conceivably seek to unify the European rimland by embarking on a program of territorial expansion in Western Europe. If at the same time she extended her domain in the Far East, we would undoubtedly be in a position of great danger”.⁹

Considering the size and the topography of the various territories Spykman observes that:

1) Size could be exploited fully only if “effective centralized control” could be exerted, thanks primarily to “an effective system of communication from the center to the periphery” and to “the absence or the successful counterbalancing of centrifugal forces of separatism”.

2) According to Spykman in order to establish a modern and articu-

3. N. J. Spykman, *Geography of the peace*, with an Introductory statement by F. S. Dunn, Wartime Books-Harcourt, New York 1944, p. x.

4. op.cit.: N. J. Spykman, *Geography of the peace*, p. x.

5. [Author's Note: He seems to predict the establishment of the EU!].

6. op.cit.: N. J. Spykman, *Geography of the peace*, p. xi.

7. Our emphasis.

8. Ibid: p. xi.

9. Ibid: p. xi.

lated system of communication, Spykman explained, geography again played a crucial role, since the shape and topography of territory heavily conditioned such an enterprise. Examples of strategies implemented to overcome natural barriers and to exploit territorial potential were found by Spykman in ancient, medieval, and modern history, in European as well as in American or Asian history (Spykman 1938:36).

3) From a military-strategic point of view, Spykman pointed out that “*Size is of primary importance as an element of defense, particularly if the vital centers of a country are far removed from the border*”, quoting Russia’s defense of her territory against Napoleon and other examples (Spykman 1938:32).



Fig.1: Spykman’s original map (*Geography of Peace*, New York 1942)



Fig. 3: NATO in 1949

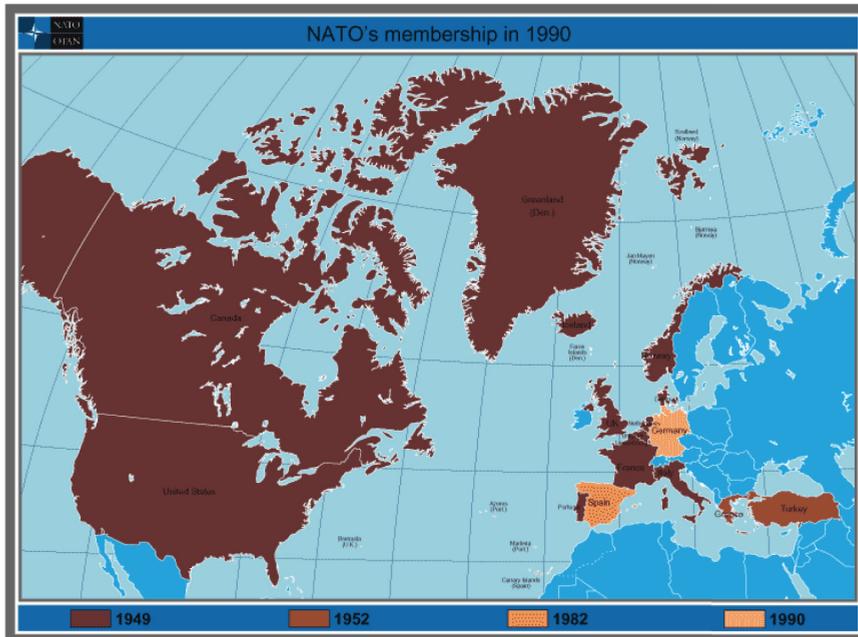


Fig. 4: NATO in 1990

It should be noted that Spykman did not limit his proposals to the need for a geostrategic containment of the USSR through control of Rimland, so that the latter could not reach the warm seas, but also he proposed, having predicted its creation, a Union of independent European states (i.e. EEC and EU), which would form a belt of containment aimed against Russian aggressiveness and also a springboard for a possible Anglo-American aggressive action against Russia. F. Bordonaro observes on this matter: “the extent, shape, and topography of Soviet territory proved once again a provider of strategic depth and defensive strength during the Second World War, as it frustrated the Third Reich’s offensive under the Barbarossa Plan. He then speculated how territorial size and resources, when coupled with technological strength, would project a state – or an alliance of states – to the status of great power, and he predicted in 1938 that in fifty years, a confederation of European states might have joined the likely “quadrumvirate of world powers” formed by the U.S., the U.S.S.R., China, and India. He was, in this respect, strikingly prescient, and well ahead of his time”.¹⁰ The same analyst concludes that “Presciently, Spykman also foresaw the irresistible rise of the Pacific Ocean as a key route for world trade. He believed that although it would have taken a long time before the Pacific basin could compete with the Atlantic, the “relative position” of the two oceans was “shifting” in favour of the former (Spykman 1938:42).¹¹

