

Reflections on NATO's Political and Military Transformation since '9/11'

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For a few short years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the liberal democracies in Europe and North America developed a natural tendency to think of themselves as the new global majority. As history had supposedly come to an end, and as no ideological rival challenged the supremacy of liberal societies, it became easy to believe in a brighter future. Military conflicts would be a thing of the past as the global system became increasingly dominated by trade and economics. The spread of democracy would be inevitable as more and more people overthrew authoritarian systems and demanded freedom. Globalization would take down barriers, make totalitarian control and censorship impossible, and create Tom Friedman's flat world of individual enterprise and prosperity for all. The late columnist of *The New York Times*, Flora Lewis, summed it all up succinctly when she wrote: 'When guns fall silent, money talks'. It was almost as if we believed in a reverse Marxism in which implacable historical forces would take over the running of the international system and produce a universal triumph of liberal democratic values with all of us sitting back and cheering on the process.

Tour d'horizon

How quickly this vision has disappeared. Today liberal democracy is on the defensive and risks becoming a minority concept. Countries such as Iran, Sudan or Venezuela are exploiting their oil wealth or their technological advances to challenge the *Pax Americana* and rally the malcontents around the world against an interventionist liberal democratic order. Globalization is, of course, continuing but we increasingly recognize its darker side; it is not only a means of opening up economies, lifting Asians out of poverty, and spreading liberal values, but also a vehicle for importing radicalism, religious fanaticism and the techniques of terrorism into our own societies. We use cyberspace to spread information, whereas our adversaries use it to spread something more powerful: irrational ideas. The same flow networks that allow money and information to be transferred instantly across borders can also be used by criminal networks to traffic virtually any commodity, whether it be people, missile components, laundered finance, guns and fissile materials.

In a similar way to the beginning of the twentieth century, the twenty-first century is seeing an initial wave of liberal globalist euphoria increasingly give way to a much more sombre mood as the extent of the security challenges becomes ever clearer. Proliferation, which was more or less static for thirty years, is now developing rapidly in the wake of the North Korean test and Iran's clear ambition to develop a full nuclear capability. How many more states will want a nuclear weapon in response? The whole region of the greater Middle East has not developed towards liberal democratic models as we had hoped, but is degenerating into open conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims, the unresolved Arab-Israeli dispute, disputes over the control of important resources such as water, and competition between religious fundamentalism and the secular state for power throughout much of the Arab world.

Europe may seem like an oasis of relative stability and prosperity, but we are increasingly aware of how much we still have to do to integrate fully our multicultural societies into a common framework of the rule of law, the capacity to cope with multiple identities and mutual tolerance. At the same time, to the south, Africa is predicted to have 1.2 billion inhabitants by 2025 (the same as China) while there will be 50 per cent more young people between the ages and 15 and 25 in the Middle East. If these exploding demographics produce despair from lack of jobs and opportunities at home, the migratory pressure on Europe, which is

already intense, will become extreme. All of this is without considering how the centre of gravity in world politics, which for the past half century has been dominated by the attractiveness of Western liberal democracy, based on the transatlantic community, is now shifting towards Asia with the emergence of China and India and the reconstitution of Russia as a great power based on its energy resources. This shift in power is not only reflected in population terms but also in the fact that in 2005 for the first time there was more investment in the emerging economies than in the developed countries.

The Need for NATO

In short this brief *tour d'horizon* underscores the fact that we will need NATO much more in the future than even in the years since the end of the Cold War. There may be people who will try to argue that NATO could have gone out of existence after 1989 without major prejudice to Europe's security – although it seems difficult to imagine how we could have handled the collapse of the Soviet Union and of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, let alone the wars in the former Yugoslavia without NATO. After all, the Alliance remained as the forum for transatlantic policy coordination even after it stopped being necessary as a bulwark against the former Soviet Union. Nonetheless, what is indisputable is that in the twenty-first century the need for an organized, effects-based response to the challenges that are rapidly building up on the frontiers of the transatlantic community will become compelling. NATO's future role is to be the organization that develops the strategic response of Europe and North America to global challenges, both in shaping political initiatives and delivering coordinated political-military effects. If the Alliance is unable to fulfil this role because of a failure of strategic imagination and political will, the concept of an open society based on liberal democracy could well suffer the same retreat and military challenge that occurred during the period of the 1920s and the 1930s with the rise of totalitarian ideologies such as fascism and Stalinism.

