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NATO's inherent dilemma: strategic imperatives vs. value foundations

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ABSTRACT

It has been clear for several years now that what NATO purports to stand for and what certain member states practice, do not fully align. From the beginning in 1949, when treaty values and strategic imperatives have been conflicted, the strategic imperatives have almost always, albeit temporarily on an “exceptional” basis, taken precedence over the values. While not new, these tensions today are greater than at any time in NATO's history. In our view, they could become an existential threat. We use a case study from NATO's history to examine the case of Turkey today.

KEYWORDS NATO; value foundations; strategic imperatives

I

The best-known passage from the North Atlantic Treaty is probably the opening of Article 5: ‘[t]he 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 NATO's core identity as a security organisation seems widely accepted.¹ However, the treaty articulates both values and a strategic agenda for the alliance. Less well known, but arguably just as important for understanding NATO's nature, are these words from the treaty's preamble: ‘[t]he Parties to this Treaty ... 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.’² Indeed, one could argue that treaties

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²*The North Atlantic Treaty*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

and alliances being means to larger ends, this language from the preamble really forms the core of what the alliance is about. At least one author has maintained that this is what sets NATO apart from other alliances and has helped ensure its survival.³

It has been clear since NATO's founding that what the alliance purports to stand for and what certain member states practice, do not always fully align. It has certainly not been lost on those skeptical of or hostile to the alliance—within or without—that authoritarian regimes have come to power in several member states and that they have begun to erode, if not outright contradict, many of the core principles NATO was designed to defend and promote. At the same time, some of the member states in question remain of crucial importance to the alliance's security interests. From the beginning in 1949, when treaty values and strategic imperatives have been conflicted, the strategic imperatives have almost always, albeit temporarily on an 'exceptional' basis, taken precedence over the values.

In the beginning, the dominance of strategic considerations over values was demonstrated when Portugal, under its autocratic regime, was invited to sign the treaty. Its Azores airfields would have been critical to American reinforcement of NATO forces in wartime. However, value-based opposition from European founding members blocked dictator Francisco Franco's Spain, despite strongly-held views of U.S. Senators, including leading NATO skeptic Robert Taft, who thought military resources of Spain and Germany would add importantly to NATO's defenses against the Soviet Union. The point was recorded in Senate Resolution 99 when it passed the Senate in 1951.⁴

While not new, these tensions today are greater than at few other times in NATO's history. In our view, they could become an existential threat. This essay focuses particularly on Turkey's drift away from secular democracy as a contemporary threat. But it is not the only worrying development observed in the politics of NATO states over the past decade. The growth of European radical right populist parties was stimulated in part by the tragic flood of refugees from the south and the fear that not only terrorism, but different racial, linguistic, and ideological challenges would come with the immigrants. Moreover, even the United States and the United Kingdom got caught up in radical right temptations, with Brexit resulting in Britain and Donald Trump's presidency in the United States.

³Walter J. Thies, *Why NATO Endures* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2009). See also, Jeremi Suri, 'The normative resilience of NATO: a community of shared values amid public discord,' in Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist, and Anna Locher (eds.), *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges in the 1960s* (London and New York: Routledge 2007), 15–30.

⁴Early U.S. interest in burdensharing as a consideration that should take precedence over values was illustrated in 1951 when the Truman administration proposed sending substantial U.S. forces to Europe to deter Soviet advances. When the Senate Resolution 99 ultimately endorsed the deployments on 4 April 1951, the Senate specified that 'provisions should be made to utilize the military resources of Italy, West Germany and Spain.' Stanley R. Sloan, *Defense of the West, NATO the European Union and the Transatlantic Bargain* (Manchester University Press: 2016), 32.

NATO's military-strategic mission and its role as a stabilising force in international politics ultimately depend on the political cohesion of the alliance and on the credibility of its fundamental principles. An alliance that lacks a common political purpose will also differ on the threats faced by member states, and as a result fail to organise an effective defense. Drifting too far from core principles will render hollow the language in Article 2, where member states pledge to '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 ...'.⁵ Those of us who believe the alliance can perform a useful role in the world of the twenty-first century and who take the fundamental principles from the preamble and the treaty seriously, need to think hard about the consequences of NATO, through the actions of important member states, not practicing what it preaches.

Because this problem is not new, an understanding of the alliance's experience with it can be useful in thinking about the present and the future. History will not provide easy answers, but examining the way the alliance in the past has dealt with the problem of authoritarian regimes in its midst, we should be able to identify key conceptual aspects (we call them fundamental dilemmas) and formulate relevant questions that will help us think about the present. This we will do in this article by using the case of the so-called Colonels' regime in Greece (1967–1974), led until late 1973 by Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos. We conclude with discussion of the contemporary case of Turkey's drift away from its NATO strategic and value moorings, set in the context of general challenges to liberal democracy throughout the alliance.

While the Greek case was unique, the controversies within the alliance over the junta in the late 1960s and early 1970s also brought to the fore many fundamental dilemmas, some of them not new. What should govern: strategic imperatives or values, and to what extent might that question divide the allies? Also, what other factors play a part in these deliberations, for example domestic politics or public opinion? And how might we imagine these deliberations to develop, and between what actors?

Our historical case study is a means to get at these questions; it will not aim for comprehensiveness.⁶ Instead, it will limit itself to 1973 and 1974, focusing on the role of Dutch foreign minister Max van der Stoep. As his biographer

⁵*The North Atlantic Treaty*. This treaty provision is also known as 'the Canadian article,' as its inclusion was strongly urged by the Government of Canada.

⁶For more thorough accounts, see: Effie G. H. Pedaliu, "'A Discordant Note': NATO and the Greek Junta, 1967–1974," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22:1 (2011), 101–120; and Konstantina Maragkou, 'Favoritism in NATO's Southeastern flank: The case of the Greek Colonels, 1967–1974,' *Cold War History* 9:3 (2009), 347–366.

points out, the social democrat had campaigned for a return to democracy in Greece ever since the 1967 coup d'état. As special rapporteur for the Council of Europe, he had been a leader in documenting the junta's human rights abuses, and he had asked for Greece's suspension from the Council. At the NATO Parliamentary Assembly – at that time called the North Atlantic Assembly – he was instrumental in the passing of resolutions in 1970 and 1971 condemning the Colonels. In the years following their fall, Van der Stoel was repeatedly honoured in Greece for his efforts.⁷

As foreign minister in the center-left Den Uyl government that took office on 11 May 1973, Van der Stoel used his position to continue his advocacy on behalf of democracy in Greece, and Greek democrats. Participating in the ministerial meetings of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), he also began to ask his colleagues what it meant for NATO to tolerate in its midst authoritarian regimes that, as a matter of policy, violated the core principles of the Treaty. Exactly what did Van der Stoel say on these occasions; what was the response he received, if any; what happened at the margins of these occasions and more broadly in Van der Stoel's diplomacy surrounding this issue; and what can this short history tell us about how NATO functions, or could function, when faced with challenges such as these? Van der Stoel's papers at the Dutch National Archives at The Hague contain much useful material on these questions. To begin documenting developments from the perspective of the other members of the alliance, we have also consulted files that are available at its archive in Brussels.⁸

