A New NATO for A New Century

Born out of the need to strengthen the capacity of a war-devastated western Europe to defend itself against a rising Soviet political and military threat and raised into a military alliance that achieved victory in the decades-long cold war without firing a single shot, the North Atlantic Alliance is today in the midst of a midlife crisis of identity. At the threshold of a new century, NATO needs to define its purpose, either by reaffirming its original objective of providing for the common defense of its members or by focusing its aims and organization in new directions. Given differences among the allies on both the need and the content of a redefinition of its core purpose, allied leaders meeting in Washington in April 1999 to celebrate the Alliance's looming seniority are likely to compromise on language that fudges its statement of purpose rather than chart a bold new course for the next century. But while the compromise may be celebrated for its clever drafting and may suffice to postpone a debate on NATO's purpose for some months or even years to come, sooner or later the Alliance and its members must come to terms with what this organization is all about.

A wide consensus on NATO's preferred purpose exists within the American policy community. This consensus favors turning NATO into an alliance of collective interests – an alliance that seeks to defend its members against the broad array of threats and challenges to their vital common interests wherever these derive from. For many inside and outside the U.S. government, the main challenges and threats to allied interests now come from outside Europe, especially the Middle East, an area that combines the possession of a critical strategic resource with long-standing conflicts and the rapid diffusion of advanced military technologies, including weapons of mass destruction. In view of the likely challenges to U.S. and European interests in this and other regions, many in the United States favor a NATO able to confront these challenges. As a recent task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations concluded, "the United Sates should draw Europe over time much further into a global strategic partnership to help shape the international system in the new era." In operational terms, this means that "NATO should conceptually broaden its new Strategic Concept to deal with threats to shared Western interests beyond Europe, especially in the Middle East: to protect Gulf oil, to slow the

entry of weapons of mass destruction and missile delivery systems into the region, and to undertake the long-term joint military planning necessary to prepare for these contingencies."[1]

Although transforming NATO into an alliance of collective interests may indeed be obvious from a U.S. perspective, there is nevertheless a fundamental problem with doing so. Few, if any, NATO allies share this perspective, and some strongly oppose it. There are two reason for this transatlantic difference. First, most European allies believe that NATO's fundamental focus should be on the Euro-Atlantic area. The debate among them is not whether the Alliance should have a role beyond Europe, but rather how far beyond allied territory its role should extend. Most allies have come to accept that NATO's role extends into the Balkans, but many believe that this is about as far as it should go.

Second, even where the allies' perspective extends the geographical limit of Europe, allied views of the interests, of the challenges and threats to those interests, and of the best way to respond to them often differ both between Europe and the United States and among the Europeans themselves. This is particularly true in the Middle East, where U.S. and European perspectives on the nature of conflict and the preferred solutions have long diverged. Of course, differing perspectives within the alliance are nothing new. Many of the differences within NATO during the cold war, including many of its frequent crises, resulted from divergent U.S. and European views about the nature and extent of the Soviet threat and the best way deter it.[2] But U.S. and European perspectives on new challenges and threats are bound to differ much more, while the lack of unity among the allies on the nature of a possible response is far less consequential than before. As a result, it is difficult to see how a united and effective strategy to counter new threats and challenges outside Europe can emerge within an Alliance framework.[3]

The emergence of a "global strategic partnership" between the United States and Europe anytime soon is therefore highly remote. A first requirement is for Europe to in fact become Europe – a single player on the global stage. Steps in this direction are being taken. There is the enunciation of a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) within the European Union, the likely appointment of a Mr. or Ms. CFSP in 1999 who can speak for the EU, and the British government's decision to abandon London's longstanding opposition to a greater European

defense role. These are all encouraging signs pointing to the possible emergence of a single European voice on global affairs. But they are just an indication of its potential, not proof positive of its emergence. Second, once a single European voice has emerged with the requisite diplomatic flexibility and the capacity for autonomous political and military action, its perspective needs to be broadened beyond Europe to become truly global in scope. Like the United States, Europe must come to view its own geographical confines as but one, albeit the most important, region among many other critical areas around the world. This, too, will take time. Finally, if a Europe with a global perspective emerges, the viability of a U.S.-European strategic partnership depends on the partners sharing both sufficient interests and common perceptions of the threats and challenges to those interests. Only then can effective, coordinated action become the rule rather than the exception. Since none of these three developments is either imminent or likely to happen within the foreseeable future, basing the Atlantic Alliance's immediate reconfiguration on their existence would be profoundly mistaken.

Whereas NATO's midlife identity crisis has forced many in the Washington policy community to contemplate ways in which to transform the Alliance in a fundamentally new direction, many European countries have responded to this crisis by doggedly holding on to its core defining mission of collective defense. This tendency is the result of both an unwillingness to concede that changing times require major adaptation and a fear that changing NATO's fundamental purpose of collective defense risks the loss of many of the Alliance's desirable attributes.[4] These attributes include, most critically, providing the United States with an institutional entrée into Europe, resolving Europe's age-old security dilemmas, accommodating a German return to "normalcy" while reassuring its neighbors, limiting the proliferation of national nuclear stockpiles, and denationalizing defense policy and planning.

