

Defense of the West
Text of Presentation by Stanley R. Sloan
to the Vermont Humanities Council First Wednesday Program
at Ilsley Library, Middlebury, Vermont, January 6, 2016

This is my first time inside Ilsley Library. Contemplating this evening, I thought about what an important role libraries have played in my life.

My first library was the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in my hometown of Montpelier. From my earliest years of frequenting the children's area, continuing up through high school, Kellogg-Hubbard was an important contributor to my early education.

Jumping ahead a few years, during graduate studies at Columbia University, the library was not just a source of information, but also of much-needed income, as I worked part-time in Columbia's Butler Library.

Then, between my two years at Columbia, I was fortunate enough to win an internship in the Government Division of the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress. In those days, I first experienced the adventure of roaming through the endless stacks containing some of this nation's most precious intellectual resources.

I returned to the Library of Congress several years later, when I began my 24 years working for the Congressional Research Service – that's the name for the organization that replaced the Legislative Reference Service. When I began work there, our offices were inside the library's stacks – not the best workspace, but with easy access to materials and to the joy of being able to emerge from the stacks into the magnificent main reading room – a real national treasure.

Now I can add Ilsley to my list of important library stops along the path of a lifelong learning process.

That leads me to another comment: One reason that I love the work I do is because it's like being a perpetual student.

The tests I have to pass now include readers' responses to what I write, and whether or not students learn from my teaching.

For me, tonight's event is another learning opportunity. Hopefully both you and I will learn something from our evening together.

Now to the business of the night: **defense of the West.**

The focus of the presentation – as with the focus of much of my career – will be on the transatlantic alliance in general, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at its center. When anyone says "NATO," most listeners conjure up images of soldiers, ships, tanks and fighter aircraft.

That's not wrong. But it also is not the entire picture.

Tonight, I'd like to ask you to join me in a consideration of

1. the value foundation on which the alliance was built,
2. the way in which values have affected its evolution,
3. how we should think about that value foundation today, and
4. the interaction between those values and the threats to our security.

My premise is that, when the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington in 1949, there were many pragmatic, national security reasons for the treaty. The fifth Article of the treaty established the commitment of all the members to treat an attack on an ally as an attack on themselves.

Let me suggest that we go on a brief Article 5 side-trip, one that might help inform our discussion tonight.

Following the attacks in Paris last November, apparently organized by ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, reports included a good bit of speculative commentary on whether or not NATO's collective defense provision would come into play. Much of that speculation was not necessarily well-informed. Some commentaries assumed that when a NATO ally is attacked, the other allies are required to jump to their defense.

In fact, Article 5 is carefully worded and limited. This is in no small part due to demands in 1949 by members of the U.S. Congress that the Truman administration not sign away their prerogative to declare war. The treaty text therefore ensures that all allies are able to make their own sovereign decisions about how to respond to an attack on another ally.

According to the text, if an "armed attack occurs ... each [member state] ... 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."

Last November, it was popular to suggest that the ally under attack — France in this case — can individually "invoke" Article 5. In fact, while the ally under attack surely needs to suggest that it supports invocation, it is NATO's North Atlantic Council (NAC) that must formally (and collaboratively) call for an Article 5 response.

In other words, collective defense requires collective consensus.

In NATO's long history, the allies have invoked Article 5 on just one occasion — following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Within 24 hours, the attack was addressed by the North Atlantic Council. The Council decided to invoke Article 5 if it were determined that the attack had been perpetrated by a foreign actor, and was not an incidence of domestic terrorism. Many NATO member states have suffered from domestic terrorism over the years. But domestic terrorism is not covered by the collective defense provisions of the Treaty.

The George W. Bush administration was initially uncertain whether or not it wanted NATO to get involved, but it did not block consensus in the Council. Later in September, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made it clear that the United States did not want Article 5 to interfere with the U.S. response to the attacks. He famously declared that, in Afghanistan, "the

mission will determine the coalition.” Some Europeans justifiably saw this as the United States saying “thanks, but no thanks.”

