

Does NATO Have A Future?

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Does NATO have a future?
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Submitted by Lieutenant (N) Michele ORINI CG#1
to
Major JK Gelerter
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The end of the Cold War has generated rapid transformation within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As the Soviet Union collapsed, NATO lost its primary reason to exist and a lot of people called for an end to the alliance. On the contrary NATO did not die, but changed its original mission, extended its sphere of influence beyond its previous geographical limits. But what is the real state of the alliance?

While NATO might seem fragile and irrelevant, the military transatlantic alliance fulfils a vital role because the United States and Europe have new common enemies to defeat together and because the United States is still vital for Europe and vice versa. Europe and America can overcome this new security challenges by using all the diplomatic and military instruments provided by NATO.

Why is NATO fragile?

The end of Cold War broke the existing balance within the alliance because the most powerful European countries no longer accepted American hegemony and because American geopolitical interests were focused on the Middle East.¹

¹ David P. Calleo, "Transatlantic folly: NATO vs the EU".

Politically, the United States dominates NATO and most European allies are unhappy with the American military and foreign policies.² Accordingly, NATO has urged Europe to develop a European Union defense policy and proper military capabilities.³ Considering the limited military resources of European countries, an independent defense capability could drain energy and legitimacy of NATO over time.⁴

On the other hand, the United States' objectives for the future of NATO show its limited interest in European Security and emphasize NATO's role in the "greater Middle East". Former United States' Ambassador to NATO, R. Nicholas Burns, argued:

NATO needs to pivot from its inward focus on Europe - which was necessary and appropriate during the Cold War - to an outward focus on the arc of countries where most of the threats are today - in Central and South Asia, and in the Middle East.[...]NATO's mandate is still to defend Europe and North America. But we don't believe we can do that by sitting in Western Europe, or Central Europe, or North America. We have to deploy our conceptual attention and our military forces east and south. NATO's future, we believe, is east, and is south. It's in the Greater Middle East.⁵

Many European Countries believe the United States is more interested in Middle Eastern and Central Asian oil reserves, rather than security. In addition, the prospect of greater NATO

² Calleo.

³ Nicola Butler, "NATO's future: to the Greater Middle East and beyond?"

⁴ Gary Smith, "NATO & UE defense plans"

⁵ Butler.

involvement in expeditionary operations further out of area undermines NATO's traditional role as a defensive alliance.

Certainly America is looking for allies to support its policy of preemptive war. The American objectives for NATO involvement in the Greater Middle East reflect this United States' need. But there is little support in Europe for the US policy of preemptive war, especially following the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in IRAQ.⁶

During the last several years the lack of common enemy has emphasized the differences between the United States and some European powers. Finally, the ongoing War on Iraq has displayed these divisions and contrasts when France, Belgium and Germany have blocked Alliance deployment of missile batteries to Turkey.⁷

The recent events have showed that NATO is no longer the primary venue in which Europe and the United States discuss and coordinate strategies. This uncertain situation is threatening the existence of NATO. Accordingly, NATO appears to have become an anachronistic institution looking for a new mission to justify its existence.

What are the new NATO security challenges?

⁶ Butler.

⁷ Butler.

Currently, the United States and its European Allies must fight against new common enemies. The need of unity could settle the current differences that Europe and America have on NATO's policy and future.⁸

In fact Europe, as well as the United States and Canada, is facing serious security threats such as failed states, transnational crime, and internal and regional conflicts. Europe and its North American allies are also grappling with the rise of a new brand of international, extremist terrorism and dangers associated with the world-wide proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁹

Actually Europe realized the terrorist threat of radical Islamist groups only after the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and in London (2005). Now the Europe perceives terrorism as the primary threat to its internal security.¹⁰

Europeans' growing perception of the seriousness of the terrorist threat has been an important contributing factor to a better cooperation that has emerged over the past year among the United States and European intelligence, justice, and law enforcement officials.

⁸ Associated Press, "Rumsfeld, in Germany, urges NATO Unity".