Anyone who has observed the evolution of NATO in the past few years will see that the Alliance has begun to understand the need to engage threats more proactively beyond its borders and to develop a broader array of political-military tools. Today NATO has 50,000 troops in the field in seven distinct missions. NATO has begun to reach out to global partners such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand and use its considerable military forces no longer only for territorial defence or to achieve military victory but to promote stability and security in the wider world. The ISAF operation in Afghanistan is NATO's first mission beyond Europe and is a reflection of the fact that chaos and a return of the Taliban regime in a country even as backward as Afghanistan could still pose a vital threat to the security of the Allies. As we witness the death of distance and the empowerment of the individual through technology, even the most backward countries can threaten the most technologically advanced. They need only to provide a haven for terrorist training camps or the international narcotics' trade.

The Riga Summit

As NATO approaches its next summit in Riga at the end of November 2006, however, the question is how far these changes are enabling the Alliance to operate with maximum effectiveness. The Alliance's enduring value derives from the fact that it can handle simultaneously the three key levels of power projection in responding to globalized and networked threats. The first level is the controlled deployment of military force across the whole spectrum of missions – from counter-insurgency and robust peace enforcement in southern Afghanistan to maritime counter-terrorism in the Mediterranean and humanitarian relief following the Pakistan earthquake. NATO's extensive planning mechanisms and exercise and experimentation facilities also give it a leading edge in coordinating both the military and civilian aspects of stabilization and reconstruction missions. In this way, NATO can build on lessons learned and help to ensure that the international community's resources are applied to maximum strategic effect. Finally, NATO has the political consultation

machinery, both within the Alliance itself and *vis-à-vis* its various groupings of partners and aspirant members, to draw the various strands of the international community together behind a common sense of purpose. Each can contribute flexibly according to their resources and desired political relationship to NATO.

The Alliance is thus an ideal balance between core cohesion and openness to others. The paradox, however, is that whereas NATO is stretched on current missions such as Afghanistan, the NATO institution is underutilized. In some cases, such as political consultation machinery or civil-military coordination, it has the capability but not the mandate. In others, such as force projection, it has the mandate but not the capabilities. The challenge for NATO is not to demonstrate its relevance by launching ever-more distant and ambitious new missions but to overhaul its own institution so that it can better exploit the three key power levers: military expeditionary force; civil-military coordination; and strategic political direction. Otherwise, the more that NATO tries to go global, the more it risks underperforming and biting off more than it can chew.

Military Expeditionary Force

First and foremost, NATO has to do a better job in its core task of deploying military forces. The intellectual revolution – whereby the Allies actually agree to use their forces mainly for non-Article 5 missions beyond Europe – has not yet been matched by a capabilities' revolution in terms of restructuring NATO's forces to be able to carry out these missions. The Alliance's target of 40 per cent of national forces being truly deployable (and one-fifth actually deployed) is far from being met. The Alliance therefore has to be more involved than in the past in shaping the decisions of its member states on capabilities. One area is budgets, where only seven of the 26 Allies spend two per cent of their GDP on defence. This should become a benchmark to qualify for and sustain NATO membership. It is somewhat ironic that many Allies are spending at least one per cent of their GDP less on defence in 2006 than immediately after the end of the Cold War, when the talk was all about demobilization and the peace dividend. Two per cent is a historically low figure, particularly when one sees how expenditures on education, pensions and social security have mushroomed in recent years while defence expenditures have remained essentially static or declining. For a while defence transformation could make progress by learning to 'spend smarter' through initiatives such as pooling of resources, joint procurement, leasing of equipment and the development of niche capabilities, but with the increasing tempo of operations and the need to choose between Afghanistan or new aircraft carriers, eventually all of the Allies bump up against the question of insufficient resources.

