MORE THAN JUST “KEEPING THE RUSSIANS OUT”:
NATO AND THE END OF WESTERN EUROPEAN AUTOCRACY, 1949-1989

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ABSTRACT

Although the best-remembered role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War (1949-1989) was as a bulwark against the ambitions of the Soviet Union on the European continent, this paper examines other secondary, though important, ramifications of the Alliance during this period. This analysis makes the critical observation that it was young military leaders who had been rigorously trained in NATO institutions who were the most instrumental in reform movements that toppled authoritarian regimes in Turkey, Greece, and Portugal, the three Alliance members that initially were led by non-democratic regimes. I argue that constant interaction between diplomatic and military officials within NATO venues allowed for democratic norms to diffuse — a so-called “socialization effect” — and influence an entire young generation of elites in the three case countries from the 1960s through the 1980s. In light of the current debate about eastward expansion of the organization and its potential effects on stability in Eastern Europe, it is important to remember that the relationship between NATO and “democratization” is not exclusive to the post-1989 era.
On 23 May 1973, Greek destroyer *HNS Velos* was engaged in routine patrol exercises with fellow NATO ships off the coast of Sicily when Commander Nicholaos Pappas heard a disturbing announcement broadcast over his radio: Key members of an underground corps of officers had been discovered plotting against the military dictatorship, and were whisked away into government custody in Athens. Pappas stood as a critical member of this handful of top Greek officials — almost all of them young and trained in the years following Greek accession to NATO in 1952 — who secretly favored a restoration of democracy, even if it meant yielding the prestige and absolute power the military had held since seizing control of the government in 1967. With the arrests, the prospect of a coup against their superiors in the ruling junta was now decimated. Furthermore, Pappas had been outed as a co-conspirator, and was in grave danger if he returned to the mainland. With no other options, he turned to an utterly dramatic alternative: He took his case to the world with a defiant, unexpected act of mutiny (Couloumbis 1974).

The dynamic commander placed a call to NATO military headquarters in Belgium, announcing his intentions to leave the squadron and take his crew to Rome to protest the autocrats that had dominated the “Cradle of Democracy” for nearly six years. And, instead of taking a page from Pericles, Jefferson, or even Marx, Pappas chose to quote the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, the document that commissioned the founding of NATO in 1949, to express his sentiments to the international media. In a press conference anchored off the waters off Rome, he declared:

> All governments ... are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

*Preamble to North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949* -and-
*Commander Nicholaos Pappas, Hellenic Navy, 23 May 1973*
Today, NATO purports to exist both as the West’s most enduring military alliance and as a buttress of democratic institutions within member states, and Alliance leaders hold both roles in equally high regard. But in 1973, in the midst of the Cold War, the disposition of member regimes towards Soviet communism took strong precedence over the authenticity of their democratic orientation, despite the lofty proclamations about “individual liberty” put forth in the North Atlantic Treaty: “The principal reason both for [the Alliance’s] existence and for admitting new members was to keep the Red Army from invading Western Europe” (Talbott 1995). As the most important criterion for membership was staunch opposition to Marxism, military dictatorships in Portugal, Greece, and Turkey were tolerated so long as they remained bulwarks against Moscow’s meddling in the Mediterranean.

Most commentators, both in 1973 and in 2008, considered the NATO leadership’s rhetoric about democracy in member states during the Cold War to be lip service at best — which is why the Pappas mutiny is such a curious phenomenon.

Building on the Velos incident in 1973 and a chain of other examples, this paper proposes an unorthodox hypothesis: Social institutions within Cold War-era NATO unintentionally facilitated peaceful transitions to democratic systems in the three initially autocratic member states. Portugal ditched its 48-year old dictatorship in 1974 without bloodshed, and, following the breakdown of democracy in Greece and Turkey in 1967 and 1980, respectively, elites presided over the relatively quick restoration of multi-party systems. Conventional history is correct in contending that the promotion of democracy was by no means an aggressively pursued objective of pre-1989 NATO, and the United
States, the Alliance’s most powerful member, is fairly accused of propping up anti-communist authoritarian regimes across the map during this era.

But the assessment of the Alliance as a realist leviathan overlooks the many smaller institutions that comprise the day-to-day operation of the organization. Although NATO’s most visible role during the Cold War was as custodian for and guarantor of American forces and arsenals on the European continent, from the conference rooms of Brussels to convoys in the North Sea, the Alliance was also the sole means to bring both civilian and military leaders from all member states together on a regular basis. Elites from all member states forged professional relationships – Dutch diplomats and Greek diplomats, Canadian nuclear technicians and Turkish nuclear technicians, British navy generals and Portuguese navy generals – because of the frequent venues for social interaction.