II

The Dutch, through Van der Stoel's initiatives, were not the first among member governments to raise the issue. In the spring of 1967, right after the colonels' coup, the scheduled NATO ministerial meeting was postponed to deal with the Danish demand that the Greek situation be put on the agenda. Ultimately, the issue was resolved internally, with no official comment from the alliance on the developments in Greece.⁹

As the junta, led by Papadopoulos, abolished democracy in Greece and consolidated its power, outside observers such as Amnesty International published well-documented accusations of widespread torture by Greek

⁷Anet Bleich, *De stille diplomaat: Max van der Stoel, 1924–2011* (Amsterdam: Balans 2018), especially chapter 7: 'De slag om Athene.' For a detailed account of the efforts within the Council of Europe and the European Community to advance the cause of human rights in Greece, and generally elevate the issue of human rights within European politics, see Víctor Fernández Soriano, 'Facing the Greek junta: the European Community, the Council of Europe and the rise of human-rights politics in Europe,' *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 24:3 (2017), 358–376.

⁸We would like to thank archivist and staff at both institutions for their kind assistance.

⁹Pedaliu, "A Discordant Note", 101–103; and Maragkou, 'Favoritism in NATO's Southeastern flank,' 352–353.

police of political opponents of the regime. Soon, the Council of Europe, with Van der Stoel as its rapporteur, would repeatedly publish similar indictments. Other than the violent suppression of political dissent, the regime limited freedom of speech, interfered with education at all levels, and sought to impose reactionary social mores, such as banning long hair for men and miniskirts for women.¹⁰

At this time, and in subsequent years, an array of arguments could be, and was, lined up to argue against antagonizing the Colonels, sometimes by representatives of the regime itself. First, there was what could be called NATO's birth defect: the admittance of Portugal under the right-authoritarian Salazar regime as a founding member in 1949, noted above. This had not occurred without a debate. However, as Mark Smith has concluded, '[i]n the end, it was recognised that the damage done to the Treaty by not including Portugal would be far outweighed by the political issues involved in her accession.'¹¹ Writing in 1970, *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist C.L. Sulzberger pointed out that '[a]s we learned to our embarrassment in Portugal, a country can contribute help (in that case the Azores), even if we don't like its ideology.'¹² Even though this could be seen as a 'birth defect,' it was in fact critically important to the pledge of the United States to participate in European defense given the contemporary range of aircraft that would be required to ferry U.S. troops to Europe in a crisis.

Portugal's, and Greece's, help was deemed indispensable considering the threat posed by the Soviet Union, of course. The threat, and, by the late 1960s, reality of increased Soviet influence in the Mediterranean region was very real for the allies. Meanwhile, the alliance was still recouping from France's withdrawal from its military command in 1966. The new regime in Athens understood all this, as it understood Greece's strategic importance for NATO in facing especially the Soviet challenge in the Mediterranean. NATO's 1967 Harmel Report on 'Future Tasks of the Alliance' spoke of the alliance's South-East flank as 'exposed.'¹³ The Colonels not only made sure to continue to do their part within the alliance, but also indicated that if pushed too hard, they might be open to suggestions from Moscow and its allies in the region for better relations. All the while, they also reminded the NATO allies that they had seized power in the first place to prevent communists from gaining predominant influence in Greek politics. Repeatedly, Papadopoulos made vague promises to work toward a restoration of democracy once that danger had abated.¹⁴

¹⁰Amnesty International, *Torture in Greece: The First Torturers Trial, 1975* (London: Amnesty International Publications 1977).

¹¹Mark Smith, *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War: Strategy and System in the Western Alliance* (Houndsmills: Palgrave 2000), 48.

¹²C.L. Sulzberger, 'Greece under the Colonels,' *Foreign Affairs* 48:2 (1970), 300–311, this point 310.

¹³NATO, 'The Future Tasks of the Alliance' (Brussels, December 1967), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm.

¹⁴Maragkou, 'Favoritism in NATO's Southeastern flank.' See also Benjamin Sharp, *NATO and the Mediterranean, 1949–1979: Deterioration on the Southern Flank* Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland: Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1981.

Throughout this period, the Greek junta frequently faced criticism within the alliance. While many member governments felt pressure from lawmakers and public opinion to speak out, calls for action generally came from Denmark and Norway, most significantly in 1970, when NATO debated a report recommending the supply of arms to Greece (and Turkey). Secretary-General Manlio Brosio, aided by Washington in particular, was able to deflect these challenges to the extent that no direct reference to the situation in Greece appeared in communiqués issued at the end of NATO Council meetings. However, there was rarely a time after 1967 when the suppression of freedom and democracy did not give rise to acrimony within the alliance.¹⁵

Of course, Greece (or more broadly, the ‘values’ issue) was hardly the only problem that troubled the alliance. Especially during the Nixon years, and particularly in 1973, the year Van der Stoel took office, the transatlantic allies argued sharply over the future of the alliance. Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic worried about the willingness of younger generations to accept defense spending even at existing levels, and about their questioning of a need for NATO in the first place in an era of East-West détente. However, Washington, on one side, and most European member states on the other, were also sharply divided over European aspirations to greater autonomy in foreign policy.¹⁶ These ambitions were driven in part by Washington’s preoccupation with its diplomacy with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Thrown into the discussion were long-standing U.S. demands that the Europeans take greater responsibility for their own defense, growing American concerns about the emergence of the European Economic Community as an economic competitor, and President Nixon’s anger over European criticism of his Vietnam policies. It all culminated 1973, first with National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger’s ill-fated ‘Year of Europe’ initiative, and then in the fall with the refusal of most of the European allies to fall into line behind Washington’s active support for Israel during the Middle-East War.¹⁷

Max van der Stoel was not the only Dutch politician to recognise how the abrogation of democracy in Greece posed a problem for the project of European integration or the Atlantic Alliance. In the Dutch parliament

¹⁵Pedaliu, “A Discordant Note”, 105–113.

¹⁶The focus in Washington on European contributions to NATO defenses and aspirations for greater autonomy was sufficient to lead the intelligence community to prepare the first-ever National Intelligence Estimate on the future of European defense cooperation. Sloan, in the summer of 1973 in between tours with the U.S. Delegation to the Vienna negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions, authored the estimate.

