

NATO, a monstrous institution
By Karel van Wolferen (June 3 2017)

Their anxiety about the future of NATO, recently on full display again when the American president was in Europe, could not be bettered as a measure of the incapacity of Europe's top politicians to guide their continent and represent its populations. Through its provocations of Moscow, NATO systematically helps increase the risk of a military confrontation. By thus sabotaging its declared purpose of serving collective security for the countries on either side of the Atlantic, it erases its fundamental reason for being and right to exist.

Grasping these facts ought be enough to fuel moves aimed at quickly doing away with NATO. But it is terrible for more and easily overlooked reasons.

NATO's survival prevents the political entity that is the European Union from becoming a significant global presence for reasons other than its economic weight. If you cannot have a defence policy of your own you also deprive yourself of a foreign policy. Without a substantive foreign policy, Europe does not show anything that anyone might consider 'a face' to the world. Without such a face to the outside, the inside cannot come to terms about what it stands for, and substitutes meaningless platitudes for answers to the question as to why it should exist in the first place.

NATO is an example of an institution that has gotten completely out of hand through European complacency, intellectual laziness, and business opportunism. As a security alliance it requires a threat. When the one that was believed to exist during the Cold War disappeared, a new one had to be found. Forged for defence against what was once believed to be an existential threat, it only began actually deploying its military might after that threat had disappeared, for its illegal war against Serbia. Once it had jumped that hurdle, it was encouraged to continue jumping toward imagined global threats. Its history since the demise of its original adversary has been deplorable, as its European member states were made party to war crimes resulting from actions at Washington's behest for objectives that have made a dead letter of international law. It has turned some European governments into liars when they told their populations that sending troops to Afghanistan was for the purpose of assorted humanitarian purposes like reconstructing that country, rather than fighting a war against Taleban forces intent on reclaiming their country from American occupation. Afghanistan did not, as was predicted at the time, turn into the graveyard for NATO to come to rest, next to the British Empire, the Soviet Union and – farther back – Alexander the Great. Having survived Afghanistan, NATO continued to play a significant role in the destruction of Gaddafi's Libya, and in the destruction of parts of Syria through covertly organising, financing, and arming Isis forces for the purpose of overthrowing the Assad government. And it continues to serve as a cover for the war making elements in Britain and France. America's coup in the Ukraine in 2014, which resulted in a crisis in relations with Russia, gave NATO a new lease on life as it helped

create entirely uncalled for hysterical fear of Russia in Poland and the Baltic states.

NATO repudiates things that we are said to hold dear. It is an agent of corruption of thought and action in both the United States and Europe. Through propaganda that distorts the reality of the situation in the areas where it operates, and perennial deceit about its true objectives, NATO has substituted a now widely shared false picture of geopolitical events and developments for one that, even if haphazard, used to be pieced together by independent reporters for mainstream media whose own tradition and editors encouraged discovery of facts. This propaganda relies to a large extent on incessant repetition for its success. It can generally not be traced to NATO as a source of origin because it is being outsourced to a well-funded network of public relations professionals.

The Atlantic Council is NATO's primary PR organization. It is connected with a web of think tanks and NGO's spread throughout Europe, and very generous to journalists who must cope with a shrinking and insecure job environment. This entity is well-versed in Orwellian language tricks, and for obvious reasons must mischaracterise NATO itself as an alliance instead of a system of vassalage. Alliance presupposes shared purposes, and it cannot be Europe's purpose to be controlled by the United States, unless we now accept that a treasonous European financial elite must determine the last word on Europe's future.

An influential policy deliberation NGO known as the International Crisis Group (ICG), is one of the organizations linked with the Atlantic Council. It operates as a serious and studious outfit, carrying an impressive list of relatively well-known names of associates, which studies areas of the world harbouring conflicts or about-to-be conflicts that could undermine world peace and stability. Sometimes this group does offer information that is germane to a situation, but its purpose has in effect become one of making the mainstream media audience view the situation on the ground in Syria, or the ins and outs of North Korea, or the alleged dictatorship in Venezuela, and so on, through the eyeballs of the consensus creators in American foreign policy.

NATO repudiates political civilisation. It is disastrous for European intellectual life as it condemns European politicians and the thinking segment of the populations in its member states to be locked up in what may be described as political kindergarten, where reality is taught in terms of the manichean division between bad guys and superheroes. While Europe's scholars, columnists, TV programmers and sophisticated business commentators rarely pay attention to NATO as an organization, and are generally oblivious to its propaganda function, what it produces condemns them to pay lip service to the silliest geopolitical fantasies.