Article 5 nonetheless came into full effect on October 2, after briefings by U.S. officials made it clear that the attacks were of foreign origin. NATO members helped monitor North American airspace and provided other supporting tasks while U.S. assets were targeted on al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. But there was no NATO mission in Afghanistan until the Bush Administration decided in 2003 it actually might need more allied help there because of the resources the United States was diverting to the war in Iraq.

In the case of the Paris attacks, even though France is a committed NATO member, it also remains protective of its national sovereignty. For example, that is why Paris preferred that the 2011 attack on Muammar Gaddafi’s forces in Libya not be taken over by NATO. The French had to relent because they needed U.S. and NATO support to manage the mission.

The parallel here is that Paris could not achieve its stated objective of destroying Daesh without a lot of help from other countries, starting with the United States and other NATO allies. Paris may have thought (accurately) that a NATO mission based on Article 5 would likely be dominated by the United States, particularly given that NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR) is, and always has been, an American. French President Francois Hollande most certainly wanted U.S. and allied support and cooperation, but also, for domestic political reasons, wanted to be seen as taking strong national action, not just as a member of a NATO operation.

Paris did ask for European solidarity. This was delivered in the form of a nice chapeau under the mutual defense provision of the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, but it offered little in the way of military assistance.

President Hollande said France would seek cooperation from both the United States and Russia in the fight against Daesh. The Russian angle was a bit of a complication. The United States already was coordinating the informal coalition against Daesh. But at the same time, Russia was stepping up military support for the Assad regime in Damascus. While Russia clearly could be helpful, President Vladimir Putin had his own, and not necessarily compatible, agenda in Europe, Syria and the Middle East more generally.

Meanwhile, the northern NATO allies (particularly Poland and the Baltic states) remained primarily concerned about Russia’s agenda in Ukraine and beyond. They see Article 5 as much more directly relevant to the threats they perceive from Russia than the threat from ISIL.

So, Article 5 is the heart of national commitments to the alliance. But, in my view, one of the reasons that the transatlantic alliance is around today is not simply Article 5, or even inertia, but rather because there is a value foundation for the alliance. As long as NATO nations perceive that foundation as valid, the alliance will survive, and will continue to represent the inner core of what we call “the West.”

Perhaps on the downside, this means that the alliance will represent values that are not universally shared or practiced, and therefore will create tensions in relations with groups or nations that hold different sets of values.

I’ve spoken at a very general level about “values.” Let me now be a little more specific.

The values to which I refer are those written down in the preamble of the North Atlantic Treaty. The treaty is an elegant document. It makes it clear right away that the signatories are framing the text in an ideological context, one that is in contrast to the perceived ideological context of the main adversary – the Soviet Union – which, by the way, was never mentioned in the treaty.

The preamble reads as follows:

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.

They 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. [emphasis added] *They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.*

They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security. They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty

The treaty was designed to counter Soviet expansion and to balance the Soviet Union's military power. But the treaty itself

- was based on common values;
- identified no enemy;
- protected the sovereign decision-making rights of all members; and
- was written in sufficiently flexible language to facilitate adjustments to accommodate changing international circumstances.

During negotiation of the treaty, the government of Canada argued that the text should reflect “the ideological unity of the North Atlantic powers.” U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson subsequently maintained that “the central idea of the treaty is not a static one” and that “the North Atlantic Treaty is far more than a defensive arrangement. It is an affirmation of the moral and spiritual values which we hold in common.” During the 1949 Senate hearings on the Treaty, Acheson and other Truman administration witnesses argued that what they were proposing was very different from previous military alliance systems.

Now, it is true that, during the Cold War, the values of “democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law” occasionally took second place when autocratic governments in NATO were tolerated in the interest of maintaining a militarily strong alliance. Regimes in Portugal, Greece and Turkey – on separate occasions – did not meet the standards implied in the treaty. However, militarily-important Spain was denied membership until the authoritarian regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco was replaced with a democratic government.

But NATO's survival beyond the end of the Cold War suggested that its value foundation and the inherent logic of Euro-Atlantic cooperation remained important ingredients in the glue that holds the alliance together.

