

FACING THE FUTURE

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Preserving international security in the 21st century is harder than it was in the 1990s. In those days, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the international system as a whole seemed to be moving towards democracy and a free-market economy, even if it was ridiculously premature to proclaim “the end of history.” The problems which inevitably arose from time to time were not that difficult to manage. Intervening in the Balkans, for instance, was really a matter of political will. Once the NATO allies had overcome their hesitations about using air power against Milosevic in Bosnia and later on in Kosovo, military victories were achieved relatively quickly. In short, the NATO allies had the power to determine outcomes, even if common vision and will were often lacking. There were no major countervailing forces willing and able to frustrate the policy goals of the Alliance.

But the 21st century is shaping up to be very different. America and Europe’s leverage over world events is not what it used to be. Western man no longer rules the world, and the Western model is no longer seen as the only one to be followed. The United States is overburdened both economically and militarily. Europe, meanwhile, still lacks global reach, despite almost two decades of enlargement and internal political integration. The classical West still has intrinsic advantages: its creativity and power to innovate, as well as the sophistication



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of its economies, financial markets and societies. But it can no longer dominate through power or example alone. At the same time, Asia is on the ascent; four of the world's top ten companies are now Chinese. And, since the impact of the sub-prime lending crisis on the Western financial system, we have been only too happy to accept over \$69 billion from the sovereign wealth funds of China, Japan and the Gulf States to recapitalize our leading investment banks.

There is no evidence that a multipolar world has to be one of balance of power diplomacy and competing military blocs. But it would also be a mistake to rely on globalization and economic interdependence alone to uphold world order and peace. History teaches us that with economic power eventually comes military power. This year alone, China plans to deploy 15 rockets and launch 17 satellites and again to send astronauts into outer space. This comes on top of its successful test of an anti-satellite weapon against an inactive meteorological satellite last year. Russia too is rapidly increasing its defense spending and fielding new generations of nuclear weapons. Both countries are also pursuing a more active and visible naval presence beyond their territorial waters. We can also see other emerging international actors who are acquiring the technological and scientific base to project significant strategic power in the 21st century. What is clear is that military power is also diffusing globally, even if it is doing so less rapidly than economic power and individual wealth. The key challenge of Western diplomacy will be to recognize the new status of these emerging (or, perhaps more accurately, re-emerging) major powers but persuade them to use that military and economic power to solve common

security challenges rather than for national prestige or self-assertion.

There are two simple lessons that the NATO allies need to draw from this unsettling new world. The first is that what in the 1990s was strategically desirable has today become a strategic imperative. NATO must be united and stay united in pursuit of its core objectives. Unity will not always guarantee success, but division will always guarantee failure. It therefore is no surprise to see the United States and Europe now working overtime to put a multitude of differences—over the Iraq war, the Middle East peace process, international terrorism and climate change—behind them and reinvigorate the transatlantic relationship. Thus, in its final months, the Bush administration is pursuing peace in the Middle East, compromising on climate change, and softening its stance on Iran. In return, its counterparts in Europe are gradually sending more forces to Afghanistan, moving towards recognition of the independence of Kosovo, and signaling their readiness to contemplate additional sanctions against Iran. These developments tell the story; the United States and Europe are the closer to strategic convergence today than at any time over the past decade.

The second lesson that the NATO allies are drawing from the global diffusion of power is that they need to have a better and clearer grasp of their common priorities, and then devote resources to meeting them. The past few years have seen a large number of missions but often without either the commitment or the resources to be successful. The United States has committed the bulk of its forces to Iraq and Afghanistan, whereas the Europeans have focused on the Balkans, Zaire or Chad, or supporting the UN in Lebanon or

in responding to calls by NATO in Kosovo and Afghanistan. All these missions assuredly have their strategic or humanitarian justification; but competing for the same scarce assets, such as helicopters, transport aircraft and engineering units, is a recipe for strategic incoherence and runs counter to the principle that as power becomes scarcer, it has to be used more selectively.