In his 2005 book *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*, Wisconsin’s Jon Pevehouse observes a “socialization effect” within regional international organizations. He contends a causal mechanism exists during periods of “political liberalization and/or the completion of a democratic transition” in a particular state, where regional organizations can “socialize actors [in said state] to change their behavior through interactions with [political and military] elites” (Pevehouse 2005:118). In other words, personal relationships between elites from well-established democracies and elites from fledgling democracies and autocracies are established through regional organizations. And, naturally, so long as there is a high “democratic density” in the organization, democratic ideas and values of the majority will eventually spread to all members of the group.
I argue that NATO served as a venue that facilitated the diffusion of democratic norms amongst military leaders during the Cold War. The “norm” was an understanding, shared by leaders of the 11 democratic states, that the model modern, developed state had a military establishment divorced from politics and subservient to a civilian government. These were the values espoused in the North Atlantic Treaty. Every time Portuguese, Greek and Turkish military officials stood astride their counterparts through the 1970s, they did so as the unfortunate aberrations within the organization — and these experiences no doubt shaped the outlook of the young, “NATO generation” of military elites. Commander Pappas, who participated in the yearly joint exercises, clearly took the democratic underpinnings of the Alliance to heart — he went as far as quoting its creed verbatim. But he is just one instance of many in this consistent, though hardly well-documented phenomenon: Young military officers who had been well “socialized” within NATO institutions and exercises were instrumental in the establishment of multi-party liberal democracies in all three of the aforementioned nations.
If only the “NATO forefathers,” crafting the language of the North Atlantic Treaty in early 1949, could have envisioned the world in 2008: Then-impoveryed, blockaded Berlin not only as the polished capital of a peaceful, unified Germany, but a financial and political epicenter of a rapidly consolidating Europe. Joseph Stalin, the engineer of the blockade, long having taken his place alongside Hitler in the pantheon of twentieth-century despots, his ideology relegated to the “ash heap of history” (Ronald Reagan speech to House of Commons, 8 June 1982). Logically, by 2008, their fledgling organization would have fulfilled its objective of staring down the Communist threat in Europe and faded into well-deserved retirement as a Cold War relic.

Not exactly. NATO endured a four-decade standoff with Moscow, the advent of an unprecedented supranational authority in Europe, and now, stands intact nearly twenty years into an age of American hegemony. The postwar creation that the first Secretary General Lord Ismay famously billed as the best way to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down” (Atlantic Review Aug 2007) on the Continent has ballooned from an initial twelve to a present-day 26 members, with a handful more clamoring for invitation.

In 1949, in order to counter the looming Soviet threat in Europe, the United States committed itself to the defense of Western Europe and embarked into an alliance more rigid and entangling than any in its history. The oft-quoted Article 5 exemplifies the unconditional guarantee that Washington pledged to Canada and ten other allies across the Atlantic:
The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

(http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/treaty.htm)

President Harry S. Truman looks on as Secretary of State Dean Acheson (Tale '15) signs the North Atlantic Treaty, April 1949

The first five years of NATO’s existence saw the battle lines harden within Europe, with the Soviet-occupied sector of Germany evolving into a communist state separate from the rest of the country, as well as the stakes in the East-West conflict intensified after the Red Army tested its first nuclear weapon in July 1949 (Lindley-French 2006). As the Marshall Plan and other loan programs facilitated miraculous economic recoveries in Western European NATO states, Moscow consolidated its grip on
satellite states by founding the Warsaw Pact in 1955 – the security counterweight to the Alliance in Europe until its dissolution in 1991.

NATO flourished in the following decades. The Alliance’s two legislative bodies — the civilian North Atlantic Council, based in Brussels, and the Military Council, based in Paris, then Mons, Belgium — provided democratic fora where diplomatic and military leaders could frequently interact. The mandates of the North Atlantic Treaty ensured a constant American presence at bases throughout Western Europe, facilitated the spread of technology and information through frequent joint exercises, and modernized European military infrastructures that had been ravaged during World War II (Lindley French 2006). Most importantly, between the signing of the Atlantic Charter in 1949 and the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, not a single battle occurred on a continent that had seen continuous bloodshed during the preceding half-century — NATO had served its purpose successfully and honorably.

*NATO and the Warsaw Pact in 1975*
The Alliance was not without shortcomings during the Cold War period. Last-minute diplomacy was necessary to avert direct conflict between the Soviet Union and NATO members during the Berlin Wall Crisis of 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and the Able Archer incident in 1983, although a long period of East-West détente stretched between the former two incidents during the Kennedy Administration and the latter during the Reagan years. French leader Charles De Gaulle had a famously rocky relationship with Washington, London, and NATO as a whole, and pulled France — then the second most populous member after the United States — out of the integrated defense structure in 1966 (Lindley-French 2006. NB: France recommitted in 1993). And, most significantly to this paper’s topic, NATO had a questionable commitment to democracy within member states: It welcomed strongman Antonio Salazar’s Portugal as a charter member in 1949, and 1952 admits Greece and Turkey both experienced periods of military rule during the 1960s and 1970s.

The Alliance has expanded on five occasions. The first expansion in 1952 brought Greece and Turkey into the fold, two nations with critical strategic positions in the eastern Mediterranean both vulnerable to the spread of communism. Besides the obvious bulwark against Moscow that the two new states would provide, NATO leaders hoped that the admission of these regional adversaries would lead to a warmer relationship between Ankara and Athens. Following the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, newly democratic Spain joined the Alliance in 1982. However, the trickle has turned into a deluge in the past decades, with ten new members joining since 1999.

Reform-minded bureaucrat Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the premiership of the Soviet Union in March 1985, and gradually introduced reforms that liberalized the
command economy, relaxed restrictions on free speech, and drew back Soviet troop placements in satellite states (Gaddis 2005). Over the course of the next four years, dissent movements grew in Eastern Bloc states, culminating in the “year of revolutions” in 1989, when despot regimes in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania collapsed and nascent democracies took their place; two years later, the Soviet Union itself fragmented into 15 successor republics. NATO quickly “expanded” for a third time in 1990 when the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) joined with the Federal Republic of (West) Germany, and the unified Germany became a member of the Alliance.