These theoretical views of Spykman help to interpret the geopolitical rationale underlying the Declaration of Robert Schuman (9 May 1950) and Jean Monnet, the creation of European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) on 18 April 18 1951, as well as many fundamental characteristics of the actually non-existent common European foreign policy¹². Germany could prove to be the unifying force in Europe due to its central position and industrial preeminence; therefore Germany should be tamed, through its division and through the integration of the Western part in a European mould. Spykman favored the division of Germany. His views on the need to keep Germany divided and to avert a unified

10. http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/publication_bordonaro_federico_rediscovering_spykman_rimland_geography_peace_foreign_policy/

11. Ibid.

12. However ‘ambitious’ this term might sound.

under Germany Europe were not met completely due to the tensions of the Cold War between the West and USSR.



Fig. 5: Evolution of NATO and similarities with Spykman's conception

Washington's views in the late 80s favored the reunification of Germany so as to contain USSR and the communist movement. These views were strongly opposed by London (Thatcher) and Paris (Mitterrand), still after waves of protests in Leipzig and East Berlin and the collapse of the communist government Germany was united in 1990. According to the American authorities a united Germany would serve as the steam-engine of Europe, sacrificing its strong currency, the Mark, in favor of Euro. This provision was the minimum demanded by France in order to agree to German reunification. In this way Germany would become a regional power, able to guarantee the cohesion of the European Union and to avert any influence or infiltration from the East. In that way Europe obtained a cohesion which was determined from external actors, in the form of the Euro-Atlantic Western European Union and NATO and the European Union itself.

Spykman's analysis laid emphasis on various factors, mainly though on geographical location. In his paper *Geography and Foreign Policy* (1938)¹³ he mentions: "World history is shaped between 25 degrees and 60

13. N. J. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy", *The American Political Sci-*

degrees of northern latitude” and that “the northern Atlantic is today the most desirable body of water on which a state can be located”.¹⁴ Unlike his predecessor, the British geopolitician Mackinder,¹⁵ Spykman believed that the geographical factor favored USSR from a strategic and economic point of view and not the US. Therefore Spykman “was convinced that, once Germany and Japan had been defeated, they should had both been included into an anti-Soviet alliance, due to the fact that Moscow would be left in a too favorable position in Eurasia. He thus anticipated the end of the Soviet-Western alliance and the formation of a Western alliance against Moscow axed on the North-Atlantic”.¹⁶ This suggestion by Spykman seems to predict the creation of NATO many years before.

It is important to note that such views were expressed by Spykman when the anti-Japanese and anti-German propaganda was at its heights in America and Washington was allied with the Soviets against the Tripartite Pact (Williamson 1985:83-86).¹⁷ Spykman did not alter his views even after the Berlin Pact was signed by the Axis powers (27 September 1940)¹⁸.

Spykman’s view, as it was later modified by George Kennan¹⁹ and other analysts and policy makers, turned out to be the dominant post-war view for the American national and international security. It was incorporated in the geostrategic planning of the US and was of crucial importance in the efforts of the US and its strategy of containment after 1947. Adopting these views the US did not return to its pre-war doctrine of diplomatic isolationism, a choice made inevitable and rather necessary after the new world geopolitical equilibrium: «the security enjoyed by the US and Great Britain –the latter due to its naval power- did

ence Review, Vol xxxii, No. 1 and 2, February and April 1938.

14. Ibid.

15. This is the so-called Heartland Thesis (Mackinder 1904, 1919).

16. http://www.exploringgeopolitics.org/publication_bordonaro_federico_rediscovering_spykman_rimland_geography_peace_foreign_policy/

17. Op.cit.

18. The Tripartite Pact, also known as the Berlin Pact, was a military alliance signed in Berlin on September 27th 1940 by the Axis powers during WWII, i.e. by national-socialist Germany (Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop), Fascist Italy (Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano) and the Empire of Japan (Japanese Ambassador in Germany Saburō Kurusu).

19. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/kennan>.

not allow for the rise of a hegemonic power in continental Europe and a possible subsequent power projection of such a power in the Western hemisphere. Still this security was threatened by the rise of Germany twice and afterwards by the rise of the USSR. The inability of Britain to preserve the power balance in Europe led to the American intervention in the two World Wars. After WWII the prospect of a Soviet hegemony in Europe and control of power centers by a land power that could theoretically threaten the security and independence of the US could ensue if the US returned to isolationism. Therefore the US entangled itself initially in Europe and then in the Eastern hemisphere”.²⁰ This is why in 1941 President Roosevelt adopted the Lend and Lease Act which contributed significantly to the British war effort against the Axis.