New priorities

Clearly, we are heading towards a multipolar world, where the West no longer holds a premium on geopolitical power. Less well understood is how to ensure that that world is one where common problems are tackled collectively, and the future of humanity is seen as more important than the parochial interests of the nation-state. Multipolarity without multilateralism could well mean a return to the competing alliances and balance of power diplomacy of the 19th century.

Now more than ever, America and Europe need an institution through which to build a transatlantic consensus on how they are going to tackle the macro-challenges of the 21st century. That organization is NATO. Indeed, on both sides of the Atlantic we can now see signs of efforts to reinvigorate the Atlantic Alliance. This focus makes good sense; after all, it is much easier to transform an existing organization than to invent a new one.

But NATO's future relevance cannot be based on the mere fact that it exists. Institutions are not just networks or meeting places; they have to produce more than the sum total of their parts and find answers to pressing challenges. This is why, over the last two decades, NATO has undergone a major process of transformation, deploying its forces beyond

Europe, enlarging its membership to include a number of formerly communist countries, and linking up with organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, the World Bank and the European Union.

NATO, moreover, has recognized that this process of transformation is not a one-off effort, but a continuing process of adaptation to a rapidly changing environment. This said, each phase of history brings its own specific challenges, which an organization like NATO needs to overcome if it is to be able to move on to the next phase of its evolution successfully. At the moment, there are four specific goals for NATO that will dominate the agenda at the Alliance's next summit meeting in Bucharest at the beginning of April.

First and foremost, NATO has to get its mission in Afghanistan on the right track. It is the most demanding and ambitious that the Alliance has ever undertaken, and one which the United States in particular is watching closely.

At the same time, NATO has to finish the job in the Balkans. This entails inviting more countries of that region to join its ranks, and putting the others on the path to integration into both NATO and ultimately the European Union. This issue is very much a holdover from the 1990s, but the current tense situation in Kosovo demonstrates the perils of NATO disengagement and stalled integration, which could foster a relapse into ethnic violence and quests for partition.

Another key challenge for the Alliance is to embed itself firmly into the operational structures of the international community, something which NATO experts call "the comprehensive approach." In contrast to the Cold War, when it depended only on its own membership to maintain

forward defense and nuclear deterrence, NATO can no longer carry out its missions alone. To be sure, NATO can send forces to the Balkans or Afghanistan. But if it cannot persuade the United Nations or the European Union to undertake civil reconstruction, it risks becoming bogged down in those places for a very long time. So NATO has to be able to cooperate closely with these other organizations, and to avoid turf fights and arguments over who leads.

Finally, an activist posture abroad depends on greater security at home. NATO cannot stay on the sidelines as new threats (including terrorism, proliferation, cybercrime and energy politics) emerge. Quite simply, allied nations will not send troops to the Hindu Kush if they feel that NATO is not doing enough to defend them at home. This means that NATO has to get back to basics and to its core Article 5 business of protecting its populations.

A chance for renewal

2009 will mark the 60th anniversary of NATO, and the moment when the new U.S. administration is expected to recommit to the Alliance in a ceremonial summit. But if this is to be a moment which equips NATO for the next 60 years, rather than merely recalls the successes of the past, the Alliance will have had to have made significant progress in the four key areas identified above. How can this be achieved?

With regard to Afghanistan, NATO has to be clear to its publics that its commitment is long term, and that there is no quick fix if we are to avoid a relapse of the country into its pre-9/11 status as the world's principal terrorist training camp. Even in more benign environments such as the Balkans, stabilization

and reconstruction will take at least 20 years. In Afghanistan, it could take as long—or longer. Afghanistan is also one single strategic theater, and NATO has responsibility for every part of it. Therefore all allies must be willing to take on all of the jobs required, whether they involve counterinsurgency or humanitarian relief. At the moment, it is too easy for individual allies to develop their own image of Afghanistan based on whether they have troops in a quiet spot or in a more dangerous location. If NATO is to be successful, it must not only be able to generate the necessary forces to go to Afghanistan but make sure that it is able to rotate them. It is much easier for an ally to take on a commitment if it knows that it will be replaced in six months to a year by someone else and not be left stuck with a mission indefinitely. Allies need also to lift the caveats on the deployment of their forces, which currently dictate that commanders do not have the full use and benefit from even the limited number at their disposal. The only viable exit strategy is a sustainable Afghan National Army and Police able to hold the Taliban at bay and provide security to the local population. This means that the European Allies need to invest much greater resources in training and education, a task which currently is being performed overwhelmingly by the United States alone.