The final two expansions of NATO, in 1999 and 2004, brought in ten young democracies that were formerly under Moscow’s tight grip. Since the early days of the Clinton Administration, Alliance leaders had considered expansion. This began with the foundation of the Partnership for Peace, an “ante-chamber for NATO aspirants” (Pevehouse 2005: 119), where individual countries built special bi-lateral security agreements with NATO. A debate raged amongst NATO states and within American domestic politics over the merits of eastward expansion, with commentators and academics wondering if an expanded Alliance would actually fortify democratic regimes in Eastern Europe, and furthermore, whether pushing NATO’s reach past the Danube would further alienate Russia. Although the effectiveness of a 20-plus-member security organization is rather questionable, NATO ultimately expanded two more times, in 1999 (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) and 2004 (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia).

Although this paper will not address the Alliance in its post-1989 manifestation, the differences in the perceived role of the two distinct eras of NATO should be kept in mind:
for its first forty years, as a guarantor of American protection for Western Europeans
right to the brink of the Iron Curtain, and today, as an agent to reinforce democracy right
to the brink of the Russian border.
DEFINING DEMOCRACY: MARSHALL AND JAGGERS’S “POLITY RATINGS”

The definition of “democracy,” as well as the fundamental quantitative tools used throughout this essay, are all derived from the Polity Rating statistic originally published in the Polity IV Project, chaired by Maryland’s Monty G. Marshall and Colorado State’s Keith Jaggers. The project defines democracy as follows, and derives its “democracy” polity score from this criteria:

Democracy is conceived as three essential, interdependent elements. One is the presence of institutions and procedures through which citizens can express effective preferences about alternative policies and leaders. Second is the existence of institutionalized constraints on the exercise of power by the executive. Third is the guarantee of civil liberties to all citizens in their daily lives and in acts of political participation (Marshall and Jaggers 2002: 13).

Marshall and Jaggers propose a definition of “autocracy” that is not merely “the absence of democracy”:

We use the more neutral term Autocracy and define it operationally in terms of the presence of a distinctive set of political characteristics. In mature form, autocracies sharply restrict or suppress competitive political participation. Their chief executives are chosen in a regularized process of selection within the political elite, and once in office they exercise power with few institutional constraints. Most modern autocracies also exercise a high degree of directiveness over social and economic activity, but we regard this as a function of political ideology and choice, not a defining property of autocracy. Social democracies also exercise relatively high degrees of directiveness (Marshall and Jaggers 2004: 14-15).

The Polity Rating is an independent state’s “democracy” score minus an independent state’s “autocracy” score in any given year. For an example of a liberal democracy, the United Kingdom in 2004 (the most recent year that Marshall and Jaggers have published scores) has a “10” democracy score and a “0” autocracy score, and therefore, has a “10” Polity Rating. On the other hand, East Germany in 1980, an
autocratic police state, had a “0” democracy” and a “9” autocracy, and therefore, a “negative 9” Polity Rating. And, between these two extremes, Russia in 1995, an emerging democracy encumbered by an oligarchic business and political class, had a “5” democracy, a “1” autocracy, and therefore, a “4” Polity Rating.

In order to better qualitatively illustrate the nature of the autocracies in Portugal, Greece, and Turkey, this paper will also utilize Marshall and Jaggers’s component polity scores, which measure the strength (or lack) of various democratic institutions. The first component polity rating measures the institutional checks on the executive, defined as “the extent of institutionalized constraints on the decision-making powers of chief executives, whether individuals or collectivities. Such limitations may be imposed by any ‘accountability groups.’ In Western democracies these are usually legislatures.” Other variables used in this paper measure the size and breath of the group from which executives are “recruited,” the freedoms allotted to opposition parties, and the extent of suffrage amongst populations.
ANALYSIS: NATO AND DEMOCRATIZATION DURING THE COLD WAR

The presence of the Soviet threat is the most obvious geopolitical distinction between the two eras of NATO history. However, this chapter will set superpower relations aside. Rather than study its strategic function as the counterweight to the Warsaw Pact, we will examine the composition and day-to-day internal functions of the Cold War-era Alliance. The characteristics of domestic regimes and political stability differ strikingly between the two periods: While in the 19 years since 1989 the Alliance has only consisted of and admitted democracies, and no member states have reverted to dictatorship, during the Cold War period, NATO admitted a dictatorship (Portugal in 1949), and bore witness to four distinct breakdowns of democratic regimes (military coup in Greece in 1967, military coups in Turkey in 1960, 1971, and 1980).

Most scholars have given little credence to possible correlations between NATO membership and reforms within member regimes during the Cold War period. Only since 1995, when a democratic regime became a formal prerequisite for entry (Lindley-French 2006), and Eastern European democracies were subsequently invited to join has the scholarship on democratization flourished. Even the strongest proponents of eastward expansion in the 1990s conceded that realist considerations dictated membership policy through the end of the 1980s (Talbott 1995). Additionally, the Alliance’s limited punitive capacities — there was, and still is, no mechanism to “expel” wayward member states — allowed Greek and Turkish democratic institutions to wither and Portuguese fascism to flourish without a peep from headquarters in Brussels (Reiter 2001).