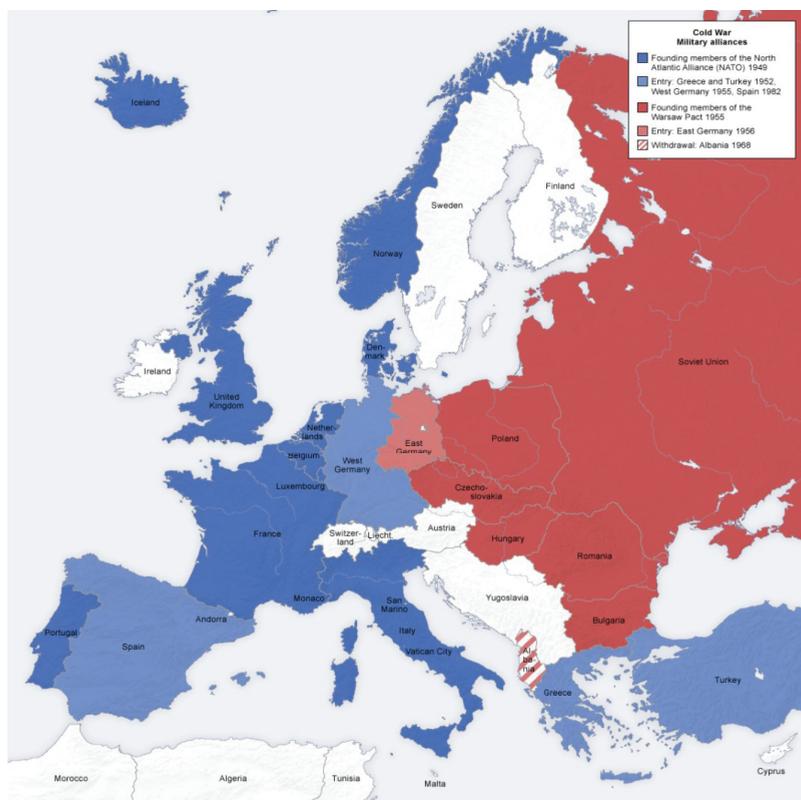


Fig. 6: NATO and the Warsaw Pact

20. Ch. Papatotiriou, *Amerikaniko Politiko Systema kai Exoteriki Politiki, 1945-2002*, Poitita, Athens 2012, p. 34.

From the end of the war to the creation of NATO

3. *The Truman Doctrine*

The first step towards this geopolitical evolution of the US was assumed by the Truman administration which thereby adapted to the facts of the time: the inability of London and Paris to face the growing geostrategic position of Moscow. The Soviet geostrategic power projection in Eastern Europe and especially in divided Germany, the postponing of the Soviet withdrawal from Iran (scheduled for March 1946) and the collapse of the Allied cooperation in Germany, led to a climate of increasing tension between Moscow and Washington, a tension and suspicion evident in the Potsdam Conference. A few days later, on 5th March 1946, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his famous speech concerning the Iron Curtain falling over Europe.²¹

On the 12th of April, 1947 President Harry S. Truman announced the doctrine to the American and the world public opinion. The Truman Doctrine defined the main principles of the foreign policy of the US, thereby abandoning the isolationist view of avoiding any implication in regional clashes which did not affect directly American interests. The US adopted a new approach according to which it should interfere in

21. The term in that particular context was used by Winston Churchill during his famous speech at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, during his visit to the US in March 1946: *“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow. Athens alone --Greece with its immortal glories-- is free to decide its future at an election under British, American, and French observation. The Russian-dominated Polish government has been encouraged to make enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed-of are now taking place. The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy».*

cases of crises even in geographically distant regions.²² Frederick Sherwood Dunn sums up Spykman's contribution thus: "Spykman's analysis guarantees the importance of the legitimate participation of the US in international relations, as a way to preserve peace in general and the security of the US in particular".²³ Under the Truman Doctrine the US decided to provide political, military and economic support to all democratic states which faced threats from internal or external totalitarian forces. The theoretical framework for the Truman Doctrine had been already presented by Spykman in his 1942 lecture in Yale.