These same factors, combined with the perceived need for a security link to the United States, made NATO membership attractive to most of the newly-independent former Warsaw Pact members and some former Soviet republics. And, a key condition for membership was that candidates establish liberal democratic regimes with market economies.

The question now is whether these values are still shared among NATO and European Union members sufficiently to provide a strong foundation for the future defense of the West.

Disunity more than unity has at times characterized the responses of the United States and its allies to the new external threats to Western security.

In a show of unity, the NATO allies catalogued their threat perceptions at a summit meeting in the UK in September of 2014. The list included most prominently a resurgent, expansionist Russia seeking to carve out a bigger role in its neighborhood and beyond, and an “Islamic State” that threatened to attack Western countries from its growing base in the Middle East, Africa, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Given the economic and military potential of the NATO allies and their partners, neither of these threats presented challenges that were impossible to counter. But the superficial level of agreement reached at that meeting on how to deal with these threats tended to hide internal divisions within and among allied governments on a number of fronts. These differences could eventually combine with the external threats to form a “perfect storm” that blows away transatlantic unity.

Throughout its history, the transatlantic alliance has faced differences and even crises over how best to define and defend both values and interests. In spite of such difficulties, the allies always decided that remaining united around the basic purposes of their alliance was worth whatever compromises were required to do so. This dynamic came into play, for example,

- when the United States opposed the French and British attack on Egypt and their attempt to seize control of the Suez Canal in the 1950s,
- when thousands of Europeans protested the deployment of nuclear missiles on European soil in the 1980s,
- and when the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2003 produced one of the gravest splits the alliance had known since its founding.

Moreover, the alliance has always faced divisions over burdensharing issues, particularly between an overburdened American ally and underperforming European ones.

Today, questions around how the values supported by the alliance should be reflected in the individual or collective actions of the allies complicate development of response to external threats. It is one thing to defend democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law in the member states, or even in other established liberal market economies. It is another thing entirely when it comes to whether or not the alliance should seek to spread those values to countries without a political history and societal infrastructure sufficient to support them.

Just look at the differences among the allies – and within the United States – concerning attempts to establish liberal free market systems in Afghanistan and Iraq following initial defeat of opposing forces there.

Even before the Ukraine crisis in Russia's relations with the West, a potent mix of political, economic and societal factors inside member states had begun to undermine the perception of shared values and interests. This mix has, in part, grown out of the economic crisis that has plagued Europe and the European Union during the past decade. Weak economic growth and high unemployment have combined to yield electoral platforms and growing constituencies for extremist parties and populist movements, largely on the far right, in many European countries.

Europe's radical populist parties include the National Front in France, Golden Dawn on the right and the governing Syriza Party on the left in Greece, Flemish Interest in Belgium, the Danish Peoples Party, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, and the Sweden Democrats. While such parties tend to present themselves differently in individual nations, they generally

- oppose their country's membership in the European Union and NATO,
- favor more autocratic forms of government, and
- sympathize with Vladimir Putin's articulated perspectives on politics, religion and strategic issues.

The mass exodus of refugees from Syria and elsewhere has intensified nativist political sentiments and driven an additional wedge into European and Western unity. These parties have played on a wide range of popular fears, opposing immigration, multiculturalism, and membership in the EU and NATO while pursuing closer ties with Russia.

And, they are not lacking popular support. France's National Front received some 25% of the vote in the May 2014 European elections, and did very well in the first round of voting in the 2015 regional elections. This forced the French ruling and main opposition parties to collaborate in the second round to block the Front's potential gains.

Some ties between these parties and Moscow have made it into the light of day. For example, the French National Front reportedly received a 9.4 million Euro loan from Russia in November 2014. Marine Le Pen, the party's leader, defended the decision against charges that the loan was a reward for having supported Russia's annexation of the Crimea earlier that year. Press sources at the time reported that Le Pen admired Putin as a "strong" leader. Does that sound familiar?

Leading officials of the government that came to office in Greece in January 2015 – Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias from the majority far left Syriza Party and the Defense Minister Panos Kammenos from the rightist Independent Greeks Party – spoke warmly of ties with Moscow. They suggested that they opposed sanctions against Russia and favored a wide range of cooperation with the Russian Federation.