However, I argue that the lack of a formal “stick” to expel members, as well as Washington’s seeming readiness to collaborate with dictatorships provided it served
policy objectives, are not sufficient evidence to discount the positive, if unintended, contribution NATO offered in fortifying democracy in the three “wayward” Cold War-era states. The events surrounding the collapse of the Portuguese fascist regime and the restoration of Greek democracy — both in 1974 — as well as the emergence of the multiparty Turkish state in 1983 that has endured to this day all have one striking similarity: The military officials that acted to remove dictatorships were all liberal-minded, relatively young leaders that had received training within NATO institutions — specifically, training schools and joint exercises with their Western European and North American counterparts.

The Literature

Jon Pevehouse’s groundbreaking scholarship in the area of regional organizations and their effects on democratization provides the analytical backdrop for this chapter. He argues in his seminal 2005 work, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*, that “the more democratic a regional organization (in terms of its member states), the more likely it will be to supply the political will for supporting and protecting democracy and the more likely the regional IO will be used by domestic groups to encourage and cement democracy” (Pevehouse 2005: 4; Pevehouse 2002; Gray 2007). By the terms defined in the previous chapter, NATO clearly qualified as a “democratic regional organization” (according to Polity Ratings by Marshall and Jaggers 2002) during the four decades of the Cold War, because the 11 charter members that did not endure
either a period dictatorship or an instance of democratic breakdown enjoyed uninterrupted periods of multi-party democracy between 1949 and 1989.\footnote{Although Spain, which joined NATO in 1982, was a dictatorship under Francisco Franco until his death in 1975, its democratic institutions have been stable in the 26 years since it joined the Alliance.}

Pevehouse applies the above argument in reference to the organization’s advocacy for civilian control of the military — an essential pillar of a modern democracy — within prospective Eastern European member states in the 1990s. His case study on Hungary demonstrates the mechanisms that allowed NATO to be extremely effective in improving civil-military relations in Hungary prior to that state’s accession to the Alliance in 1999: First and foremost, as part of the 1995 “Study on Expansion,” a democratic regime became a prerequisite for entry into NATO, and civilian control of the military was a core tenet of this requirement (Simon 1996). Yet, the “external guarantee of policy preferences” — a mandatory minimum threshold imposed on military expenditures in prospective and existing member states — ensured military leaders that financial support would be consistent, and that funding cuts would not undermine the prestige of the armed forces (Pevehouse 2005: 119).

However, it is Pevehouse’s second mechanism, NATO’s capacity to “socialize military commanders to accept civilian supremacy, a hallmark of liberal democracy” in the 1990s, that I argue can also be applied to democratic transitions in pre-1989 Portugal, Greece, and Turkey (Pevehouse 2005:119). “Socialization” refers to NATO’s function as a figurative and literal summit for civilian and military leaders, and the likelihood that the democratic norms of the majority will inevitably spread to the minority. Infrastructure has existed since 1949 that ensures that diplomats and military officials interact on a frequent and consistent basis. For example, senior military figures meet in weekly round-
table Military Committee assemblies at command headquarters in Mons, Belgium, large units from all member states regularly engage in training exercises together, and “NATO schools” have long existed in Western Europe and the United States as fora to exchange theoretical and practical information (Jacoby 2006, Gaddis 2005).

Military leaders from the then-19 NATO member states meet in Sicily, 2000

Pevehouse argues that this “socialization effect” has helped Eastern European military leaders acclimate to the democratic norms of older members, but he does not extend his argument to the aforementioned pre-1989 cases where military dictatorships eventually yielded to democratic regimes. Rather, he concedes in both his study of Greece in 1974 and of Turkey in 1980, as do most experts, that realist objectives prevailed over any sense of duty to protect and defend democracy: “NATO had the potential to be an effective pressure point for the [military dictatorships]…but for better or for worse,
NATO placed its security interests over its interest in the domestic politics of its members” (Pevehouse 2005:177). For the most part, this is accurate — the half-hearted American and NATO objections to these disturbances seemed perfunctory compared to the loud clamor and targeted sanctions from the then-European Community (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1990). However, upon closer observation, Pevehouse overlooks one key phenomenon: His own “socialization” argument does apply to Greece, Portugal, and Turkey, as it was military elites that had had broad exposure to NATO institutions who were most instrumental in bringing about democracy.
CASE STUDY: GREECE 1973

The first case study analyzes the deterioration and restoration of democracy in Greece between 1967 and 1974. I argue that disillusionment within the military — highlighted by the 23 May 1973 HNS Velos anti-regime, pro-democracy mutiny that occurred minutes after a NATO exercise — was a pivotal factor in fanning public discontent and garnering the international attention that eventually led to the downfall of the authoritarian junta in Athens in 1974.

The multi-party system was fragile at best within the so-called “Birthplace of Democracy” from the end of the Nazi occupation into the 1960s. Following a protracted civil war in which American and British-backed forces eventually quashed communist insurgents, Greece joined NATO alongside Turkey in 1952. The rationale for the Greek invitation was two-fold: First, President Truman hoped to “lock in” Athens and Ankara as critical anti-Moscow outposts in the vulnerable eastern Mediterranean region. Second, NATO leaders hoped that joint accession would quell hostilities between Turkey and Greece (the Greek-Turkish conflicts over Cyprus in the mid-to-late 1970s later proved this to be a failure) (Lindley-French 2006). Twenty-four year old King Constantine took the throne in 1964, and was immediately alarmed when the socialist party of George Papandreou won 1965 elections following a decade and a half of center-right, monarchist parliamentary majorities. Through a complex series of events, Constantine arranged for the Papandreou government to be dissolved and replaced with loyalists in late 1965, but following months of political instability, the socialists were primed to win again in upcoming spring 1967 elections (Barrett 2008).