The announcement of the Truman doctrine was due to the recent decision by the British government that from the 31st of March 1947 (only 10 days before Truman's announcement) it could no longer offer substantial help, whether military or economic, to the Greek government in its struggle against the Communist insurgent forces controlled by the Greek Communist Party. (This former involvement of Great Britain was expressed most vividly by the visit of Winston Churchill at Athens on Christmas of 1944, during the active urban communist revolt)^{24,25} Facing this situation President Truman asked from Congress to approve the initial granting of 400 million dollars to the Greek and the Turkish governments.²⁶ Both countries were in dire economic situation after the war. Turkey received 100 million dollars and the visit of the aircraft carrier Franklin D. Roosevelt in order to protect the Bosphorus Straits from a Soviet attack. At the same time Turkish political life entered a multi-party period with the Republican Party of Adnan Menderes assuming power. Greece received approximately 706.7 million dollars over the following years.

22. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/truman-doctrine>.

23. op.cit.: N. J. Spykman, *Geography of the peace*, p. xi.

24. <http://www.kathimerini.gr/552423/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/o-tsortsil-o-kesel-kai-o-anwnymos-ellhnas>.

25. <http://www.protothema.gr/Stories/article/434049/i-alithini-istoria-gia-ton-glezo-kai-ton-tsortsil/>.

26. To justify this course, Truman said: "I believe we must assist free peoples to work out their destinies in their own way." The key to preventing the overthrow of free nations was to attack the conditions of "misery and want" that nurtured totalitarianism.

4. The Marshall Plan

Soon the American economic help extended to other countries of Western Europe. In June 1947 George Marshall, Secretary of State of the then Truman administration²⁷ proposed the extension of the economic support, stressing that this project was not directed “against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the existence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.”²⁸ The program of economic help was offered to all European states; still it obviously needed a free market economy to function. In this way it was made a successful de facto countermeasure against the expansion of socialist economy of Eastern Europe. Congress approved the European Recovery Program, also known as Marshall Plan, which included an aid of 13 billion dollars over the next years and which contributed greatly to the rebuilding of Western Europe and the prosperity of free market economy and not socialist economy in Europe.

5. NSC-68

The shift in American foreign policy towards interventionism was augmented during the 1950s after the creation of NATO and after the successful nuclear bomb test (1949) by the Soviets and the victory of the Communist forces of Mao-Tse-Tung in China (1949). This shift was clearly expressed in a 58-page top secret policy paper by the United States National Security Council (NSC) presented to President Truman on April 14, 1950. It would prove to be one of the most important statements of American policy in the Cold War. This document became known as NSC-68. NSC-68 advocated a large expansion in the military budget of the United States, the development of a hydrogen bomb and

27. He was also Army Chief of Staff (1939-1945), Secretary of State (1947-1949) and Secretary of Defense (1949-1951).

28. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/truman>

increased military aid to allies of the United States. It reinvigorated containment policy toward the Soviet Union.²⁹ After the Korean War (1950-1953) this text became the blueprint for the official American security policy.

Euro-Atlantic cooperation in Europe

6. Western European Union (WEU)/ Union de l'Europe occidentale (UEO)

The economic security provided by the Marshall Plan was important still not enough to implement fully a feeling of security between the states of Western Europe, so that these could operate in a promising economic environment full of vigor and self-reliance. A plan of military cooperation was therefore needed that would complement economic and political cooperation that was well under way. Recent events, as the founding of Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) in September 1947, a successor to Comintern that aimed to coordinate communist parties all over the globe and could also function as a way for power projection of Moscow, as well as the split between Stalin and Tito (1948), rank among the factors that caused new containing geostrategic choices by the Western powers. On 17th March 1948 five European states, Great Britain, France and the states of Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) formed the Western Union through the Treaty of Brussels. The Western Union would evolve into the Western European Union in 1954.

7. NATO

It had become clear that any attempt to increase collective security in Western Europe without participation of really powerful actors, would not lead to any tangible results. The dimension of power was achieved

29. (<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/koreanwar>)

by the incorporation of the transatlantic states of the US and Canada, thus making NATO a regional and supra-systemic geopolitical axis of power. The countries of the Western Union, the US and Canada, and Denmark, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Iceland (of vital importance for the control of the North Atlantic) signed in Washington in 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty, thereby creating NATO. NATO was a geostrategic defensive and political organization that would fulfill Spykman's predictions controlling the space surrounding the North Atlantic projecting military, political and economic power. NATO is still today the most powerful regional grouping of states in the world.

It is clear without a doubt that the security of the countries of Western Europe could be functionally guaranteed only by a strong trans-Atlantic bond between the US and the European states. The same observation applied also to countries of Eastern Europe, as NATO's containing value did not avert geostrategic tensions in Europe. We should also note that in the immediate post-war period it was rather difficult to expand NATO so as to include France and Italy due to the political power of the communist parties in those two states at that period.

