The US, the EU, and NATO Defense
Hans Binnendijk and the New Military Framework

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Dr Hans Binnendijk is Director of the Center for Technology and National Security Policy (CTNSP) at the National Defense University in Washington DC. Binnendijk and his constituents at CTNSP developed the NATO Response Force (NRF) concept in late 2001 in answer to questions about Allied readiness and preparedness that were raised by US deployment to Afghanistan. It has since become evident that NATO's Allied forces need a “total makeover” and not just a “facelift.” Binnendijk shares with us his thoughts on NATO progress and his newly proposed military framework.

The New Military Framework

An article in Defense Horizons entitled “A New Military Framework for NATO,” written by Hans Binnendijk and his fellow research professors David C. Gompert and Richard L. Kugler, suggests a change in the military structure of NATO operations. In May 2005 the article published a framework that was designed to help direct NATO’s future improvements. The NATO framework is presented in a pyramid-like format demonstrating five critical areas of military capabilities: a new NATO Special Operations Force; the NATO Response Force; NATO High Readiness Combat Forces; Stabilization and Reconstruction Forces; and defense sector reform assets. The pyramid or spearhead design indicates the entry and extraction of expeditionary troops; that initial operations would be carried out by NATO Special Ops; while assets for defense sector reform would begin extraction activities. The idea behind the proposal of this new framework is that NATO is now facing the challenges of a global security era. The organization must develop an easily deployable expeditionary force that harnesses all the power of Special Ops and contains some stabilization and nation-building elements.

Binnendijk says: “Given the global missions that NATO has ahead of it, it needs to restructure its armed forces, which are currently too large and still focused on a Cold War posture. There needs to be a shift toward a more mobile expeditionary force: lighter, more lethal, and more network centered with an array of different capabilities within that force. This notion of a new military framework has been briefed in Washington DC, Mons, and Brussels, and has been very well received.”

Need for a New Strategic Concept

NATO transformation will involve large-scale coordination and support, which must be realized in a new strategic concept. The strategic concept is a set of ideas that will provide the philosophy under which military transformation should occur. The purpose of developing a new strategic concept is to help streamline NATO’s decision-making. The concept should be used as a mechanism to insure reinvestment in military transformation and to determine what sort of force structure NATO needs for the future. Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) is convinced that there needs to be major restructuring, including a reduction in force structure. Binnendijk suggests: “It is critical for the Alliance to have a sense of its own purpose and how it might be used in the future.” There should be a “dual-track approach” to the transformation process: first the political; then the military. Both sides to this approach should be addressed in harmony to enhance efficiency.

NATO is no stranger to political turmoil. In the 1960s the organization was stifled by tremendous division over the nature of deterrence and détente. Solutions were set forth in the Harmel Report (1967), which was developed by an independent working group led by
Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel. In a unifying process, the Harmel Report married political détente with military deterrence. This put NATO's missions in a politically acceptable framework, and allowed the Alliance to progress toward flexible response. Such a global assessment could again help to converge political opinions and resolve dissimilarity in policy toward the Middle East and Central Asia. What Binnendijk suggests is that NATO revisits the dual-track approach. The strategic concept is the centerpiece of the political approach.

Binnendijk says: “Not only do you need to have a sense of what you are building for the future, but you have to make it clear and public, and use it to explain to finance ministers that NATO is indeed transforming itself and it is a big job that is going to be costly. When [a NATO country] restructures itself, it should be doing so consistent with NATO directions, and the savings that are taken from that restructuring should be reinvested in this transformation of capabilities. With a clear, unified concept we can more easily change decision-making procedures. If you have a force that can deploy in a week but a political decision-making process that takes two months, then it does not make sense. Once you have a unified concept there will be an even clearer recognition that in order to meet these global missions you also need expeditionary capabilities, and that brings us to the second track of this approach: military transformation.”

The Three-Pyramid Architecture and its Relation to a New Military Framework

The new military framework is outlined in a three-pyramid architecture designed by Binnendijk at CTNSP to show the intended and most effective composition of the US, EU, and NATO forces (see illustration). The three-pyramid architecture outlines sets of parallel capabilities that can be drawn from both sides of the Atlantic and used to strengthen NATO’s expeditionary operations. The spearhead shape of the pyramids indicates missions moving from entry (at the top) to extraction (at the base). The US pyramid is composed of US forward-deployed troops, expeditionary forces, stabilization and reconstruction capability, and followed by the civilian nation-building components for defense sector reform. The EU pyramid begins with the EU Battlegroups, followed by the EU Rapid Reaction Forces, constabulary forces, and civilian nation-building components. The NATO pyramid demonstrates the entry of an expeditionary force, starting with Special Operations Forces, then the NATO Response Force, and the NATO High Readiness Forces for sustained combat. The Stabilization and Reconstruction Forces would begin the transition to a post-conflict mission, then assets for defense sector reform for stabilizing countries would establish the point of military extraction once that civilian [nation-building] components are in place. The co-alignment of these military capabilities should increase readiness and provide sustainability in operations. This can also help to de-conflict the commitments of EU Battlegroups to NATO missions, and to promote the transfer of new technologies between NATO Allies.