Clearly, Greek democratic institutions by no means boasted the pedigree of contemporary democracies in Western Europe and the United States: Per the 1948
Constitution, genuine political competition in the Parliament was limited as several large parties, most notably the Greek Communist Party, were banned (Terlexis 1971). Such undemocratic restrictions are reflected in the component polity score for “Competitiveness of Participation,” which only receives a “2” out of a possible “5” for the years 1952 to 1967.

Here, I must concede that NATO merits some blame for the collapse of a democratic regime: Fearing a socialist victory in the scheduled May 1967 election, mid-level military officials used the blueprints from “Prometheus,” a NATO-engineered plan designed to neutralize a communist uprising, to engineer a swift anti-parliament coup on 21 April (Barrett 2008). For seven years, various manifestations of a “Regime of the Colonels,” with self-appointed Prime Minister Georgios Papadopoulos as strongman, ruled over a Greece with severely curtailed civil liberties and no political parties.

The Polity Ratings reflect this abrupt breakdown of democratic institutions:
The ideology of the colonels’ regime seemed nebulous, hardly consistent with the by-the-book “totalitarian” models of neighboring Eastern Bloc states: Although free elections and the right to assemble were quickly stripped away, tourism and the arts, for example, were encouraged and flourished during this period (Couloumbis 1974).

Although Greek democracy was fragile in the decades following World War II, an elected parliament and independent judiciary still provided suitable checks against the prime ministerial post and the ceremonial monarch. The “Constraints on Executive” component polity rating shows how quickly Athens degenerated from a modern constitutional monarchy (with a highest-possible “7” rating), to an autocracy where, over the course of a few months in 1967, the King meddled in day-to-day politics and the military dissolved the Parliament.
At face value, the United States and NATO were both a party to the usurpation of the Greek Parliament and the prolonged suspension of civil rights from the Greek citizenry. The United States continued military aid at pre-1967 levels to the junta in Athens, as token, weakly-worded public statements from Washington “expressed with varying degrees of conviction, sadness at the turn of events” (*The Economist*, 20 September 1975). Other regional organizations heaved criticism and punishments at the government, most notably in 1973, when the EC suspended Greece’s special economic relationship with the community and the Council of Europe expelled Greece altogether (Pevehouse 2005). But, in the midst of perceived complacency — or even collaboration — from the United States and NATO, Pevehouse’s “socialization” effect reared its head in one unusual event in May 1973.
Commander Nicholaos Pappas’s mutiny of the *HMS Velos* — where he peeled the Greek destroyer away from a NATO joint exercise, dropped anchor off the coast of Rome, and voiced his displeasure at the military regime in Athens with words drawn from the North Atlantic Treaty — suggests the influence of years of interaction with Western European military officials. Pappas went through training and rose through the ranks in the years after World War II and the Greek Civil War in the late 1940s, and was just one of many in his generation who was frequently “socialized” through NATO exercises.

Pappas’s revolt was mostly symbolic, and this anecdotal evidence does not account for other undeniable factors, including a robust student movement and popular disgust with the junta’s Cyprus policy, that led to the Colonels’ 1974 demise. However, his actions marked the beginning of a period where the junta’s grip began to crumble under such civilian opposition movements and unprecedented international scrutiny. Less than a year later, the junta-backed president Phaedon Gizikis invited exiled ex-Prime Minister Constantine Karamanlis to form a centrist government until free elections could be held in mid-1974.

This is *by no means* an argument for causation. In all likelihood, NATO’s decision not to intervene in Greek domestic politics prolonged the brief digression from democracy, and NATO’s inability to mediate the prolonged conflict with Turkey over Cyprus actually caused Greece to withdraw from Alliance military exercises for a period in the late 1970s. But the case of the *Velos* demonstrates validity of Pevehouse’s “socialization” theory regarding the spread of democratic norms in regional organizations: Commander Pappas clearly had broad exposure to Western European and
North American NATO officials, and by extension, Western notions of democracy and appropriate civil-military relations.
CASE STUDY: PORTUGAL 1974

Members of the Ford Administration, fronted by the sharp tongue of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, would be the last people to vouch for a complimentary relationship between NATO and the nascent Portuguese democracy in the mid-1970s. After all, it was Kissinger who in 1975 suggested expelling Portugal from NATO after it had transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a leftward-leaning democracy. European critics had compared alleged CIA support of the Portuguese anti-communist (and arguably fascist) movement to covert American actions in Iran in the 1950s and Chile in 1973, and indeed Washington expressed huge concerns when the first democratic governments in Lisbon contained prominent Marxist leaders (de Carvalho 1975, in Sobel 1976). However, I would like to focus on a phenomenon that paralleled contemporary developments in Greece: Once again, it was the young generation of NATO-trained military leaders who initially argued for Western civil-military norms and who were eventually at the forefront of the movement for democracy in the “Carnation Revolution” of 1974. Once again, Pevehouse’s “socialization” theory figures prominently.