A second concern is to move priorities to the things that NATO actually needs. For example, not only does Europe currently face a situation where over 80 per cent of its forces cannot be deployed, but it still possesses over 10,000 main battle tanks and 3,000 combat aircraft when it is in the process of cutting those infantry regiments that are most in demand for peace-support operations such as KFOR in Kosovo or ISAF in Afghanistan. Fluctuating defence budgets and different procurement trends have created a situation where military assets are not shared proportionally among the Allies, with only a few possessing the full spectrum for expeditionary missions, such as strategic transport, mobile headquarters, deployable communications and special forces. This has brought about a situation, described by Donald Rumsfeld, where a majority of tasks are carried out by a minority of Allies. There is the risk of a hierarchy developing where some members will be projection states, able to handle high intensity tasks, some will be peacekeeping states and some will be protected states that rely upon the support of others. As NATO takes on more dangerous missions, such as currently in the south of Afghanistan, with the reality of frequent casualties, the willingness of all of the Allies to share risks and tasks on an equitable basis will become ever more important. This essential solidarity can be reflected in more common funding, so that the more capable Allies do not have to pay twice, once for themselves and once for the others. Common funding can

also assist force generation, as Allies that are tapped to send forces on operations, for instance through participation in NATO's Response Force rotations, will not have to shoulder all of the costs themselves. Common funding can also be expressed by smaller members' willingness to develop hard-core niche capabilities for expeditionary military missions and willingness to buy into expensive items such as transport aircraft even when they cannot buy these solely by themselves.

Transformation

At the same time, as NATO sets more stringent standards for the military efforts of its member states, it will be important to get a firm grip on the concept of transformation. In the distant days of the Roman Empire, the satirist Petronius Arbiter, in looking at the performance of the Roman legions, recognized that one approach to transformation is simply changing things for change's sake in a never-ending process of reorganization. He put it as follows: 'We trained hard [...] but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization'. In the twenty-first century, by contrast, nobody can be opposed to transformation. It would be like emulating the nineteenth-century Luddites in England who broke up factory machinery in a vain attempt to hold back industrialization. It is obvious that in our fast-moving world with its rapid technological innovation we have to rethink constantly our methods and capabilities.

Yet there is also a danger of incoherence and even cynicism if NATO Allies are constantly being told that whatever they have is not good enough and must be changed. If transformation becomes a permanent process rather than a specific product, then everything loses value because it has to be jettisoned immediately in favour of something else. Thus it can become a deterrent to defence investment and an excuse for postponing decisions. An alliance that is in the business of doing rather than just talking cannot be constantly reforming itself. Consequently, a major challenge for NATO's modernized defence planning system will be to focus efforts on those items that really are necessary and make a difference, and where the benefits will be tangible and long lasting so as to justify the investment. A case in point is the recent decision of thirteen Allies to procure jointly a number of C17 strategic lift aircraft or moves to develop an Alliance-wide air-to-ground surveillance system and theatre anti-missile defence. In this regard it is important to break the concept of transformation into specific concrete packages rather than presenting it as a permanent cultural revolution that would not allow for periods of implementation and consolidation. NATO needs to manage transformation rather than for it to manage NATO.