¹⁷Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2019), chapter 8. The issue of Greece is not mentioned in this chapter, which, given the other items on NATO’s agenda is not surprising. But to emphasize: our aim is not to discuss the case of the junta for its own sake, but to use the debate officials did conduct as a way to think more systematically about NATO’s value foundations v. strategic imperatives dilemma generally.

there were many who believed 'Europe' and NATO ought to take action and that the Netherlands ought to lead, in accordance with, as many preferred to see it, a long Dutch tradition of moral leadership in the world.¹⁸ In February 1973, expressing the aspirations of many at this time, Bas de Gaay Fortman, the leader of the Christian Radicals (PPR) about to participate in the new Den Uyl coalition government, had coined the term *Gidsland*: the Netherlands as 'guiding state' ought to point to way for others to a better world.¹⁹ However, while Van der Stoel's predecessor as foreign minister until 1971, Joseph Luns recognised the relevance of the issue too, neither as foreign minister nor as NATO's Secretary General after 1971 did he expect much from pressuring the Colonels, and he did not think that NATO was the appropriate forum to discuss this matter.²⁰

III

Taking office on 11 May 1973, one month before the ministerial North Atlantic Council meeting was scheduled to convene in Copenhagen, Van der Stoel made it clear during his first press conference that he intended to raise the issue of the Greek dictatorship (and that of Portugal) with his colleagues.²¹ He did so for reasons of principle, but also out of political necessity. Throughout his tenure as Dutch foreign minister, but already prior to that time as his party's foreign affairs point person in parliament, Van der Stoel had to face down organised challenges within his own party to Dutch NATO membership. Younger activists on the party's left wing argued that membership was incompatible with human rights violations by Portugal and Greece, and that either the latter or the Netherlands ought to leave the alliance if things did not change. Van der Stoel always resisted these calls, but although a moderate and a staunch Atlanticist, he

¹⁸J.J.C. Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles: A Study of Dutch Foreign Policy* (Leiden: Nijhoff 1979). It is not as if the promotion of international law and human rights had no place in the history of Dutch foreign relations. However, as Voorhoeve's title suggests, it was not the only, or even the predominant, aspect. For a nuanced evaluation of the place of human rights and international law in Dutch foreign policy since the late nineteenth century see Peter Malcontent & Floribert Baudet, 'The Dutchman's burden? Nederland en de internationale rechtsorde in the twintigste eeuw', in Bob de Graaff, Duco Hellema & Bert van der Zwan (eds.), *De Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek in the twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Boom 2003), 69–104.

¹⁹Bas de Gaay Fortman, 'De vredespolitiek van de radicalen,' *Internationale Spectator* 27:4 (22 February 1973), 109–113.

²⁰Tellingly, the section in the major Luns biography is entitled 'Under pressure from the opposition: Greece, Biafra and Portugal.' Albert Kersten, *Luns: een politieke biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom 2011), 420–430. On 19 June 2019 Kersten revisited the issue at a conference at the Dutch Archeological Institute in Athens, Greece in a detailed and nuanced paper (unpublished), essentially reaching the same conclusion. 'Luns, macht en democratie.' Paper generously shared with the authors.

²¹See for example a report on his first press conference, on 14 May, 'Van der Stoel wil snel over Portugal praten met de NAVO,' in the daily *Trouw*, 15 May 1973. For the broader context see, T. De Goede, 'De mensenrechten in het Nederlandse buitenlands beleid ten aanzien van Spanje, Portugal en Griekenland, 1945–1975', in Maarten Kuitenbrouwer & Marij Leenders (eds.), *Geschiedenis van de mensenrechten: Bouwstenen voor een interdisciplinaire benadering* (Hilversum: Verloren 1996), 227–258.

can still be seen, like his critics within his party, as a representative of the so-called human rights revolution in international politics of the late 1960s and 1970s.²²

Following his press conference, Van der Stoel asked the Dutch ambassador in Athens, Carl Barkman, what action could be undertaken within NATO to promote democracy in Greece.²³ The ambassador was not optimistic, neither on the chances of other countries joining a Dutch initiative, nor on any positive influence such an initiative would have on the Papadopoulos regime. Referring to a suggestion made to him by former Greek foreign minister and retired admiral Ioannis Toumbas, Barkman believed that what might do some good (he added that U.S. ambassador in Athens, Henry Tasca, agreed) was raising the issue of the importance of a return to democracy in military-to-military contacts with the Greeks.²⁴

Meeting Van der Stoel in The Hague on 2 June 1973 the U.S. ambassador in the Netherlands, J. William Middendorf, handed Van der Stoel a memorandum, placing 'the "undemocratic regimes" issue' in a broader context, emphasizing the importance of allied unity. The fisheries dispute between Iceland and the United Kingdom was putting enough pressure on allied solidarity as it was; Danish and Norwegian appeals in the past usually had only brought sharp rebukes from Athens; bilateral contacts were much better suited to raise this issue. Moreover, the Europeans, according to the Americans, had real leverage in the admission process at the European Community (EC), which was the appropriate venue to pursue the desired changes anyway – 'not pressure within a military alliance.'²⁵ In response, Van der Stoel told the U.S. ambassador that while certainly planning to raise the problem in bilateral discussions, he would still bring it up at the NATO Council's ministerial meeting, particularly, he added, now that the West, rightly, was placing so much emphasis on the free flow of ideas, people, and information in the context of the Helsinki talks with the Soviet Union and its allies. To Middendorf's reference to Papadopoulos' promise of a general election, Van der Stoel responded that actions spoke louder than

²²On Van der Stoel and his party see, Frank Zuijdam, 'Tussen wens en werkelijkheid. Het debat over vrede en veiligheid binnen de PvdA in de periode 1958–1977.' Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2001, especially chapter 8; Bleich, *De stille diplomaat*, chapter 8. Van der Stoel was posthumously honoured in 2011 with a special issue of the journal *Security and Human Rights*, 22:3 (2011), containing many testimonies from colleagues and collaborators on his commitment to human, refugee, and minority rights worldwide, and his effectiveness as an advocate in various capacities from the 1960s to the early 21st century.

²³Barkman has published the frequent notes he took in the nearly six years that he served as ambassador in Greece: C.D. Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene: 1969–1975 Van Dictatuur tot Democratie* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij 1984), this episode 81–84. English-language edition: C. Barkman, *Ambassador in Athens* (London: Merlin 1989).

²⁴Barkman to Van der Stoel, 1 June 1973. Max van der Stoel papers, *Netherlands National Archives, The Hague* (NA-Ha), 2.21.420/214.