Portugal had been billed as a relatively “benevolent dictatorship” from the time it joined NATO as a founding member in 1949 until a pro-democracy military coup brought about a multi-party system in 1974 (Sobel 1976). Dictator Antonio Salazar had seized control of the Portuguese state in the 1930s, steered the country clear of World War II, and waged some of the bloodiest colonial wars of the twentieth century as Lisbon’s grip on dependencies slipped in sub-Saharan Africa. And all the while, Washington touted him as a reliable bastion against Moscow and a strategic ally with key North Atlantic ports.
Despite his perceived “benevolence” compared to the Francoism of neighboring Spain, Salazar suppressed civil liberties and political parties, which is reflected in the Polity Ratings:

Portugal had a spotty history of democratic institutions, with a very weak multi-party system in place between 1910 and 1926 before a military coup swept the Parliament from power. Salazar had near-absolute control over all functions of the state, reflected in the dismal “Executive Constraints” component polity rating in the years leading up to 1974.
But, in a single spring day in 1974, the Movimento das Forcas Armadas (MFA), a pro-democracy, vaguely leftist faction of military leaders, gained control of all military facilities and government buildings in Lisbon, sweeping away 48 years of Salazar’s *Estado Novo* dictatorship. However, the 26 April bloodless military coup that deposed Salazar’s successor, Marcelo Caetano, was unconventional in that its objective was to *diminish* the powers of the military within the Portuguese state and to remove political and economic control from a handful of elites:

The army officers who led the 1974 revolt, most of them young and all of them veterans of Portugal’s unpopular thirteen-years-long colonial wars in Africa, acted from varied motives: The frustrations of fighting endlessly and inconclusively against African rebels, dissatisfactions over pay and promotion, discontent with the economic backwardness of their country, its high rate of illiteracy, the social inequities and the political rigidity of Portugal’s rulers… (Sobel 1976).
Simply put, the younger generation fighting in the Portuguese military desired working conditions that mirrored the political and military norms of its NATO allies in Western Europe: A post-imperialist foreign policy, a well-compensated volunteer military, and some form of liberal democracy to go along with it. Portuguese historian Luis Nuno Rodrigues stressed the significance of the constant interaction between Portuguese officials and other Alliance leaders in creating a new class of liberal-minded elites.

Rodrigues points to the strains put upon a small European military trying to cling on to a vast African empire. With the “Overseas War” draining resources and lives, the government did not have the luxury of installing exclusively Salazar loyalists into high military posts. Furthermore, many of these young leaders learned their trade in the 1950s and 1960s — in NATO drills, astride NATO allies, with NATO equipment — before shipping down to the dreadful battlefields of Angola and Mozambique. As such, a “NATO generation” of elites, without much of an allegiance to the totalitarian bureaucracy in Lisbon, slowly supplanted the intransigent veterans of the 1926 coup in the highest levels of power, and radical change was not far behind (Rodrigues 2004).
The events that ensued following the Carnation Revolution clouded this phenomenon. The provisional military government held elections in early 1975 that yielded a sizable plurality for communist and socialist parties. Despite repeated reassurances that a socialist Portugal would remain a loyal member of NATO, fears of Lisbon’s potential drift towards Moscow became a cause célèbre for conservative leaders in the United States and United Kingdom. U.S. Senator James Buckley (Cons.-R – N.Y.) told a press conference in Washington on 21 March 1975 that “there is nothing else now going on in the world — not in southeast Asia, not even in the Middle East — half so important and so ominous as the communist drive to power in Portugal”(Sobel 1976). Newly elected British Conservative leader Margaret Thatcher made Portugal, where “the first faint flickers of democracy are being snuffed out by Communist reaction,” the theme
of her first foreign policy speeches (Speech to Chelsea Conservative Association, 26 July 1975).

The fears were ultimately unwarranted: With the “NATO generation” assuming the role of political elites, a liberal democracy, with smooth and frequent transitions between socialist and center-right administrations, emerged out of the turmoil of the mid-seventies and remains to this day a key participant in NATO.
Case Study: Turkey 1980

Turkey has by far been the least politically stable member in the Alliance since it joined as part of the first expansion in 1952. At three distinct junctures, in 1960, 1971, and 1980 (and arguably in 1997, when the military pressured the prime minister to resign), democracy has broken down. On each occasion, the military has quickly “stepped in” and assumed power from multi-party systems that had descended into chaos. While I will not play apologist for the occasionally brutal military regimes that presided over the interregnal periods of Turkish democracy, military leaders were relatively successful in restoring order in Ankara. The ruling dictatorships never professed to be permanent, and swiftly reinstated multi-party democracy in all three instances (Dodd 1983).