Civil-Military Coordination

A second piece of urgent unfinished business is NATO's relations with the civilian side of reconstruction. During the Cold War, NATO was able to fulfil its mission by itself. The goal of liberating an Allied territory from a Soviet invasion could be accomplished by military means alone and NATO therefore did not depend on any outside partner to be successful. These days, by contrast, NATO's strength –military implementation in peace-support missions – is also its weakness, as the military by itself cannot define its own exit strategy. Unless political reform, institution-building and economic improvements occur, the military cannot leave and its mission is seen increasingly as a failure. It is quite possible to waste immense sums on military deployments if there is no matching effort on the civilian side, just as large-scale aid and development grants can be totally wasted for want of security. The Palestinians have received per capita and in constant dollars four times the amount of Marshall Aid received by Europeans in the late 1940s, but with infinitely less to show for it. Conversely, but in the same vein, a recent estimate puts the bill for military operations in Afghanistan since 2001 at 82 billion dollars, whereas less than 7 billion have been spent on Afghanistan's civilian

reconstruction. This is a difficult issue for the Alliance, which is not intending to become a civilian reconstruction agency but which also cannot dictate to other international organizations or force them to step up their presence and investments in places such as Kosovo or Afghanistan.

Yet if NATO is to have a future as a provider of high-quality military forces for stabilization missions, its ability to work alongside civilian agencies according to a coherent and realistic plan for reconstruction will be ever more important. Arrangements are coordinated at the moment on an ad hoc basis, mostly in theatre, and after the key actors have arrived and set up their operations. What is required is a more strategic-level coordination before the mission is launched, so that NATO military commanders have a better idea in advance of what the civilian agencies will be doing and where, and can therefore plan the scope of their mission accordingly. Otherwise, years can be lost before the international response becomes truly joined up and effective and this, as we see today in Afghanistan, is time that can be exploited by NATO's adversaries, such as the Taliban, to regroup and to claim that they offer a better alternative to the misery of people's daily lives. Based on its experience in the Balkans in the 1990s where the UN, the EU, the World Bank and other agencies had extensive presences on the ground, and the military and aid budgets were more or less in balance, NATO began to assume that this would always be the case. However, Afghanistan has shown that the opposite can be true. Not only are the civilian organizations far less engaged in Afghanistan than NATO, but there is also no overarching body, such as the Contact Group for Kosovo or the Peace Implementation Council for Bosnia, where the key international actors discuss strategy and coordinate their responses.

Persuading these other organizations to join NATO in setting up such a structure of coordination will be one of NATO's key future challenges. Otherwise there is a danger that Allied countries will dissipate their resources and energies over too many missions – some with more civilian presence than military, some with more military than civilian – but with none a success. The international community has to set a limited number of priorities for its long-term engagement – whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq or Darfur – and then make a far more strategic joined-up effort in order to achieve lasting impact. What we cannot afford is 'strategic schizophrenia' whereby nineteen EU countries in NATO believe Afghanistan to be sufficiently important to engage significant numbers of troops, but the same nineteen countries in the EU do not believe that Afghanistan is sufficiently important to engage the EU's considerable financial resources and institution-building expertise. Nations simply have to be consistent from one institution to the other, otherwise the result will be military missions that are forced to withdraw after a period of time, leaving little accomplished despite having used up billions of dollars. From Lebanon to Somalia and the Balkans, the 1980s and 1990s had their fair share of such missions.

Strategic Political Direction

The third and final area where the Alliance has underutilized its capacity concerns its political role. Ultimately, no stabilization mission can succeed if there is not a political settlement. For instance, today in Kosovo KFOR is keeping the peace and assisting civilian reconstruction, but as long as the status of Kosovo is not resolved, the unemployment level remains at between 60 and 80 per cent and there is almost no foreign investment, people will not have much reason to look to the future and the tensions that caused the conflict in the first place will remain latent. Similarly, in Afghanistan NATO will succeed only if the government of President Karzai commands popular support and its authority is accepted by Afghans throughout the country, and if its neighbours support in deed as well as in rhetoric an independent, democratic Afghanistan rather than seek to undermine it. An evolving political process will greatly facilitate military and civilian stabilization. Political paralysis or stalemate will only frustrate and ultimately undermine them. If the Alliance puts thousands of troops into a stabilization mission and assumes responsibility for the fate of a given country, it cannot be

