

Evanthis Hatzivassiliou. "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953-1964." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11:2 (Spring 2009): 89-116.

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Review by **Linda Risso, University of Reading**

The multilateral defence structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and its role as a forum for the projection of national defence and information policies make it an intricate research subject. The NATO Archives in Brussels provide crucial information on both the military and political dimensions of the alliance. In addition to its integrated military command and the co-ordination of rearmament and the defence policies of its members, NATO carried out an important action in the production and dissemination to its members of information about the Soviet Union and its satellites for defensive purposes. In order to study specific aspects of the 'Soviet question', throughout the Cold War, NATO set up numerous working groups and committees, often on an ad hoc basis and for a limited period of time. Topics ranged from the monitoring of the communist front organisations to the analysis of the infiltration of communism in newly independent African countries, from the study of the economic development of the Soviet bloc to the assessment of the Sino-Soviet partnership.

Evanthis Hatzivassiliou examines NATO's first assessments of the Soviet military and economic potential. His research is based on the North Atlantic Council's papers held at the NATO Archives in Brussels. Despite the fact that these documents have been declassified for almost a decade, they remained largely under-studied and this article is therefore an important contribution to our understanding of NATO's own assessment of the Soviet military threat. Hatzivassiliou carries out a detailed summary of the reports produced between 1953 and 1964 by the NATO experts. The Working Group on Trends of Soviet Policy (later Trends and Implications of Soviet Policy), for example, operated between 1953 and 1955 and its reports showed the continuity of the Soviet regime after Stalin's death. In the same period, the Working Group on Economic Trends carried out a comparison of the Western and Eastern economies and a projection of the balance of economic power over the following decades. The reports revealed that although the

declared Soviet goal of economically overtaking the Western bloc would not be achieved, the gap between the two blocs would be substantially reduced. At the end of the Fifties, the reports produced by the Committee of Economic Advisers revealed an important shift in the economic relations within the Eastern bloc: after 1956, the USSR stopped the economic exploitation of the satellites states and started extending aid to them and imposing a division of labour among the satellites, with each country specialising in one specific aspect of industrial and weapon production. Equally important were the conclusions reached by the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group (APAG), which was established in 1962 to gain a more sophisticated insight into the Sino-Soviet alliance.

The information gathered by the working groups and committees allowed the NATO Council to have a more sophisticated understanding of the Soviet military and economic potential, to monitor the USSR's relations with the satellites and to project future developments of the Soviet security strategy. The NATO experts could therefore achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the Soviet aims and establish that they were not merely strategic. The need to maintain the 'conquests of socialism' had also to be taken into account when evaluating the Soviet strategic goals in the region.

Hatzivassiliou tells us that the reports were discussed by the NATO Council, but he does not examine to what degree the discussions that generated from these reports brought a review of NATO's strategic concept and information policies. For example, the article mentions that in 1960 NATO experts correctly attributed the Soviet troop reductions announced in 1960 by Moscow to the changed economic and demographic circumstance within the Soviet Union. According to Hatzivassiliou, this is evidence that NATO's study of the economic trends made it easier for their analysts to understand shifts in the Soviet strategy (p. 111). The extent to which the reports summarised in this article influenced NATO's defensive strategy remains, however, an open question.

This article also raises the question of the relationship between the perception of the adversary and accuracy of the analysis carried out by NATO. According to Hatzivassiliou, despite the NATO reports having some misinterpretations and errors, in the majority of cases they were relatively accurate and detailed. Precisely because of their accuracy, it is crucial to know how these reports were put together and what sources they were based on. The reports produced by NATO's International Staff were for the most part based on information provided by national delegations, which sent regular reports. Not all delegations contributed to the same degree and, as Hatzivassiliou points out, the Americans contributed large amount of material which often came directly from the CIA (p. 113). Yet, the role of other delegations, and particularly of the British, should not be overlooked. Papers from the NATO Archives and from National Archives in London reveal that the Information Research Department made consistent use of the British Delegation and of the British experts in NATO to spread their intelligence and

information material, a point already put forward by Andrew Defty¹. The NATO archives also show that from the end of the Fifties, the Dutch, West Germans and French became equally active in providing intelligence and propaganda information and recent scholarship has challenged the view whereby the US Delegation played an uncontested leading role in shaping NATO's information action.² More research of the NATO archival material is therefore needed to assess the shifting degrees of initiative of the national delegations and their impact on the formulation NATO's security, military and information policies.

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¹ Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-1953* (London: Routledge, 2004).

² Valérie Aubourg, "Creating the texture of the Atlantic Community: The NATO Information Service, private Atlantic Networks and the Atlantic Community in the 1950s," in Valérie Aubourg, Gérard Bossuat and Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *European Community, Atlantic Community* (Paris: Soleb, 2008), pp. 390-415; Linda Risso, "'Enlightening Public Opinion': A Study of NATO's Information Policies between 1949 and 1959 based on Recently Declassified Documents," *Cold War History*: 7/1 (February 2007), pp. 45-74.