The Polity Ratings, from accession in 1952 through to 2006, reflect the volatility of modern Turkish political history, as well as the relative brevity of the interludes of military control:
The 1980-83 military regime, the longest and most intense of the three digressions from democratic rule, will be the focus of this brief study. Marshall and Jaggers’s polity component rating for “Executive Restraint” indicates that the breakdown of executive checks was more absolute in the early 1980s than during previous military regimes:

The control of opposition parties by the military regime was also at its tightest during the 1980-83 period:
Radical elements on both the right and left had escalated political violence beginning in 1978, and by mid-1980, democratically-elected Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel had completely lost control, with politically-motivated murders averaging 30 a day (Dodd 1983). On 12 September 1980, General Kenan Evren declared that the Parliament had been abolished and all political parties banned, and became de facto dictator of Turkey for much of the next three years. Over this period, regional institutions such as the European Community and the Council of Europe censured Turkey in a variety of venues, but NATO, as in 1960 and 1971, stood silent and continued military aid. Despite the curtailment of civil liberties, the military leadership rapidly began preparations for a return to democracy, creating a committee to draft a constitution in early 1981, putting the new Constitution to a plebiscite in 1982, and yielding to Turgut Ozal’s Motherland Party after 1983 elections (Dodd 1983).
This is the only pre-1989 episode where Pevehouse comments on the relationship between NATO and democracy in his 2005 work: He concludes that NATO’s decision, at Washington’s behest, to continue to support the military junta amounted to a “realist emphasis on great power preferences,” and despite Turkey’s longstanding relationship with Western European and North American armed forces, the evidence for “socialization” is weak (Pevehouse 2005: 147).

Pevehouse is slightly off the mark in his assessment for two reasons. First, Washington had jeopardized its relationship with Ankara — perhaps its most important Mediterranean rampart against Moscow — by instituting substantial targeted sanctions from 1974-78 to protest Turkish aggression in Cyprus (Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott 1990). Obviously, the Ford and Carter Administrations recognized the limits of a realist strategy, and determined they could not allow Turkey, however valuable an ally, to invade non-aligned states using American weapons. Second, Pevehouse contradicts himself, refuting the applicability of “socialization,” but then going on to point out the work of Ali Karaosmanoglu, who defends the “professionalism” of the Turkish military and its understanding that democracy was critical in cementing ties with Europe:

Most of Turkey’s high-ranking officers have either visited or served in various NATO headquarters in Europe or the United States. Such experiences abroad gave them an international outlook and contributed to their sense of professionalism…Its commitment to professionalism appears to be one of the reasons the Turkish military has disengaged itself from politics as quickly as possibly following each intervention (Karaosmanoglu 1994:126; Pevehouse 2005: 147-48).

In all three case studies, I am not contending that NATO “created” the actors and circumstances that reversed these breakdowns of democracy — clearly, many of the explicit actions of the Alliance served Cold War interests at the expense of internal
democratic movements. However, an undeniably democracy-influenced “NATO culture” arose in the postwar years, as military and diplomatic leaders stood side by side at daises in Brussels, officers quarters at Ramstein Air Base, and observation decks in North Sea-bound destroyers.

As NATO headed into the post-1989 era, this culture had the potential to prove a most valuable, if unquantifiable, asset.
REFLECTING BACK TWO DECADES AFTER GORBACHEV

A botched 1989 press conference led by an inept bureaucrat helped transform the nature of European security forever.

Gunter Schabowski, a leading member of the German Democratic Republic’s Politburo, received hastily penned instructions for issuing a decree to the international press corps that had assembled in a government building in East Berlin. His task was to announce a slight relaxation of restrictions on travel to the West, but he misunderstood the directions. With little time to prepare on that chilly November evening in 1989, the clueless Schabowski made a most infamous gaffe.

The citizens of the East Germany were free to leave “through any of the border crossings,” he proclaimed mistakenly. One of the dozens of stunned reporters asked when this dramatic change would come into practice. “According to my information, immediately.” And, they inquired of the visibly flustered Schabowski, would this travel between East and West be unrestricted? “Permanent exit can take place from the G.D.R. to [West Germany] and West Berlin, respectively” (Gaddis 2005: 245-46).

East Berliners rush to take down the Wall, 10 November 1989
East Berliners rushed to the wall with axes and hacksaws, and the images of Germans young and old dancing on top of the graffiti-laden wall broadcast to the world just how impotent Moscow had become in its ability to rein in its puppet regimes in Eastern Europe. Nearly every Soviet satellite went on to scrap its communist leadership by the end of 1989, and, over ensuing months, both the Warsaw Pact and the dictatorship it served in Moscow dissolved into oblivion.

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NATO officials understood that a new purpose and a fresh common denominator amongst member states were critical to avoid a plunge into redundancy. As Council on Foreign Relations scholar Celeste Wallander noted, “even if Western Europe continued to worry about the possibility of a ‘Weimar Russia,’ the alliance’s raison d’être was widely questioned” (Wallander 2001).

The question on the minds of leaders in Washington, Brussels and every other Western European capital was whether NATO should use its existing infrastructure in Europe to ensure stability in the nascent democracies behind the former Iron Curtain, and perhaps even expand the Alliance to include these states and, in effect, serve as guardian of their fledgling democratic institutions.

Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Ronald Reagan’s late Ambassador to the United Nations, was one of the earliest proponents of “democratization by expansion” in the weeks following the fall of the Berlin Wall. To the prominent 1980s diplomat, expanding the breadth of the Alliance was the critical step to ensure that the United States would be the linchpin behind a stabilized Eastern Europe.

There is . . . only one reliable guarantee against aggression. It is not found in
international organizations. It is found in the spread of democracy. It derives from
the simple fact that true democracies do not invade one another and do not
engage in aggressive wars . . . . Pre-serving and strengthening democracies in
Central and Eastern Europe should be the United States' central goal and top
foreign policy priority in Europe, in my opinion. Membership in NATO will help
to achieve those goals and strengthen the alliance (in Reiter 2001: 41).