seen simply as a service provider or taxi company that provides a service under a mandate that is determined from the outside. The Alliance has a claim to be a political actor in its own right and to be part of international discussions on the broader political issues. But to play this role effectively, NATO itself has to broaden its political consultations and expand its set of political relationships. Just as NATO interacted with the UN, the EU, Russia, Croatia and Serbia over Bosnia and Kosovo, so it is only natural that it interacts with Pakistan, India, China and Russia over the future of Afghanistan. This does not mean that NATO is becoming a global institution ready to take responsibility for any conflict in the world; it simply means that NATO has to develop the political and diplomatic network to be able to undertake effective crisis management in the region in which it is engaged. If countries from beyond the Euro-Atlantic area such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand are willing to contribute troops, resources or intelligence to a NATO mission, then they should be actively engaged to increase NATO's legitimacy as well as to help it by sharing the practical burdens.

Partnerships

At the same time, as NATO understands that helping to make the rest of the world secure is now the new way of fulfilling its Article 5 defence mission, partnership is no longer an optional extra for the Alliance but a key security task. Partners not only share the burdens, but also provide the political insights and contacts that immediate neighbours frequently can offer best. They can help with the heavy political lifting and persuade other countries in a given region that NATO is a viable organization with which to work. NATO's partnerships with Central Asian countries or its engagement with Pakistan make it easier for Afghanis to accept a NATO presence, just as NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has made it easier for the African Union (AU) to accept support from NATO in deploying its forces in Darfur. Partnerships have enormous unexploited potential. The main objective is not simply to expand the number of partnerships in order to produce a global alliance, but to intensify them. With respect to those partners that share NATO's values fully and that have advanced modern capabilities, the key challenge is to open up the Alliance so that we can develop better interoperability and practical cooperation and give these partners a degree of political involvement that is commensurate with their material contributions. Obviously, there can be no taxation without representation, so NATO will have to develop bodies where the more active partners contributing to NATO missions can be consulted on a more equal basis. Existing Allies will need to be reassured that these increased consultations do not mean that certain partners have become more important than certain Allies, or that the legal distinctions between the privileges of members and non-members have become blurred.

The other type of partner is one that does not fully meet NATO's standards when it comes to values and capabilities but that is willing to engage the Alliance and is ready to benefit from NATO's help. In this connection, a great untapped resource of the Alliance is in the field of training and education, whereby NATO can use its existing military academies to develop a network of advanced training facilities, including eventually setting up training academies in partner countries, such as in the Middle East. Training will not only help partners to become better able to solve their own security problems but will also make them more interoperable with NATO and turn them into future contributors. Training is also an activity to which the more advanced partners can contribute. It is a good way of building bridges across a world that is increasingly fragmenting along religious or ethnic lines, just as training will also become a more important aspect of NATO's exit strategy in places such as Kosovo or Afghanistan, where foreign forces need to hand over to well-trained, well-equipped local security forces. Here, too, the Riga summit could usefully set a process in motion that could make the future NATO a hub of capacity development, planning assistance, specialist assets and training for partners and even international organizations such as the UN or AU, while still serving as a provider of forces for its own NATO-led missions.

This emphasis is not to suggest that partnership has overtaken enlargement as the Alliance's key future objective. NATO's door will clearly remain open to those countries that aspire to membership and are able to meet NATO's political and military standards. It is also vital that at a moment when the EU is said to be suffering from enlargement fatigue, NATO does not send a signal that it is also losing heart in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration, as this would only encourage nationalist and anti-reformist forces on the fringes of Europe. This said, in facing up to twenty-first-century security tasks, capable partners will become as important as new members. NATO's objective is not to become bigger for its own sake or to occupy more and more geographical space. Future members will need to demonstrate that they are not simply seeking protection or identity, but that they fully share NATO's global vision of challenges and are willing to contribute to its security tasks well beyond their specific regions. As NATO membership becomes a more demanding concept than in the past, so enlargement will become a more strenuous exercise.