All of these attributes of the transatlantic security community are important and need to be retained. But whereas they are a welcome by-product of a collective defense alliance, there is no reason to believe that such a narrow purpose suffices to ensure their perpetuation in the future or that a different kind of Alliance would not be equally effective in promoting them. To the contrary, an Alliance committed solely to collective defense is, along with its many positive attributes, bound to atrophy for lack of clear purpose. Under these circumstances, the United

States might retreat from Europe, the security dilemma could re-emerge (especially if Germany takes on a pivotal role), and defense policy and planning might once again become a national affair, raising the prospect that nuclear weapons would spread.[5]

Of course, this negative spiral of events need not occur. The values, interests, and functions that have developed as desirable by-products of cooperation during NATO's evolution are characteristics of the extensive security community that has emerged in the North Atlantic area over the past 50 years. NATO is at the core of that community, and one of its primary purposes in the years ahead must be to enlarge the scope and extent of the community's reach so that others, too, can benefit from what the Alliance has to offer. This means that an Alliance dedicated to extending security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area is one that is most appropriate for the new era we are entering. Indeed, this is NATO's fundamental political purpose, its main *raison d être*. In the 21st century it is what the Atlantic Alliance is – and should be – all about.

Central to fulfilling this fundamental political purpose will be to keep open the prospect of Alliance membership to all European states that desire to join and meet the critical political and military criteria for entry. It is only by enlarging the security community that has arisen under NATO's auspices that the community is likely to survive and thrive. Of course, NATO is not alone in its commitment to extend security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. However, what distinguishes NATO from other European organizations, like the EU and OSCE, is not so much this shared commitment, as the fact that it is based on a solid military foundation – one that provides NATO with the means to enforce the fundamental rules, norms, and codes of conduct that unite the region as a whole.

The Alliance's military foundation needs to be further developed, strengthened, and adapted to the new security environment. A consensus among the allies needs to be developed on where to threaten or use military force and how to employ it in these circumstances. NATO should be ready to act along the full spectrum of military operations – ranging from peace support and crisis management missions on one end to regional collective defense on the other. Geographically, the Alliance should focus on missions that are confined to the Euro-Atlantic

region, although it should not *a priori* exclude operations beyond Europe or weaken the ability of those allies that so desire to engage in joint military action wherever their interests might dictate. Although regional collective defense must remain a key planning concern for the Alliance as a whole, on a day-to-day basis, NATO should focus on applying military force in those situations where the key values and characteristics of the Euro-Atlantic community are threatened or need to be strengthened. This, rather than the containment of the Balkan conflicts or fear of their spreading, is the primary value of the Alliance's military engagement in Bosnia, Kosovo, and elsewhere in southeastern Europe. What is threatened by conflict in the Balkans is less the potential stability or security of NATO members than the credibility of NATO as the primary instrument for enforcing the rules, norms, and fundamental standards of conduct that underpin security throughout Europe.

In preparing and employing military force for this purpose, the Alliance must focus its attention in three areas. First, NATO must continue to implement the concept of Combined Joint Task Forces, which provide both a flexible and adaptable command arrangement to manage the deployment of military forces in and beyond Europe. In making possible joint military action by all Alliance members, by the Alliance in conjunction with non-member partner countries, or by a subset of members (in an all-European force or an ad-hoc coalition), CJTF furnish the type of flexible arrangement that is fundamental to retaining a solid military foundation for the Alliance.

Second, the allies as a whole need to develop the type of military forces and capabilities that are necessary to operate along the full range of possible military missions. This requires enhanced mobility, greater power projection capability, improved sustainability, and preparedness to operate in a WMD environment – all key aspects of the Defense Capabilities Initiative that will be approved by the allied leaders at the Washington summit.

Third, the Alliance needs to encourage greater responsibility and burden sharing, in large part by improving European defense capabilities. The British government's proposal of late 1998 to develop European defense capabilities is a major step in the right direction. The Blair initiative, as the proposal is known, focuses not only on enhancing Europe's ability to act on an autonomous basis (a proposition heartily endorsed by the French), but also, and importantly, on

improving Europe's capacity to do so through major defense reform.[6] Rather than spending more on defense, most European countries need to redirect their defense spending from personnel to equipment, focusing on enhancing the ability to project power far away from home and sustaining military operations over prolonged periods of time. Strategic lift, intelligence, and command, control, and communications are key areas that need to be emphasized in rechanneling Europe's defense efforts.

In summary, a NATO prepared for the next century is an alliance with the fundamental political purpose of extending security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic region based on a solid military footing. Its political purpose in the 21st century must be to secure the gains of the second half of the 20th century by enlarging the security community in Europe. NATO's primary focus must continue to be on Europe – though it will be a Europe that extends geographically well beyond the territory of the member states. At the same time, a strong military foundation will provide the Atlantic Alliance not only with the requisite means to enforce and secure the essential political basis of an enlarging security community, but also with the foundation for joint military action in and beyond Europe by those allies that believe such action to be warranted. Only by pursuing this path will NATO succeed in extending its record as the most successful military coalition of states well into the next century.

NOTES

[1] Robert D. Blackwill, chairman and project director, *The Future of Transatlantic Relations*. Report of an Independent Task Force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1999), pp. 3, 5.

[2] For a detailed elaboration of this point, see Ivo H. Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response: NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 19-66.

[3] For an elaboration of this argument, see Richard N. Haass, ed., *Transatlantic Tensions: The United States, Europe, and Difficult States* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

[4] The argument that these attributes might be lost by moving away from NATO's core mission has been made most convincingly by David S. Yost, an American student of NATO, who is also a close observer of the European security scene. See his *NATO Transformed: The Alliance s New Role in International Security* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1999), esp. p. 276-77.

[5] See John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56.

[6] See Tony Blair, "It's Time to Repay America," *New York Times*, November 13, 1998, p. 31; Tony Blair, Address to the North Atlantic Assembly, Edinburgh, Scotland, November 13, 1998; and George Robertson "The Future of European Defence," Speech to the WEU Assembly, Paris, December 1, 1998.