Over the time the reverse crescent that contained the Soviet influence, a crescent stretching from the Northern Ocean (through Norway and Iceland) and reached the Adriatic Sea, should be complemented with the inclusion of vital spaces of the Eurasian bloc, such as the Balkans (especially the Balkan outlet towards the Mediterranean Sea), the Aegean Sea and the Bosphorus Straits, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, reaching the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, Iran and the oil-producing region of Mosul in Iraq (Mosul was ceded by Turkey to Iraq in 1922 after the successful efforts of Lord Curzon and the British Petroleum Company which controlled the majority of the shares of Iraq Petroleum). For that reason in 1952 Greece and Turkey became members of NATO, while in 1955 Western Germany was also included.

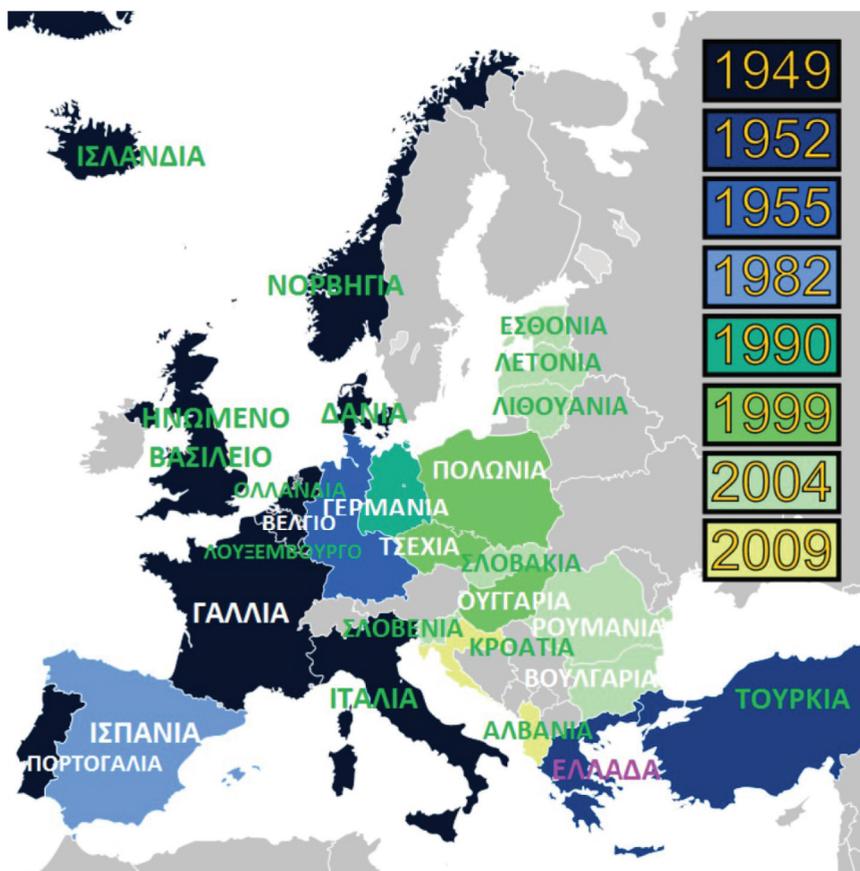


Fig. 7: Expansion of NATO, 1949-2009

Conclusions

The first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay (1887-1965), outlined NATO'S mission in Europe with a typical British verbal style as: "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The declared objectives of NATO can be found at the Preamble of the Washington Treaty, NATO's charter (1949). It is of value to reexamine these objectives, as the values and geopolitical challenges that led to the creation of NATO are still relevant, albeit in a radically different geopolitical environment, even today. The Allies, all members of the

Washington Treaty, are determined to “*safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security.*”

We should compare these objectives to the notion of peaceful coexistence, announced by the Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers (i.e. premier) Georgy Malenkov at his speech to the Supreme Soviet on 8 August 1953, where similar idealistic values of interest can be found: “*The struggle for peace, waged by the Soviet Union and the democratic bloc, has led to fruitful results. [...] We firmly believe that today there are no pending or controversial matters that cannot be solved peacefully, with an unanimously accepted agreement between the interested sides. This is also valid for the disputes between the US and the Soviet Union. We support, as we have done in the past, the peaceful coexistence of the two systems. We believe that there are no objective reasons for clashes between the US and the Soviet Union.*”³⁰

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30. Pravda, 9 August 1953, 1-4.