As the negotiations in the 2015 Greek debt crisis approached a critical stage, Prime Minister Tsipras flew off to Russia to participate in the St. Petersburg Economic Forum and to meet with President Putin. He came away with nothing of value in hand, but he took a shot at his EU lenders, saying: "We are ready to go to new seas to reach new safe ports..." and that "Russia is one of the most important partners for us."

Russia seized every opportunity after the beginning of the Ukraine crisis to try to create divisions among EU members that might mitigate or even block continued economic sanctions.

It was not just in Greece that Putin's arguments resonated. Just after negotiations in Minsk, Belarus last March reached agreement on a ceasefire in Ukraine, in which Russia admitted no responsibility for the conflict, President Putin traveled triumphantly to Budapest, Hungary, to be welcomed warmly by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Orbán, whose disdain for liberal democracy and admiration for Vladimir Putin are well-known, represents one of many weak links in the EU sanctions regime (although last month the EU did renew the sanctions for six more months).

Statements from officials in several European governments have reflected how the pain of imposing sanctions on trade with Russia combined with Moscow's reverse sanctions and Russian self-justifying propaganda have begun to slip wedges into the cracks in Western solidarity. For example, the Russian news agency *Tass* in July 2015 cheered the comments by Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov who implied it was up to the "big bosses," meaning the United States and the European Union, to "figure everything out and lift sanctions." Borissov appeared to place no blame on Russian President Putin for the situation.

Dealing with these internal European political challenges was complicated by developments in the transatlantic relationship. Most importantly, the unauthorized release of secret U.S. intelligence documents revealed that the U.S. National Security Agency had been spying on the German and other European governments, including Chancellor Merkel's private telephone conversations.

This outraged many Europeans and increased their level of distrust of the United States. Prior to the disclosures, there was already fertile ground for anti-Americanism in many European countries. The appreciation for the American role in the Second World War, and even in the more recent reunification of Germany, had faded. Differences over the Iraq war remained viral in some quarters. And, in Germany's eastern regions as well as in some former Warsaw Pact countries, a certain romantic memory of the "predictable" days of communist control has lingered.

With revelations of NSA spying, the well-respected Pew Surveys of public opinion reflected drops in favorable German opinion of the United States and confidence in President Obama – whose ratings had been sky-high prior to the leaked revelations.

In the 2015 Pew survey, the German public even edged away from NATO's key collective defense commitment. Some 58% of Germans in the survey opposed using force in support of a fellow NATO ally attacked by Russia. This seemed particularly ironic given the fact that Germany (at least West Germany) benefitted more than any other ally from NATO's collective defense commitment during the Cold War.

One response to the spy scandal in German-U.S. relations was that nations have always spied on other nations, even friendly ones. However, at a critical time in transatlantic relations, revelations that the United States had been conducting a variety of intelligence collection efforts against one of its closest allies – and that it had been caught – were particularly damaging. In any case, it was clear that the interaction between external threats and internal political dissonance posed a serious challenge to the West.

A growing “values gap” between the United States and some European countries was illustrated by the European Parliament’s vote in October 2015 to absolve Edward Snowden for illegally releasing highly classified American documents on the grounds that he was defending democracy. This, of course, while Snowden was being sheltered in Moscow by the hardly-democratic Russian government.

The focus on issues inside European political systems should not let us think that everything is just fine in the United States – everyone in this room knows better.

In one of its most important foreign policy initiatives, the Obama administration in 2012 decided that the United States needed to put increased emphasis and resources on US interests in East Asia. The administration announced it was “pivoting,” or “rebalancing,” US foreign and defense policy in that direction. There was little reason to object to the administration putting some special focus on China’s growing power, North Korea’s unpredictability, and the need for effective US relations with and presence in allied states in the region. But there were some unintended consequences.

Some of us asked whether the pivot/rebalancing policy was also a message to the European allies that they needed to get their act together? Did the administration believe that backing away from a leadership role in Europe would force the Europeans to fill the gap both in terms of leadership and resources, in the Middle East as well as in Europe? If so, this approach was based on an overly optimistic view of the ability of the European Union to produce coherent and effective foreign and defense policies.