²⁵Memorandum 'Confidential.' Handwritten date, 3/6. NA-Ha, 2.21.420/214. For United States policy toward Greece in this era see James Edward Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece: History and Power, 1950–1974* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 2009), especially chapter 7.

words, particularly the freedom of regime opponents to take part in any election campaign.²⁶

Determined to keep the issue on the table, Van der Stoel also looked for partners, and he made sure to avoid surprising anyone with his initiatives. Neither was he interested in trying to corner Greek officials. A week before the NAC he shared with the Dutch ambassador in Athens, Barkman, the relevant parts from his prepared remarks for the meeting. He would be critical of undemocratic regimes within NATO, but he was not going to identify any countries by name. Barkman had his permission to share that last fact with the Greek government.²⁷ The foreign minister also sent the particular passage to the Dutch embassies in Belgium, Luxemburg, Canada, Denmark, and Norway, so that his respective colleagues—presumably Van der Stoel viewed them as potential partners—could use it as they prepared their own remarks.²⁸

When it was his turn to speak at the Copenhagen NAC, Van der Stoel made his point in the part of his address dealing with the Helsinki process, or the East-West deliberations over a European Security Conference (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE). These talks covered political, economic, and cultural issues. However, on the initiative of West European countries, very much including the Netherlands, the West was placing a lot of emphasis on the respect for basic human rights in the Soviet bloc; the so-called ‘third basket’:

[i]t is my Government’s strongly-held view that the maintenance vis-a-vis the East of the ideals and principles now successfully embodied in the mandates of the first and especially the third basket has important implications for ourselves as well. For we can hardly appear sincere in the defense of our ‘freedom, common heritage and civilization of our peoples, founded in the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law’ – and therefore we can hardly expect to convince – if we ourselves, the members of this Alliance, do not, one for one, practice what we preach. . . . NATO needs more than planes and tanks and guns – it needs widespread popular support. In order to maintain the credibility and vitality of the Alliance, it is essential that the basic requirements of individual liberty and political democracy are being respected everywhere.²⁹

In a separate bi-lateral meeting at Copenhagen, Van der Stoel and his Greek counterpart, Phedon Cavalierato, essentially agreed to disagree on the political process in Greece, doing so after a frank but businesslike exchange. The Greek

²⁶Memorandum Van der Stoel, ‘Dutch attitude toward Greece and Portugal at the coming NATO ministerial council,’ 3 June 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

²⁷Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene*, 85.

²⁸Van der Stoel to embassies Brussels, Luxemburg, Ottawa, Copenhagen, Oslo, 12 June 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

²⁹Verbatim Record of the Meeting of the Council, 14 June 1973. *NATO Archives*, Brussels, C-VR(73)36-PART_2_BIL.PDF. For the Dutch approach to the diplomacy in pursuit of a European security conference, see Floribert Baudet, ‘Het heeft onze aandacht’: *Nederland en de rechten van de mens in Oost-Europa en Joegoslavië, 1972–1979* (Amsterdam: Boom 2001). More generally on the Western approach: Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2018), chapter 6.

official did express his appreciation that the Dutch foreign minister had not named any countries by name.³⁰ Speaking with ambassador Barkman in Athens two weeks later, Cavalierato admitted that Van der Stoel's intervention at the NAC had gathered the support from more colleagues than he had expected.³¹

And indeed, Van der Stoel's colleagues from Norway, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Luxembourg, and Denmark all endorsed his remarks during the meeting, causing the chairman, Secretary General Joseph Luns, to sum up that 'several Ministers had drawn attention to the importance of living up to the principles and ideals embodied in the preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, which were also the subject of talks in the CSCE, in order that public support for the Alliance be strengthened and maintained.'³² Once again, there was no mention of the Greek dictatorship in the communique issued after the meeting. However, talking to the press afterwards, Luns confirmed that there had been discussion of the fact that certain alliance members did not respect the democratic principles formulated in the NATO treaty's preamble.³³ At the next cabinet meeting in The Hague, Van der Stoel reminded his colleagues that this had not happened before in the context of Ministerial Council meetings.³⁴ What had certainly helped was that at this time, the spring of 1973, the Colonels regime in Athens was coming under growing pressure. The challenge now also came from within the armed forces when, in May, the navy staged a mutiny. This event called into question one of the Colonels' main justifications for their rule, namely the indispensability of the Greek military contribution to NATO's Southeastern flank. In the end, the two could not be separated: the regime's lack of legitimacy inside Greece, and the tensions and instability this caused, also undermined the country's military-strategic value for the alliance.

Copenhagen was a very modest achievement, but an achievement nonetheless. Van der Stoel had clearly, though indirectly, criticized the Colonels' regime and gained some recognition for his principled stance from fellow NATO foreign ministers, to the extent that for the first time since the 1967 coup d'état, the secretary-general of the alliance had publicly acknowledged there had, indeed, been debate over this. Meanwhile, he had also managed to remain on speaking terms with leading representatives of the regime, whom he recognized as important participants in NATO as well as the people who might eventually move the country back to democracy.

³⁰Van der Stoel to Dutch embassy in Athens, 18 June 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214. The meeting took place on 15 June.

³¹Barkman to Van der Stoel, 29 June 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

³²Verbatim Record of the Meeting of the Council, 14 June 1973. *NATO Archives*, Brussels, C-VR(73)36-PART_3_BIL.PDF.

³³Han J.A. Hansen, 'MR van der Stoel na NATO-Raad: Veroordeling dictatuur wekt goede reacties,' *De Volkskrant*, 16 June 1973.

³⁴De Goede, 'De mensenrechten in het Nederlandse buitenlands beleid ten aanzien van Spanje, Portugal en Griekenland,' 246.

Van der Stoel's nuanced Greece policy included his decision at this time to allow the Dutch munitions company Kruithoorn to make a sale, the first one in years, to the Greek air force. The political situation in Greece was a problem, but this was not the only aspect. Another was to make sure that, on NATO's Southern flank, Greece continued to be as strong as possible. But clearly, Van der Stoel wrote in his decision, these things should be decided on a case-by-case basis, and by the foreign minister himself.³⁵

Worries about Greece's contribution, perhaps even adherence, to NATO came up when Van der Stoel met with his British counterpart, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, later in June 1973 in London. Greece's strategic value simply was too great (Portugal's too) for NATO to isolate the regime in the way Van der Stoel apparently was doing in Home's eyes. Van der Stoel responded by restating his case from Copenhagen, adding a new argument, namely that not raising the issue of the suppression of democracy in Greece not only would undermine support for the alliance in, for example, the Netherlands, but also in Greece itself. Parliamentary under-secretary Anthony Royle wondered if there was not a danger the Colonels would leave NATO if criticised too harshly by the allies? Van der Stoel matter-of-factly parried this challenge by using the junta's own justification for its rule, namely anti-communism: 'the fear of Greece's rulers for the in their eyes imminent communist threat was far too great for them to consider a withdrawal from NATO.'³⁶

Other than fielding skeptical questions from some allied governments, Van der Stoel also worked pro-actively to get them on his side, as for example in his meeting with U.S. Secretary of State, William Rogers, in early July 1973. Using Ambassador Barkman's good working relationship with his American counterpart in Athens, Henry Tasca, the minister worked to get Greece, and practical possibilities to influence the political situation there, on the agenda for his discussions with Rogers. Apparently, the Americans believed exploring the use of military-to-military contacts to influence internal Greek developments had some merit.³⁷

³⁵Internal Foreign Ministry memo, 19 June 1973 (Van der Stoel's decision, via the state secretary, handwritten on the memo on June 21). *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214. A year later, early July 1974, in a much more polarized situation domestically in Greece and with neighbor Turkey, Van der Stoel ruled against a new request from a different Dutch company, especially because he believed the junta to be largely responsible for the tensions. *Ibid.*

³⁶Van der Stoel to Dutch Foreign Ministry, 27 June 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214. For an examination of British policy toward the Greek junta, see Alexandros Nafpliotis's thorough study with its revealing subtitle, *Britain and the Greek Colonels: Accommodating the Junta in the Cold War* (London: I.B. Tauris 2013).