The real issue, however, concerns the "comprehensive approach." There is too widespread a perception that Afghanistan is NATO's task, and that other international organizations can follow different priorities elsewhere in the world. But soldiers are not civil servants in uniform and NATO is not a development agency. As in the Balkans, it needs the involvement of the UN to develop the economy and

local institutions, and it needs a much larger EU element in training the police. The proposed appointment by the UN of a new High Level Representative for Afghanistan is an encouraging sign that this message is finally getting through. Rather than follow different priorities and timelines, the international community must coordinate better and work as one team, just as our populations need to understand that Afghanistan is not a "war of choice" in a faraway place but a country that is directly linked to their own security.

Accomplishing the second task, stabilizing the Balkans, should be easier. If the Bucharest Summit agrees to extend membership invitations to Croatia, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, it will be a powerful message that the West is not suffering from enlargement fatigue, and sees enlargement as a security gain rather than a risk. Already, the prospect of a new round of NATO enlargement is encouraging Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro to ask for new forms of partnership with the Alliance. Moving the entire region towards Euro-Atlantic integration is the best way to convince Serbia that retreating into sullen nationalism over Kosovo is a political and economic dead end.

It would also be a potent signal for countries further afield, such as Ukraine and Georgia, that NATO's open door is truly open—something which could help the forces of reform maintain the upper hand in those places. Ukraine and Georgia have been through much domestic turbulence of late, but both have recently held elections which have restored democratic reformist governments that are now considering participation in NATO's Membership Action Plan. So an ambitious enlargement at

Bucharest will provide major encouragement for them to stay the course, notwithstanding a more assertive Russia and even if it is difficult at the moment to give a time-frame for when they will be able to join either NATO or the EU.

Kosovo is and doubtless will remain a difficult issue, all the more so because not all NATO allies are convinced of the wisdom of recognizing its declaration of independence. In the short run, lancing the boil in Kosovo will produce new tensions, not only between Serbs and Kosovars but also between Serbia and many NATO countries. But the current status quo is untenable; to date, uncertainty over Kosovo's ultimate status has nurtured and sustained ethnic disputes throughout the region. Building a new state in Kosovo and focusing the energies of Kosovars on real domestic reform rather than gaining independence will need a long-term commitment.

The next challenge, namely making sure that NATO has the right networks of relationships to operate effectively, is also something that should be solvable. The international community cannot be effective if NATO allies speak with one voice in the North Atlantic Council and another in the European Union Council. It does not make sense for 21 NATO nations that belong to the European Union to designate Afghanistan as a life-and-death issue for the Alliance but then not even mention it in their EU Summit Declarations. This type of "strategic schizophrenia" does not reflect the fact that NATO and the EU have complementary assets, the former stronger militarily and the latter more endowed financially and in terms of civic reconstruction.

Fortunately, and despite more than a few jokes in Brussels about

the NATO-EU relationship's being a "frozen conflict," the two organizations do seem to be moving closer together. The EU will shortly take over from the UN in overseeing civil administration and police reform in Kosovo, which will necessitate much closer contacts with NATO. Moreover, the willingness of new French President Nicolas Sarkozy to bring France closer to NATO and encourage a closer NATO-EU dialogue suggests that this growing proximity has the potential for lasting political closeness. What will be essential, however, will be to give NATO and the EU in future a common base of assets, such as forces, headquarters, key enablers like transport, aircraft and helicopters, and deployable civil and military personnel. Currently NATO and the EU are duplicating each other far too much in developing their own separate military structures—a luxury that the defense taxpayer should no longer be willing to accept.