Kirkpatrick’s view prevailed, and NATO girded itself to nearly double in size, all
the while foretelling the good that expansion would do to stabilize democracy in the
formerly communist capitals.

Emory’s Dan Reiter, perhaps the most prominent opponent of expansion,
countered this prevailing argument in the Spring 2001 issue of International Security,
pointing out that the sampling of states that participate in the candidacy process distorts
legitimate causal mechanisms behind democratization. He contested that the only states
that seek entry into NATO are those that already have maturing democratic institutions,
and the “Membership Action Plan” (MAP) imposed on prospective members has had
little effect in promoting internal reforms (Reiter 2001: 42).

The European Union, Reiter argues, presents the most effective tool for
democratization. The economic prosperity that is bolstered by sweeping EU aid programs and trade
mechanism is the key to political stability (Reiter 2001, Jacoby 2006). Furthermore, while the
North Atlantic Treaty lacks a punitive “stick,” the EU has a mechanism to discipline or
dismiss members that “back away from democratic norms”:

…Democratization in Eastern Europe after the Cold War is most likely to be
advanced by international institutions other than NATO, specifically the EU,
which is likely to do better than NATO at providing the carrot and stick necessary
to promote and maintain democratization. Including a state in the web of EU
institutions strengthens domestic economic and political reforms, thus making it
more difficult to overturn them. As mentioned, the EU both explicitly requires
democracy as a condition of membership and contains a measure permitting the
sanctioning of a member that backs away from democratic norms (Reiter 2001:
66).
This debate raises the issue of a severe limitation encountered when working with the supposed “consequences” of NATO membership. Due to the nature of the research topic, there are some issues that simply cannot be addressed. For example, the selection process by which countries enter into NATO may be correlated with the potential “effects” that NATO membership might seem to “exact.” For example, the parameters of this selection question are straightforward for the post-1989 period: One must ask if NATO actually effects any domestic change within prospective members, or if only states that were already on a trajectory towards liberal democracy opt to join the Alliance (Gaddis 1998, Reiter 2001). Opponents of expansion contend that any observed progress towards democracy would occur even in the absence of the NATO expansion process — the null hypothesis. Additionally, because many prospective Alliance members also simultaneously seek membership in the European Union, many scholars believe that it was the strict acquis communautaire requirements\(^2\) and the aid- and trade-related EU programs that actually spurred the maturation of democratic institutions (Jacoby 2006: 119).

\(^2\)Acquis communautaire refers to the blocks of EU law that must be incorporated, en masse, into the legal frameworks of candidate states as a prerequisite to membership.
For the pre-1989 time period that is the main focus of this paper, the literature on the membership-democracy relationship is scant and the analysis even more difficult because of the tiny number – three – of non-democratic member states that existed. Perhaps these countries could have just as easily transitioned from autocracy to democracy outside the framework of NATO, just as Spain did in 1975. And perhaps the countries that join NATO possess inherent qualities that make them more likely to evolve towards democracy. To correct for this potential endogeneity, it would be nice to be able to hypothetically run experiments where countries enter into NATO under all sorts of randomly assigned conditions. Alas, only 16 countries entered over the period 1949-1989 under very specific conditions.

However, this selection problem should not diminish the critical historical relationship that has been discussed here. The fact that NATO military officials have
constantly intermingled since 1949 and the fact that NATO-trained officials led the charge against autocracy in Greece, Turkey and Portugal are both irrefutable, and together reveal a pattern that is rarely explored. And projecting the role of the Alliance out in the decades after 1989, one can only hope that this pattern continues in Eastern Europe.

In all likelihood, the European Union will play a more significant role in nurturing nascent democracy in Eastern Europe than NATO will: There is nothing that NATO demands in the realm of conditionality that the EU does not take a step further, nor does the Alliance offer any special “carrots” that the EU does not. The only exception to this is in military affairs. NATO offers not only military funding — and, by extension, an assurance to military elites that the armed forces will continue to hold an elite place in society — but will continue to extend the benefits of a “socialization” effect to places like Hungary and the Czech Republic where civil-military relations have traditionally been dismal.

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s most durable contribution to postwar democracy — a contribution that has been consistent since 1949 — has been the spread of democratic customs in the military through the “socialization effect.” The framers had anticipated this phenomenon, albeit implicitly, in the North Atlantic Treaty:

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being (Article 3, North Atlantic Treaty).
NATO has facilitated a culture unprecedented in modern history, where military leaders do not just recognize, but revere their role as faithful, apolitical servants to civilian regimes. This was evident during the Cold War, when young, NATO-trained officers willingly gave way to democratically-elected regimes in Portugal, Greece, and Turkey. This was also evident after 1989, when democratic norms — most importantly, definitive civilian control of the military — spread from seasoned American, British, and Belgian officials to the guardians of the young democratic regimes in Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw, to name just a few.

The organization has its limits — democratization in the broadest sense is likely to be advanced primarily by other institutions, namely the European Union. However, NATO came into being as a military alliance — and in the past decade has at last gone into battle in defense of democracy in the Balkans — and in the coming years, its role as the most influential advocate of modern civil-military relations will only expand as the Alliance reaches further eastward.
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