³⁷Barkman to Van der Stoel, 18 July 1973. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214. Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene*, 85–86; 92–93. Bleich, *De stille diplomaat*, 119–120. However, while Ambassadors Barkman and Tasca worked together well in Athens, the latter's apparent claim of U.S. leadership on advocating for the return of democracy to Greece, with allies such as Van der Stoel in support, is not supported by the facts, or other internal U.S. documents, available to us now. See Tasca's claim at a Regional Staff meeting at the State Department on 20 March 1974, of the U.S. having succeeded in getting 'the Dutch–Vanderstahl [sic]–to go along with our policy ...' Minutes of Secretary Kissinger's Regional Staff Meeting, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS]*, 1969–1976, XXX, Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, 1973–1976 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 2007), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v30/d12>, this point p. 51. For how the democracy issue rather separated the U.S. from especially its North-Western European allies see

Growing Congressional criticism of the regime (which Van der Stoel, as a member of parliament prior to 1973 on visits to Washington, had also encouraged) played a part here too.³⁸

While initially in the summer and fall of 1973 it appeared as if Greece might, indeed, be on the way back to democratic government, student protests in November, met by a violent response, instead led to the coming to power of proponents of an even harder line. They were led from behind the scenes by the head of the military police, Brigadier Dimitrios Ioannides. Papadopoulos, whose policies the hard-liners viewed as a threat to the junta's power, was sidelined. At the end of the month, at one of their periodic meetings, European Community ambassadors in Athens agreed that given the instability of the situation and the unpredictability of some of the members of the new regime, criticism at the upcoming ministerial North Atlantic Council meeting in Brussels might well backfire, especially because the new foreign minister, Spyridon Tetenes, had no experience at NATO.³⁹ U.S. ambassador to Greece, Tasca, meanwhile told his Dutch colleague Barkman in early December that in Washington, the new Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, wanted to avoid a fight with the Greeks at any price.⁴⁰ Both Barkman and Tasca believed that while Greece probably should not be mentioned by name at the NAC, the allies should certainly tell the new government in bi-lateral contacts of their dismay with the recent developments. Both ambassadors also agreed that the last thing Greece would do was pull out the alliance.⁴¹

³⁸Action Memorandum from the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Lord) to Secretary of State Kissinger, 15 February 1974, *ibid.*, d10. Konstantina Maragkou makes persuasive case for how geo-political considerations dominated U.S. Greece policy at the expense of human rights: 'The Relevance of *Détente* to American Foreign Policy: The Case of Greece, 1967–1979, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25:4 (2014), 646–668.

³⁸For more on Congressional criticism of especially the Nixon administration's Greece policy, see Barbara J. Keys, 'Anti-Torture Politics: Amnesty International, the Greek Junta, and the Origins of the Human Rights "Boom" in the United States', in Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock (eds.), *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press 2012), 201–221; and her *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014), 75–76; 84–88. Also: Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press 2018), chapter 3. To stay with the subtitle of the latter work, these studies confirm that, while the Greek case is highly significant as one of the early causes in what has become known as the human rights revolution in U.S. foreign policy in the late Cold War, the impact of domestic activism against the Greek junta on U.S. policy between 1967–1974 remained marginal.

³⁹Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene*, 109–10.

⁴⁰In his memoirs, Kissinger does not discuss the credibility problem the Greek junta posed for NATO, nor is Max van der Stoel mentioned anywhere in the two relevant volumes. Almost exclusively, Greece and the Colonels regime appear in Kissinger's recounting of the Cyprus conflict. See *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown 1982), 1189–1192; *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1999), chapter 7. In the latter volume, Kissinger confirms Ambassador Tasca's December 1973 representation of his view, when he writes: 'I had rejected a policy of isolating and humiliating Greece—whatever my reservations about its government—because I considered it to be an essential pillar of our NATO strategy.' *Years of Renewal*, 225. See also Sotiris Rizas, 'Henry Kissinger and the transition to democracy in Southern Europe,' *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 17:1 (2019) 61–80.

⁴¹Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene*, 110–111.

At the Brussels NAC, it was not just Van der Stoel who highlighted the problems the Greek dictatorship was causing for other NATO governments and the alliance as a whole. Canadian foreign minister Mitchell Sharp made a general appeal for adherence to core values, referring to the challenge from a younger, 'questioning generation.' Belgian foreign minister Renaat van Elslande followed suit. Norwegian foreign minister Knut Frydenlund, in his first participation, apparently had decided to be bold – bolder than Van der Stoel had been six months earlier at Copenhagen. Underlining the importance to his constituents of democracy and human rights, Frydenlund went on to criticise the recent violent suppression of the student demonstrations in Athens directly. The Danish foreign minister, K.B. Andersen, endorsed the Norwegian's words. Van der Stoel spoke next, and he too endorsed Frydenlund's words. Echoing Mitchell Sharp's words, he also spoke of the younger generation in member states: 'it does not accept words at their face value but demands that the principles we preach individually or collectively be applied in practice.' Finally, he broadened the issue beyond NATO, though still in reference to the language of the treaty's preamble and Article 1, and spoke of alliance members' 'worldwide duties and responsibilities, amongst them a duty to promote the implementation of recommendations which have been adopted in the United Nations with our support.'

Challenged so openly by several of his colleagues, and as predicted by the EC ambassadors in Athens, Greek foreign minister Tetenes went out of his way to reject any criticism. It was not as if democracy was a kind of untouchable idol, he argued, particularly if its weaknesses exposed a country to anarchy. Such disorder in a member state certainly would not be conducive to the defense of shared principles, to which, he added, Greece remained both committed and rather important. Speaking of principles, according to Tetenes, those critical of Greece's regime themselves violated the important principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries; that was another way in which NATO ought to practice what it preached, especially if, from Tetenes' viewpoint, the informational basis for the criticism was so distorted.⁴² In the restricted meeting (for which no records are available at NATO's archive) Tetenes may have been even more outspoken. He certainly was in a meeting two days later with Ambassador Barkman, where an 'argument with minister Van der Stoel in Brussels' was one point of contention. Referring also to what he was hearing from Greek contacts, the ambassador noted afterwards about Tetenes that '[t]his foreign minister truly is a complete fool.'⁴³

The situation in and around Greece at the end of 1973 – violence and oppression inside Greece, animosity between Athens and several NATO allies,

⁴²Verbatim Record of the Ministerial NAC, Brussels, 10 December 1973. *NATO Archives*, Brussels, C-VR(73)74-PART_1_BIL.PDF; C-VR(73)74-PART_2_BIL.PDF.

⁴³12 December 1973. Barkman, *Ambassadeur in Athene*, 115.

all against the background of war in the Middle East, and rivalry between Greece and fellow NATO member Turkey, mostly, but not just, over Cyprus – demonstrated the perils for the alliance of having unstable, authoritarian regimes in its midst.⁴⁴ However, it also showed that there was little outsiders could do to change things, and, given the many uncertainties in the region at the time and the unaltered military-strategic importance of Greece, how carefully they had to tread addressing any aspect of the situation.