⁹ *Joint declaration: European defense integration*, endorsed by thirteen former and current European senior military officials.

¹⁰ Robin Niblett, "Overview of transatlantic relations prior to President Bush's visit to Europe".

Europe appears more vulnerable than the United States to Islamic terrorism because of its proximity to the Middle East and North Africa and its large Muslim population. In addition, Islamic terrorist groups continue to perceive that many European States are responsible for supporting the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the occupation of Iraq.¹¹

The United States and Europe have also taken the lead on multilateral counterterrorist efforts, helping create the UN counter-terrorism committee and the G-8's counter-terrorism action group. However, there are important differences in the ways the United States and Europe approach the fight against international terrorism.¹² The US administration emphasizes defeating these enemies so that it does not have to fight them at home.¹³

Consequently, collective security depends on the United States' and Europe's cooperation and mutual respect.

¹¹ Niblett.

¹² Niblett.

¹³ Niblett.

Why are the United States and Europe mutually dependent?

To ensure its own internal balance, the European Union still needs a benevolent United States.

In fact, the European political integration will be completed only if America will not interfere with this internal process. Europe needs that America protects this process of unification or, at least, maintains a silence presence. Currently, the European Union is giving the ex-soviet republics the opportunity to join the continental union. This trend requires America's reassurance perhaps greater than ever. And certainly, perceived United States' hostility towards this process can easily make the problems of the European Union's insoluble. ¹⁴

While Europe requires a friendly United States to support the European process of unification, America needs the European ally to increase its military capabilities. Europe has to play an important role to sustain global security, because both sides of Atlantic must work closely to meet the new security challenges together. Europe must modify the current anti-soviet European defense structure into an expeditionary and flexible instrument able to undertake a wider set of military missions. The European

¹⁴ Associated Press, "Rumsfeld, in Germany, urges NATO Unity".

military transformation will make NATO something more than a toolbox for American projects.¹⁵

Having more capable European military establishments will also give European leaders more options for preventing and responding crises, not just diplomacy.¹⁶

Building a strong alliance requires mutual respect and the decisive will of the political and military leaders within NATO, United States' government and the European Union.

Failure to improve Europe's collective defense capabilities would have negative impacts on the ability of European countries to protect and advance their own interests.

Finally, American and European policy makers have the same interests in strengthening the competitiveness of their domestic economies and maintaining open markets (to American and European products services). Consequently all western politicians are promoting laws to improve markets transparency, respect rules for intellectual property protection and combat corruption.¹⁷

Conclusion

Current NATO Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer recently emphasized his concern that is a "dangerous illusion that the

¹⁵ Calleo

¹⁶ *Joint declaration: European defense integration.*

¹⁷ *Joint declaration: European defense integration.*

United States can, and should, go it alone when it comes to security. Iraq should demonstrate the impossibility of that approach."¹⁸

Tomorrow's difficult challenges must be managed by a genuine concert of great powers negotiating regularly to find a community of interest. Such a global concert seems unlikely to endure, except on the foundation of an already deep transatlantic friendship. But that friendship will endure only if it will be a friendship among two partners with equal political and diplomatic influence.¹⁹ Europe, with its vast experience in anticipating and conciliating conflicts among states should shape the world's future structure and build a world order based on reason and mutual appeasement. America should help Europe to reach its unity and embrace a partnership of equals.

Finally NATO's political credibility lies in its military. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan once said that you can do a lot with diplomacy, but you can do a lot more with diplomacy backed up by the threat of force. The more military capabilities available, the less need to use them. If NATO will become an organization unable to act, it will die.²⁰

¹⁸ *Joint declaration: European defense integration.*

¹⁹ Colonel Gregory G. Kraak, "Nato: still relevant after all these years?"

²⁰ Butler.

For half a century, NATO has been the key transatlantic link. Now the NATO will have a future only if both sides of the Atlantic will believe NATO to be the most effective tool for protecting the international community.

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