In Conclusion

In a world where problems have become increasingly networked, NATO has to link up better with its partners and other international organizations, both to bring its undoubted military power to bear more effectively, and to ensure that they are supplying the political and civilian resources to complement NATO's military strengths. Security today is no longer about individual actors but about coordinated networks. If a computer has been badly or insufficiently wired, it can perform some of its functions but not the whole spectrum. The same can be said today of institutions. To qualify as a player in the first place, the Alliance needs a clear military vision for its future capabilities and the ability to apply military performance standards to all of its members so that it becomes once again the instrument of choice for both Europe and America in responding to security challenges. At the same time, however, it needs to overcome the current gridlock in its relations with the European Union to define a more rational division of labour in areas that are not of existential importance to each, but also a common approach and commitment in areas that are, such as the Balkans or Afghanistan. The Alliance has to be more present in the United Nations, particularly in contributing to the future Peace-Building Commission and the development of UN peacekeeping operations, and to improve its dialogue with NGOs and other civilian agencies. Above all, it needs to stop seeing itself mainly as a generator of forces, putting its credibility into play every time that it needs to find a few helicopters for Afghanistan. It needs to see itself as a political actor in its own right, conducting broader consultations on the key security issues of the day. It does not make sense for NATO to send forces into the field unless the intensity of transatlantic consultations has previously identified a common analysis of the situation and the agreed strategy to be followed. Those political consultations cannot take place only after NATO has begun a military mission.

Any issue that could pose a security threat to Allies has to be a legitimate subject for debate and discussion. It is surprising that when the rest of the world is increasingly preoccupied with energy dependency and the protection of critical infrastructure, Iranian proliferation, the Middle East peace process, stability in Iraq or massive migratory flows into Europe, NATO is not bringing North Americans and Europeans around the same table to discuss these issues. Political consultation does not mean that NATO is claiming responsibility for each issue, or that it is going to take specific military action, only that the Alliance needs to understand the politics of the wider world better if it is going to engage successfully in areas far beyond its traditional zone of responsibility and cultural frame of reference. Afghan warlords or Darfur tribesmen are very different from Soviet nuclear strategists. We are all soon out of our depth. It would help if NATO itself could acquire the necessary expertise to understand better the dynamics of the Middle East or the forces behind religious fundamentalism in Iraq or nuclear proliferation in North Korea. Statements are no substitute for real engagement and policy relevance. At all events, if NATO is to be as central to the security debate in its national capitals as it is in Brussels, it has to be directly involved in the topics that are at the top of the

list for Allied governments. It may take time to produce this common analysis and consensus, but it can begin only with a broadening and revitalization of NATO as the forum for the transatlantic strategic debate. NATO ambassadors have to discuss these issues inside the Alliance and not only when they go outside on the conference circuit.

The Riga summit, like all NATO summits, will be yet another way station on the continuing process of NATO's adaptation to the new security environment. It will not, under present predictions, take high-profile decisions on enlargement, partnerships, operations or transformation, unlike its two immediate predecessors in Prague and Istanbul. However, if the Riga summit nonetheless in its own more discreet way sets NATO, the institution, on the path to performing more in line with its potential, it may in the longer term be a more significant event. As the world slides into disorder, fanaticism, religious conflict, energy and resource competitions and rival power centres, the liberal democracies badly need an institution that can promote order in the international system and organize their response, an institution that unashamedly embodies liberal democratic values but that is accepted as legitimate by the rest of the world, which is all too ready to see the West as aggressive or self-serving. NATO remains by far the best institution to serve as that force multiplier. But the institution itself needs attention, and not only the operations such as ISAF that NATO is currently conducting and that hog all the media attention.

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