Van der Stoel's constituents would not leave the issue alone, however – on the contrary. Back home in The Hague the following April 1974, the minister felt somewhat ambushed in a meeting with a group of Dutch activists promoting solidarity with the Greek resistance. To underscore the extent to which this kind of activism had been institutionalised, they were led by the international secretary of Van der Stoel's own political party, the social-democratic PvdA. The group had told the press about their meeting with the foreign minister ahead of time; they would hold a rally at the Greek embassy later that day; and the visitors presented Van der Stoel with a list of demands that struck him as an ultimatum. Given his track record on the matter, Van der Stoel felt it was all a bit unfair, not to mention the unrealistic nature of many of the activists's ideas. It was an uncomfortable exchange, much like his meetings with Greek officials and, sometimes, allies could be contentious. In the end, however, Van der Stoel's nuanced but principled approach prevailed. The issue was legitimate and ought to be kept on the table, but if you looked at it closely, the scope for action was rather limited for an allied government. As if to validate their host's approach, the visitors did not contradict Van der Stoel when he emphasised that it would serve nobody's interests, certainly not the victims of the Colonels' regime, if Greece was thrown out of NATO.⁴⁵

Thus, one has to keep the issue on the table because it is right, because one's own credibility is at stake, and because one's constituents demand it; one can plead in any way possible with one's errant partner; and one can seek allies in this endeavour. But if the goal also is to keep the errant partner within the alliance – important for a host of reasons – there is not much more one can do than persistent advocacy and careful diplomacy. Van der Stoel's account of his uncomfortable meeting with the activists – the other side of the minister's debates with Greek officials and skeptical allies, if one likes – serves to illuminate both the nature of his efforts, and the constraints within which he had to operate.

In subsequent months, Van der Stoel would continue his advocacy and his diplomacy, increasingly worried about an escalation of tensions inside Greece

⁴⁴For more on the tensions between Athens and Ankara at this time see Sotiris Rizas, 'Managing a conflict between allies: United States policy towards Greece and Turkey in relation to the Aegean dispute, 1974–76,' *Cold War History* 9:3 (2009), 367–387, especially 369–372.

⁴⁵Van der Stoel to Embassy in Athens, 19 April 1974. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

between the regime and its opponents, and by a deterioration in Greece's relations with Turkey. He kept engaging Greek officials in discussions in which he not only made his basic point with reference to the preamble of the NATO treaty and the credibility of the alliance as a whole, but also urged concrete action on the junta, notably the release of specific political prisoners.⁴⁶ He asked the Dutch defense minister to take up with the U.S. secretary of defense the importance of military-to-military contacts with the Greeks to express allied concern, not just with the suppression of democracy but especially over the consequences for NATO of the civil strife in Greece, presumably the country's military readiness.⁴⁷ At the next ministerial NAC, 18–19 June 1974 in Ottawa, he used the recent democratic revolution in Portugal as an opportunity to point out that there was still one undemocratic regime left within the alliance, one exception to member states practicing what they preached.⁴⁸ And he debated important allies skeptical of challenging the Colonels, getting U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger to admit, at least privately, that the alliance's credibility on this score with younger generations was a legitimate concern and that raising the values issue in this case went beyond simple interference with a member state's internal affairs.⁴⁹

The impact of all this activity on the quick demise of the Colonels' regime during the crisis over Cyprus in July of 1974 is impossible to determine. It was most likely only marginally relevant, although, to judge by the admiration he encountered whenever he visited the country afterwards, for many Greeks it had been quite meaningful. In our context, however, that is not the main point.

IV

Documenting Van der Stoel's diplomacy on behalf of Greek democracy in 1973 and 1974 within NATO demonstrates how a respected member of the alliance's policymaking elite can raise what we have called the 'values issue' and keep, perhaps even increase, his respect among his partners in doing so. Neither in discussions with Greek officials nor in those with colleagues from other member states did anyone ever contradict Van der Stoel's principal point. This was, of course, because the Greek political reality made it impossible to do so. The debates that developed always revolved around how the

⁴⁶Van der Stoel memorandum on meeting with Greek Ambassador Cottakis, The Hague, 27 May 1974. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

⁴⁷Van der Stoel to Defense Minister Henk Vredeling, in reference to NATO's Nuclear Planning Group meetings at Bergen, 11–12 June 1974, nd. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/214.

⁴⁸Verbatim Record of the Ministerial NAC, Ottawa, 18 June 1974. *NATO Archives*, Brussels, C-VR(74)28-PART_1_BIL.PDF.

⁴⁹Van der Stoel memorandum on luncheon conversation with Kissinger in Ottawa, 17 June 1974. 19 June 1974. *NA-Ha*, 2.21.420/215. On how accommodating the junta mortgaged U.S. relations with Greece for years, if not decades, after 1974, see Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece*; to some extent, as witness Greece's withdrawal from the alliance' military command between 1974 and 1980, the same went for NATO.

discrepancy between the alliance's basic principles and the Greek reality could be remedied.

The same went for Van der Stoel's (and others') argument that in an alliance founded to defend and promote democratic societies, to rate a member state's military-strategic value over the nature of its government can backfire: the political instability that results from the violent suppression of a democratic society can undermine military dependability; in the meantime, support for the alliance among the oppressed population can erode.

Debates over these questions might not have been conducted had Van der Stoel and others not put the issue on the table. And one could argue that, in the longer run, it enhances NATO's credibility if it conducts such debates, even if it is far from obvious how a peaceful return to a democratic society can be achieved. It is yet another way in which the alliance can practice what it preaches.

Once on the table, a problem such as the Greek case in the early 1970s, can prove near-impossible to crack. Perhaps it also enhanced Van der Stoel's efforts, and the power of their example, that in trying to advance the cause of democracy in Greece – and through it, that of NATO's reputation – he generally seemed quite cautious in his assessment of how much (or rather: how little) could be achieved concretely from the outside and how much could be jeopardized for the alliance as a whole if one lost sight of this fact.

Finally, next to principle, domestic politics was an important factor, but ultimately it was mostly about values too. The pressure Van der Stoel, and a growing number of his colleagues, felt from domestic constituencies to address the gap between the theory of the NATO treaty's preamble and the reality of Greek politics was very real. At a time when it was engaged in a big debate over its military and political viability, it mattered greatly if electorates in its respective member states viewed the alliance as credible. Van der Stoel's frequent references to especially younger generations in member states not only were opportune politically, they also cut to the core of the alliance's identity. As Van der Stoel put it in his first intervention, in 1973, 'NATO needs more than planes and tanks and guns.'