The following explanation of this three-pyramid architecture, with a focus on the NATO pyramid, will clarify the new pattern for NATO expeditionary missions from invasion, through sustainability, to extraction plan.

The NATO Pyramid

Special Operations

Recent NATO missions to Afghanistan have shown that Special Operations Forces (SOF) with laser-range technology and aircraft overhead can be an extremely powerful capability. SOF can conduct a number of crucial tasks, and are highly interoperable. This interoperability should be maximized and utilized in areas such as networking, tactical weaponry, and logistics, particularly when in cooperation with ground or air forces in combat
missions. “US and European militaries have realized the superior advantage of national SOF. None of these national units, however, have been organized under a centralized NATO command. The NATO SOF should be a multilateral, collocated force controlled by a NATO command similar to the United States Special Operations Command for SOF,” Binnendijk tells us. This command headquarters could coordinate Alliance-wide SOF goals. Such a command would imply the need for multinational intelligence-sharing agreements, which Binnendijk believes can be reached despite existing national sensitivities. At the heart of NSOF would be a core no larger than 300 troops that are highly specialized in tactics and technology. Expertise in technological capabilities such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and global positioning systems (GPS) is what makes this small force so indispensable. “This would be a very small and elite group that has the right links to overhead capability. Maintained as a standing force, these troops would be deployable in a matter of hours to undergo counter-terrorism missions, rescue missions, or any other mission-essential engagements. No national caveats,” explains Binnendijk. “If you are interested in national caveats, do not bother participating in this. This has got to go.”

**NATO Response Force**

When the United States was preparing to enter Afghanistan, a US central command assessment of organization-wide capabilities revealed an inadequacy in Allied support. The NATO Response Force (NRF) was designed by Binnendijk’s CTNSP to give NATO the “forced entry expeditionary capability” that it lacked. As a joint force configured for strike operations, the NRF’s “knock down the door” ability is now a reality where quick action is called for, and is the strength that NATO needs to operate beyond the traditional Atlantic realm. “In November 2001 we had an Article 5 commitment and we were going to war in Afghanistan. When NATO Allies asked US central command what they could do to help, no useful units could be identified. There was no habit of cooperation and we were about to engage in a highly technical, network-centric warfare. We decided that if this were to happen again, NATO would be in trouble. I agree that it is time for the US to step up and include some ground troops in this, but we have been through several rotations with this and it is doing quite well,” praises Binnendijk.

The NRF’s second purpose is to serve as a vehicle for the transfer of training and technologies between the United States and European Allies. The NRF is currently comprised of about 20,000 troops that are rotated from the NATO High Readiness Forces. One contingency of 20,000 troops is on duty for six months, while another is standing down from previous duty and yet another is preparing for duty. The rotational nature of these troops makes it ideal for transferring techniques used by the US to its European Allies. “As we think about [the US’s] newly shaped forward posture, one of the elements of that will be a striker unit, which is fairly lightly armed but highly network centric, and has sensors in its units that normally are division or above. So they have taken sensors in intelligence and moved them very close to the battle platform. Now that is part of a transformation concept. It is going to be in Europe so we should use it to train with the NRF as a perfect way to develop its second mission.” Binnendijk acknowledges that this purpose of the NRF has not yet been fully realized, and the potential to transfer NRF technologies between Allies can still be expanded.

**NATO High Readiness Forces**

The NATO High Readiness Forces (NHRF) are the longstanding NATO forces assembled from national member forces. This is a sizable force of between 400,000 to 500,000 military personnel and is mostly operable within Europe. These ground forces lack the logistical support and airlift to deploy rapidly, yet since NHRF units are well trained and fully manned they can be instrumental in providing sustained combat readiness, but they must be reorganized with improved information networks. Providing force and support for these
NHRF improvements will considerably enhance European ability to project power. “The NRF is relatively small and quickly deployable, but as it has been designed, it is not sustainable for more than 30 days. If it is doing its principal mission, it is going to be a battered force after 30 days,” Binnendijk tells us. “The NATO High Readiness Forces are meant to provide that sustainability to NRF missions. This follow-on force is a fighting element and not just a stabilization or combat-support element. In their present status, the NHRF are not as highly ready as NATO command would like them to be.” Binnendijk explains that “there are twelve of these divisions that are still labeled highly deployable, but they are not, perhaps just one or two. Modestly thinking, we need about five or six of these divisions to be deployable [within] 30 days.”

Stabilization and Reconstruction Forces

NATO stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) abilities have been challenged in Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. There are indications that these NATO capabilities may be drafted to assist in the rebuilding of Iraq. S&R operations require a large force and involve varying capabilities such as light infantry, military police, psychological operations (PSYOPs), civil affairs, contract administrators, medical teams, and civil engineers. These aspects of an S&R force should be organized into an existing and readily deployable entity. As seen with Iraq, there should not be too long a gap between combat missions and post-conflict S&R missions. Had S&R forces been in place when combat forces gave way, then we would have had a more stable outcome.