The news also looks more positive on the NATO-UN front. NATO and the United Nations are currently negotiating a declaration on cooperation that could be ready by Bucharest. The UN also is increasingly turning to NATO for help in Africa or to handle humanitarian emergencies such as after the earthquake in Pakistan three years ago.

As these signs suggest, the Alliance has been highly successful in developing a network of partnerships that now extends across the globe. When NATO meets with its partners at the Bucharest Summit, the Heads of State and Government of over 60 countries and from four continents will be around the table, including from Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. The latter countries all contribute to NATO's mission in Afghanistan; indeed, today nearly

15 percent of the forces deployed on NATO's missions are from partner countries. They see NATO as a reliable partner which offers them participation in commands and planning in exchange for their contribution. At a time when the world is fragmenting politically, the ability of NATO to develop these partnerships and move them into a permanent relationship based on interoperability and common training can be a rare bridge builder across religious, ethnic and even political dividing lines.

The final task—the need for NATO to be rebalanced—takes us back into difficult territory. Countries that do not feel secure at home will be reluctant to engage their troops abroad. A few years ago, many analysts believed that the only purpose of NATO after the Cold War would be as an organizer of expeditionary missions to manage crises abroad or rebuild failed states. Living safely within their borders, our populations did not see NATO as necessary for homeland defense. But this situation has changed dramatically in recent years, in the wake of energy cut-offs and power failures in Europe, crippling cyber attacks in Estonia, a resurgent Russia and the high visibility given to Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

Missile defense is the most immediate issue in this regard, given that the United States has already entered into negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic, two NATO members, about deploying radar and interceptors on their respective territories. Initially Washington had excluded the Alliance from its direct bilateral dealings with these countries, but has recently decided that NATO is its preferred forum for taking the missile defense issue forward. In the end

it is better to discuss security issues within established structures than to invent ad hoc formats which could give rise to suspicions and misunderstandings. This is in and of itself another forceful argument in favor of NATO's continuing relevance. But the Alliance also needs to do more to recognize the future likelihood of proliferation threats and reaffirm the indivisibility of Allied security. If a missile defense shield in Europe is not only technically feasible but also politically desirable, the solution has to be a NATO one covering all Allies. At the same time, a clear message of NATO's renewed interest and commitment to arms control and an offer to Russia to consult on the future shape of the non-proliferation regime could help to lead the current highly sensitive political discourse over missile defense in Europe in a positive direction.

Of course, it is one thing to define credible policies for meeting new security challenges; it is quite another to develop the military capabilities to meet those challenges. Capabilities are the core business of NATO, and here the Alliance will need to do a better job of improving the usability of its forces for new operational commitments. From common funding for deployable infrastructure and communications to greater investments in expeditionary forces, the Alliance and its members must do more. Fortunately, the case for a robust military reorganization is more salient than ever. For the foreseeable future, European countries will live with the paradox that military deployments and strategic risks are going up while their respective defense budgets remain static or even decline. As such, NATO's value as a practical defense problem solver will be a test of its credibility.

Continued relevance

Whenever the issue of the relevance of an institution comes up, the first impulse of observers is to make comparisons with the organization's immediate competitors. This is often a false comparison; international organizations have their intrinsic strengths and weaknesses and their comparative advantages. That said, relevance is not a permanent state of affairs. Nor is it preordained by nature or politics. It derives from whether an organization is handling important business and providing a concrete product that moves the world forward. The key questions, therefore, are as follows. First, is NATO engaged in stabilizing crucial areas of strategic importance for the security of the West? And, second, is it acquiring the tools that it needs to do these missions successfully?

If we look at what NATO has been able to achieve in the Balkans and Afghanistan, despite the daily difficulties and occasional setbacks—and what it has learnt from these experiences—the answer to both questions is “yes.” To be sure, NATO has always had, and will always have, its critics. But the proper method by which to judge NATO is on its merits, as well as its utility. And on that score, the Atlantic Alliance is unequivocally moving in the right direction.