V

Fast forward to 2020. Once again, the Alliance faces the dilemma, in which the mandates of the treaty create separate and conflicting requirements. Difficult choices must be made between NATO's value foundation and contemporary security requirements. The immediate problem, of course is Turkey, but it is complicated by the fact that radical right populist tendencies have spread to governments on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has established an autocratic regime while at the same time playing off a budding friendship with autocratic leader

Vladimir Putin against Turkey's NATO commitments. Erdoğan's authoritarian tendencies are now well-established. He has joined other radical right populist leaders in playing on popular fears to maintain political dominance. Political opposition has not been eliminated, and this suggests that Turkey is not yet a lost cause. This challenges the West to help push Turkey back toward liberal democracy while not pushing this strategically important country out of the alliance.⁵⁰

Before addressing the setting for and issues around today's Turkish case, it might be useful to reflect on the evolution of NATO's political circumstances since the end of the Cold War. Developments in and after 1989 represented a major transition to the next segment on history's unpredictable timeline.

But for NATO, it was at the very least a major and remarkably positive turning point, both in terms of the implications for its value foundation and the strategic interests of the allies. The fact that former Warsaw Pact states and Soviet Republics, out from under Moscow's thumb, immediately sought to be welcomed into the West and its institutions was an opportunity to reaffirm NATO's value statement as well as an apparent windfall for its strategic circumstances.

After a period in which NATO weighed how best to approach the desires of these newly free, the allies came up with a strategy. That strategy was based on what came to be called the 'Perry Principles,' named for the U.S. secretary of defense William Perry. Those principles specified requirements that would have to be met for those states that wished to become signatories to the North Atlantic Treaty. They were subsequently incorporated in the Alliance's 1995 'Study on NATO Enlargement.'⁵¹ The study laid out the rationale for enlargement as well as providing a value-based and practical guide for aspiring members.

With regard to the 'how' of enlargement, the allies established a framework of principles, including that new members should assume all the rights and responsibilities of current members and accept the policies and procedures in effect at the time of their entry; no country should enter with the goal of closing the door behind it, using its vote as a member to block other candidates; countries should resolve ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes before joining NATO; candidates should be able to contribute to the missions of the alliance; and no country outside the alliance (e.g., Russia) would have the right to interfere with the process. Most importantly, the study required aspiring states to establish functioning democracies, based on the Treaty's preamble commitment to 'democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law,' free market economic systems, and civilian control of the military.

⁵⁰Stanley R. Sloan, *Transatlantic Traumas: Has illiberalism brought the West to the brink of collapse?* (Manchester University Press 2018), 67.

⁵¹NATO, 'Study on NATO Enlargement (Brussels, September 1995), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm?

In those days, the only dilemma seemed to be the danger that pursuit of the alliance's values might work to the disadvantage of its strategic interests if Russia were isolated from the process and took up the mantle of anti-Western values once worn by its Soviet predecessor. Was NATO enlargement the leading causal factor leading to a new confrontation with Russia? That has been and will continue to be the subject of debate among historians, theorists, and political scientists.

But today, that downward spiral in NATO's relations with Russia provides part of the context for a renewal of concern inside the alliance about the commitment of allies – original and more recent – to the values to which they subscribed when they signed the Treaty. Russia has become the leading enemy of liberal political values, and President Putin has found allies in the West for his alternative governance approach, which Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has admiringly called 'illiberal democracy.'⁵² The convergence of Russian external overt and covert intervention and the surge in domestic support for illiberal radical right populist parties and politicians has created what one of the co-authors of this paper has analyzed as the source of 'transatlantic traumas.'⁵³

Part of the problem of analyzing today's issue with Turkey is that Erdoğan is not the only leader of a NATO country that seems to have political aspirations which conflict with the commitments made in the North Atlantic Treaty's preamble. Erdoğan, if he were so inclined, could claim that, in the cases of Hungary, Poland and, indeed, the United States, criticizing his approach to democracy could be construed as the pot calling the kettle black. This contrasts sharply with the time in which Van der Stoep was defending core alliance political values. The enemies of democracy were found almost entirely in the governments and societies of the Soviet Union and its allies. It was the exception inside the alliance. Today, they challenge Western norms in many ways across the board in alliance states.

When President Trump welcomed Erdogan to the White House in November 2019, he rolled out the red carpet even though Turkey had just given the United States a bloody nose in Syria. Trump had removed a small U.S. military detachment stationed near the border with Turkey. Once gone, Turkish troops moved in, attacking the Kurdish forces and populations that had carried much of the burden of the fight against the Islamic State in Syria. There may not be vocal constituencies in the United States and other NATO countries against the alliance's tolerance of Erdogan's illiberal regime, but, at least in Trump's case, his domestic opponents noted the shortcoming of the alliance and U.S. policy.⁵⁴ Not only had Trump abandoned a key ally in the

⁵²Jamie Dettmer, 'Orban Presses On With Illiberal Democracy,' *Voice of America News*, 10 April 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/orban-presses-illiberal-democracy>.

⁵³*Transatlantic Traumas*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴See, for example: Editorial, 'Trump rewards Erdogan for bad behavior, The Turkish President's White House visit was worse than a distraction,' *The Boston Globe*, 16 November 2019.

fight against the Islamic State but he was honouring an autocrat who was destroying Turkey's democracy while using a blossoming relationship with Russia's Putin as leverage against the West.

Putting that aside, Erdoğan's rule in recent years has produced increased calls for Turkey's suspension or even expulsion from NATO. Prospects for Turkey's membership in the European Union (EU), of course, were always a chimera and now are non-existent. Therefore, U.S. Ambassador Middendorf's suggestion to Van der Stoel in 1973 that the, at the time, European Community accession process (and not NATO) is the right place to promote democracy in other countries, if it was ever compelling, does not apply here.

The technical problem is that there are no provisions in the North Atlantic Treaty for suspension or removal. A member state can leave the alliance by giving one year's notice of its denunciation to the depository state – perhaps ironically, the United States.⁵⁵ No country has ever taken advantage of that possibility, but it is a prospect raised by Donald Trump himself, even while the United States was in fact increasing its support for the alliance. It is possible that a modern-day Max Van der Stoel could emerge as a leader to decry Turkey's violation of the very fundamental values of the alliance. But just as Van der Stoel argued against forcing Greece out of the alliance, it is very unlikely that he would want to force Turkey out. Greece was a politically important symbol of democracy, and a democratic lapse there was a nasty blemish on the alliance's face. But Turkey – then and now – is a strategically important NATO ally with far more military relevance to NATO than Greece ever had. This highlights the dilemma between values and strategic importance that has faced the allies on several occasions since negotiation of the Treaty of Washington in 1949.