NATO is not only terrible for Europe, it is very bad for the United States and the world in general, for it has handed to America's elites important tools aiding its delusional aim of fully dominating the planet. This is because NATO provides the most solid external support for sets of assumptions that allegedly lend a crucial moral dimension to America's warmaking. NATO does not exist for the sake of

indispensable European military prowess, which mildly described has not been impressive. It exists as legal justification for Washington to keep nuclear weapons and military bases in Europe. It obviously also exists as support for America's military-industrial complex. But its moral support ought to be considered its most significant contribution. Without NATO, the conceptual structure of a 'West' with shared principles and aims would collapse. NATO was once the organisation believed to ensure the continued viability of the Western part what used to be known as the 'free world'. Such connotations linger, and lend themselves to political exploitation. The 'free world' has since the demise of the Soviet Union not been much invoked. But 'the West' is still going strong, along with the notion of Western values and shared principles, with 'the good' in the form of benevolent motives automatically assumed to be on its side. This gives the powers that be in Washington a terrific claim in the realm of widely imagined moral aspects of geopolitical reality. They have inherited the mantle of the leader of the 'free world' and 'the West', and since there has not been a peep of dissension about this from the other side of the Atlantic, the claim appears true and legitimate in the eyes of the world and the parties concerned.

In the meantime the earlier American claim to speak and act on behalf of the free world was broadened and seemingly depoliticised by a substitute claim of speaking and acting on behalf of the 'international community'. There is of course no such thing, but that doesn't bother editors who keep invoking it when some countries or the bad guys running them do things that are not to Washington's liking. Doing away with NATO would pull the rug from under the 'international community'. Such a development would then reveal the United States, with its current political system and priorities in international affairs, as a criminal power and the major threat to peace in the world. I can hear an objection that without this resonance of moral claims the activities serving the 'full spectrum dominance' aim would have been carried out anyway. If you think so, and if you can stand reading again what the neocons were producing between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, subtract all references to moral clarity and the necessity for the United States to serve as moral beacon for the world from that literature, and you will see that precious little argument remains for American warmaking that ensued.

The spinelessness of the average European politician has added up to huge encouragement of the United States in its post-Cold War military adventurism. With forceful reminders from Europe about what those much vaunted supposedly shared political principles actually stood for, American rhetoric could not have been the same. Strong European condemnation of the shredding of the UN Charter, and the jettisoning of the principles adopted at the Nuremberg trials, would have made it much more difficult for George W Bush, Dick Cheney, and the neocons to go where blind fanaticism and hubris, with imagined economic advantage, took them. Perhaps more importantly, it might have given a relatively weak American protest movement the necessary added energy to rise to the level of effectiveness once attained by the

anti-Vietnam activists as they imprinted themselves on the political culture of the 60s and 70s. European dissent might not have halted but could have slowed the transformation of much of the mainstream media into neocon propaganda assets.

As it is, NATO exists today in a realm of discourse in which revered post-World War II liberal conditions and practices are still believed to exist. It is an apolitical and ahistorical realm determined by hubris and misplaced self-confidence, in which powers that have utterly altered these practices and negated its positive aspects are not acknowledged. It is a realm in which America's pathological condition of requiring an enemy as a source of everlasting profit is not acknowledged. It is a realm in which America's fatuous designs for complete control over the world is not acknowledged. It is a realm of foreign policy illusions.

NATO is supposed to guard putative Western values that in punditry observations have something to do with what the Enlightenment has bestowed on Western culture. But it deludes staunch NATO supporters, who cannot bring themselves to contemplate the possibility that what they have long trusted to be an agent of protection, has in fact become a major force that destroys those very qualities and principles.

There is a further more tangible political/legal reason why NATO is monstrous. It is steered by nonelected powers in Washington, but is not answerable to identifiable entities within the American military system. It is not answerable to any of the governing institutions of the European Union. Its centre in Brussels exists effectively outside the law. Its relations with 'intelligence agencies' and their secret operations remain opaque. Who is doing what and where are all questions to which no clear, legally actionable, information is made available.

NATO has thereby become a tool of intimidation lacking any compatibility with democratic political organisation. An autocrat aspiring to unfettered rule with which to operate anywhere in the world would find in NATO the ideal institutional arrangements. All this should be of our utmost concern. Because all this means that NATO is now one of the world's most horrible organizations that at the same time has become so politically elusive, apparently, that there is no European agent with enough of a grip on it to make it disappear.