In these realms, Europe remained decisively a *Europe des états*. It was unrealistic to expect “Europe” to speak, to say nothing of acting, as one on questions still so deeply embedded in national sovereignty.

This new U.S. approach came at a time of serious economic weakness in Europe, a time when there were neither political nor financial resources to finance a confident European defense and security policy role. It also turned out to have come at a time when threats in the Middle East and Europe would take dramatic turns for the worse.

Related to the question of American leadership, the gridlock in the American domestic political system seriously weakened the foundation on which American leadership rested. Early last year, one of the most widely-respected Washington hands, former legislator and Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, judged that dysfunction in Washington was the biggest threat to U.S. security. Nothing has improved since!

If the American political system is dysfunctional for the United States, it is also dysfunctional for the transatlantic alliance and the West.

The divide between President Obama’s administration and Republicans did not stop at the water’s edge. The 2015 Munich Security Conference saw U.S. Senate Republicans busily labeling Angela Merkel as an appeaser while senior U.S. administration officials were trying to lead from behind the German Chancellor. Granted, the “water’s edge” had long since been washed away by modern travel and communications, and politics were now global. But Washington’s dysfunction certainly further diminished U.S. credibility, soft power, and leadership ability in NATO.

The ISIL terrorist attacks in Paris followed by the ISIL-inspired one in California, have raised the level of fear in the United States to a peak not seen since the aftermath of 9/11. Some candidates in the current political campaign have chosen not only to use this fear as motivation for their supporters, but have also intentionally fed the flames of fear to bring more voters into their camps. Issues that were already part of the American political debate now have more of an edge: do the dangers to our nation from terrorism outweigh the civil rights that we cherish? How do we strike a balance?

Perhaps the future of the West comes down to some very basic choices:

- First, should the United States and its European partners acquiesce in Russia's geopolitical demands for a buffer zone between Putin's kleptocracy and the democratic west, or should they assert, with actions as well as words, the liberal values that they hoped would shape post-Cold War Europe?
- Next, what should the United States and its allies do about the threat posed by ISIL and other radical groups that are determined to attack the foundations of Western values and interests when there is little taste in Europe or the United States for participation in more Middle Eastern wars?

President Putin, for his part, has made it very clear: he does not accept the Western model that he says the United States, NATO and the European Union tried to impose on Europe at a time of Russian weakness. He first made Georgia a battleground for this confrontation. And he won. He then made the Crimea a battleground. He won there too. Some have said he has been winning in his war against a free and sovereign Ukraine.

Does the West care? Should the West care? If it does not, it raises the question of what the West stands for or believes in.

It would seem that the Western nations and their leading institutions – NATO and the EU – now must successfully defend the values and interests they claim to hold dear while not increasing the chances of a new and prolonged Cold War, or even a hot one. This clearly will not be easy. But the task calls for both U.S. leadership and allied cohesion.

Meanwhile, President Putin's approach to governance has even intruded on the American political campaign. Putin and Donald Trump seem to think that they have a lot in common. Is this dangerous? *The Washington Post* apparently thinks so. Last month its editorial writers said: "What the two men share, and recognize in each other, goes beyond strong polling numbers, an affinity for incendiary language and a contempt for those (with President Obama leading the list) they regard as weak. What really attracts them is a common worldview in which money talks and democratic norms are for suckers."

In conclusion, while the external threats to the West are real, internal weaknesses could block Western democracies from working together to deal with them. If transatlantic solidarity fails, then the future of the West would be in doubt. The transatlantic community is more than ever dependent on the right choices being made on both sides of the Atlantic.

I will leave you with some questions for our discussion:

- Will the United States find a sufficient sense of national unity to be a respected and credible leader of the West?

- Will European nations rise above the populist challenges and reaffirm their commitments to the values that underpin both NATO and the European Union?
- Will a true rededication to transatlantic cooperation, stimulated by a sense of shared values and interests, bring out the best on both sides of the Atlantic?
- Or will a “perfect storm” of external threats and internal divisions weaken the transatlantic bonds to the point where they no longer serve as the main defense of Western values and interests?
-