Transition to post-conflict operations begins with stabilization and reconstruction forces. Binnendijk and the CTNSP also suggest the creation of stabilization and reconstruction forces within US capabilities: “We have a Defense Department Directive 3000, which will be focusing a lot of attention on stability operations. We are shifting a number of combat commands to do these other missions. For example, some 30 artillery battalions are going to be disbanded and shifted to other purposes. We are trying, additionally, to recruit more civil affairs’ personnel, people with cultural and linguistic skills for this troubled area that we are going to be working in. The US is trying to build this capacity, but it does not have the superstructure to deal with this. This is more than experimental in the sense that people are changing their military occupations and specialties, but it is experimental in the sense that the US command has not yet figured out how these forces should be commanded.” Binnendijk contends that “there is a kind of resistance to specialty forces like these in the US, because they are seen as a sort of ‘team B,’ which in fact they are not. Winning the peace is as important as winning the war.”

Just as the US is developing its S&R capabilities, so should NATO. “We have written a separate paper on this,” says Binnendijk, “and have spoken to a number of very senior officials, and there is a lot of perceptivity to this notion.” Although optimistic about the creation of S&R capabilities within NATO, Binnendijk admits that it is unclear whether these capabilities will ever be organized into a NATO-commanded force. “My guess is that an [S&R force] is not going to happen with a capital F … but there ought to be a headquarters associated with [the capability], and some way to gather together a virtual force within NATO. There is an enormous wealth of experience with this in Europe, but little of it has been organized within NATO. So we are suggesting that you simply take existing capacity and organize it so that it is better trained and has some surge capacity. The Germans, Poles, Italians, and a number of other European Allies are moving in this direction. Some, like the Dutch, French, and British, are reluctant to do so, preferring to focus on high-end combat. What should be pointed out is that you can re-role for the stabilization mission because combat forces with a different set of rules would be there to manage the stabilization aspect. The early reconstruction aspect, however, requires a number of specialty forces,” continues Binnendijk. “Engineers, medical people, some PSYOPs to put it all together, and civil affairs
to do the governmental stuff. A cluster of specialty S&R capabilities is needed with the combat forces and NATO should organize this."

**Defense Sector Reform**

“What we have found in the United States, in the cases of both Afghanistan and Iraq, is that there was a regime change,” explains Binnendijk alluding to the last tier of his NATO pyramid – defense sector reform. What the US did in both of these situations was to topple a regime, leaving no super structure, no police, no standing military or national security council. There can also be a failed state that “collapses from its own weight.” In any account, both the US and NATO need people who are trained in re-establishing security systems and can begin training military and security forces. S&R capability would be a fluent predecessor to this defense sector reform, but with some combat capacity. “Civilian nation-building – the last tier of the US and EU pyramids – is the civilian component of this defense sector reform,” says Binnendijk. “As the United States learned in Iraq, there should not be too much of a time gap between the implementation of military and civilian components for stabilization. You make some early mistakes and those mistakes stick with you.”

**EU Counterparts**

The EU Battlegroups are integrated, small and quickly deployable, making them a counterpart to the NRF. Binnendijk thinks this a positive development because it is real and deployable, and therefore useful to the transatlantic community. “We do need to de-conflict, because in some cases you have national units that are going to be either in a rotation cycle for the NRF or in a rotation cycle for the Battlegroups …What we do not want is a national unit that is in the high-readiness box for both of these institutions. If it gets deployed in one, the other will be left naked.”

The EU is unique in its advanced civilian capabilities and constabulary forces. The United States does not maintain an independently trained constabulary force comparable to the Netherlands’ Marechaussee, French Gendarmerie, or the Italian Carabinieri. Binnendijk believes that “the development in Vicenza [Italy] of this new school that is taking constabulary forces from five EU countries to include Italy, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal, and actually training them for deployment overseas,” is an essential and powerful instrument. In both counterterrorism and S&R operations the civilian capacity is crucial. “In the US today one of the biggest efforts we have is: how do you harness the interagency capacity? How do you give it more capacity that is deployable? How do you smooth out planning between the military and civilian sectors?” There is an analogy between the efforts being made in the United States and the existing capacity in the EU: “We need to figure out how to do, in the NATO-EU context with EU civilians, what is being done in the United States in terms of building interagency capacity.”

**Conclusion**

The nature of NATO deployments has and will continue to change, and military transformation is therefore essential, according to Binnendijk. The configuration of NATO forces should support operations ranging from invasive action up to the point of extraction. This framework presented by Binnendijk and the CTNSP is based upon capabilities. Most capabilities already exist within US and EU military forces, but must be organized under NATO command in a forward-deployable structure, and exercised at an optimal capacity. US and European dialog must be revitalized to ensure this transformation’s success. The three-pyramid architecture drafted by CTNSP outlines sets of parallel capabilities that can be drawn from both sides of the Atlantic. Counterterrorism, which sits at the base of each pyramid, is overly applicable to every Allied operation today. A common need to counter terrorism globally should be seen as a converging factor in future Allied cooperation. The US
and its European Allies must isolate weaknesses and build this new NATO framework on a foundation of existing strengths.

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Notes