The debate over whether to try to push Turkey out of the alliance therefore does not focus only on the value violations. Van der Stoel sought to balance advocacy for return of democracy to Greece with acknowledgment of Greece's strategic importance to the alliance. Turkey's strategic value to the alliance has been based not only on the fact that it is a majority Islamic state that nonetheless had maintained the secular state established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924, but also on its critical geographic location. It has served as a reliable guardian of NATO's southeastern flank against Soviet and then Russian power. All of that now is in question. According to one analyst, 'One of the most contentious disputes [with the United States] is Erdoğan's decision to buy advanced S-400 missiles – an air defense system – from Russia ... The U.S. countered by barring Turkey from manufacturing or purchasing advanced F-35 warplanes. (The U.S. fears that the Russian air-defense system could allow Russia to gain access to F-35 communications and defenses if they operated in the same theatre.) No other NATO member

⁵⁵North Atlantic Treaty, Article 13.

buys Russian military equipment, in no small part because the alliance was established to counter Moscow's influence.⁵⁶ The bottom line, as suggested in *Transatlantic Traumas*, is that:

From a strategic perspective, Turkey has been the tip of the West's spear in the Middle East. But the drift that President Erdoğan is piloting away from Western democratic norms is not only creating divisions among NATO allies but also suggests that Turkey could be the first NATO ally to leave the alliance, perhaps even allying with Russia. This would be a huge loss to NATO's strategic position in the region as well as to the West's demonstration of the validity of its political model.⁵⁷

The current Turkish case poses critical challenges for the alliance. President Erdoğan has not only taken Turkey away from its Western-oriented roots, but he has been using the potential shift toward becoming a Russian rather than a NATO ally as leverage for his relations with the West. Communist Soviet Union would have been an unacceptable ally for Turkey's Erdoğan, but there is no such conflict between Putin and Erdoğan's radical right autocracies. Erdoğan also has leverage in the fact that Turkey still is home to some 4 million Syrian refugees as well as some 360,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from countries other than Syria, mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.⁵⁸ Erdoğan has, in fact, threatened to open the refugee flood gates to Europe in response to Western criticism of Turkey's incursion in Syria and the violent aggression against the Kurdish population there.⁵⁹ He could use this threat on other issues as well. It could be argued that both NATO and the EU missed earlier opportunities to lock Turkey more firmly into the West. The Turkish perception – most likely accurate – that the EU would never invite Turkey to join certainly created resentment and a nationalist reaction that Erdoğan has used to political advantage.

VI

At this point, the options for NATO and EU members dealing with this Turkish problem are none too attractive. Turkey clearly is not headed for EU membership and there is no way to formally kick it out of NATO; that path was closed when the founding allies rejected the Canadian proposal that such

⁵⁶Robin Wright, 'After six decades, Turkey is a US ally in name only,' *The New Yorker*, 14 November 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/after-six-decades-turkey-is-now-a-us-ally-in-name-only>.

⁵⁷Sloan, *Transatlantic Traumas*, 66.

⁵⁸UNHCR Global Focus, Turkey, 'Year End Report,' <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2544?y=2019#year>.

⁵⁹Natasha Turak, 'Turkey's Erdogan threatens to release millions of refugees into Europe over criticism of Syria offensive,' *CNBC*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.cnbcc.com/2019/10/10/turkeys-erdogan-threatens-release-of-refugees-to-europe-over-syria-criticism.html>. Matina Stevis-Gridneff and Carlotta Gall, 'Erdogan says, "We Opened the Doors," and Clashes Erupt as Migrants Head for Europe,' *The New York Times*, 29 February 2020.

a provision be included in the treaty. According to Aurel Sari, 'Canada proposed a draft provision entitling the North Atlantic Council to suspend or expel a member state from the privileges of membership (Draft North Atlantic Treaty, 17 December 1948).'⁶⁰ Sari argues that, under international treaty law, '... the absence of a suspension and expulsion mechanism in the North Atlantic Treaty does not prevent the North Atlantic Council from suspending or terminating the membership of an ally found to be in material breach of the treaty.' But he wisely suggests that, politically, this is most likely a non-starter. We agree.

One of NATO's greatest strengths is the fact that membership is based on protecting and honouring the sovereignty and independence of all members. As we know, it is also one of the alliance's greatest weaknesses, as it gives each member a theoretical veto over alliance actions, with NATO's decision-making system based on achieving consensus for any action by the alliance. As an old saying once heard at NATO headquarters goes, 'In NATO, votes are weighed, not counted.'

What this suggests is that the alliance will remain a forum for sovereign states to represent their interests to their allies and attempt to see those interests reflected in NATO actions. It is a system that relies on like-minded allies seeking agreement on common action and willing to compromise to achieve that outcome. The spirit of Max van der Stoep may still be alive, but it currently has no prominent proponent. That will have to change if the alliance is to survive and prosper in the years ahead.

If Max Van der Stoep were around today, we suspect that he would not lead the charge to isolate or remove Turkey from the alliance, but perhaps would follow a somewhat different logic. The Greek case from the 1970s, as we can see, included several factors that also are in play today with Turkey. They include:

- the question of whether more subtle, diplomatic approaches work better toward a good outcome than frontal assaults;
- consideration of strategic factors, including weapons sales, affects positions of many NATO states;
- the worry that tolerating illiberalism in one alliance country could reinforce such tendencies in others, while at the same time diminishing support for the alliance among those who believe it should be a force for democracy and the rule of law;
- the hope or even possibility that the country's military – neutralized by Erdoğan for the time being – at some point might be part of the coalition that helps return democracy;

⁶⁰ Aurel Sari, 'Can Turkey be Expelled from NATO? It's Legally Possible, Whether or Not Politically Prudent,' *Just Security*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/66574/can-turkey-be-expelled-from-nato/>.

- considerations related to maintaining balanced pressure to work toward the goal of the country's return to the democratic fold while not provoking reactions that make the situation worse; and,
- realization that the problem cannot be ignored, even if pressure from inside the alliance cannot be guaranteed to promote the desired change.

The recommended strategy for Turkey today could be conditioned on the judgment that Turkey's geographic position and continued strategic importance to the West warrant caution. Erdoğan will not be around forever, and without question substantial numbers of Turkish citizens and elites would prefer a path back toward the West to one that looks toward Moscow or Tehran. Recent local elections in Istanbul suggested there is some reason to be hopeful in this regard.⁶¹

The NATO allies need to lobby against Turkish purchases of Russian military equipment and impose sanctions where necessary. But we suspect that Van der Stoep might also conceive of some trade or financial incentives that the United States and European members of NATO and the EU could dangle in front of this difficult ally. A classic carrots and sticks strategy may be all that is logically available to the West. Buying time for Turkey to return to its Western orientation might be frustrating but well worth the effort.

The key question for all NATO allies is whether enough time can be found—whether the perceived interests of the member states will remain sufficiently convergent to ensure the continued effectiveness of their alliance in representing shared values and interests as laid down in the North Atlantic Treaty. At the time, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that time is running out and that the gap between principles and practice is widening. How could we put extra time on the clock, buy time for Turkey and the alliance as a whole? Much, of course, will depend on the political process inside Turkey. However, domestic politics in other member states matter too. If the United States resumes its responsible political leadership of the alliance and *all* European members and Canada demonstrate their commitment to the values and strategic missions of the alliance by increasing their material contributions to the effort, the alliance might begin to be less schizophrenic and eventually return to fair health.

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⁶¹ Carlotta Gall, 'Turkey's President Suffers Stinging Defeat in Istanbul Election Redo,' *The New York Times*, 23 June 2019.

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