



Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych
Center for International Relations

Reports & Analyses

11/03

Klaus Becher

**It takes an Optimist:
The Future Role of Nato in
European Security**

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ul. Emilii Plater 25, 00-688 Warszawa
TEL.: (22) 646 52 67, FAX: (22) 646 52 58
www.csm.org.pl, info@csm.org.pl

It Takes an Optimist: The Future Role of NATO in European Security

by Klaus Becher

The speech given at the conference „New Europe, Old Europe and the New Transatlantic Agenda” held on September 6, 2003 in Warsaw.

The conference was organised by the CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS in the framework of its project ***Poland, Germany and the Transatlantic Security Agenda*** which is supported by the German Marshall Fund of the United States



The German Marshall Fund of the United States is an American institution that stimulates the exchange of ideas and promotes cooperation between the United States and Europe in the spirit of the postwar Marshall Plan

Despite NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson's impressive record of leadership, the question of NATO's future remains a divisive issue in today's strategic debate. To many observers, there is a straightforward and apparently common-sense answer: NATO is on its way out. According to this mindset,

- NATO's historic mission, standing up to the Soviet threat, is increasingly distant history;
- NATO's main method, military defence, is of decreasing relevance at a time when European nations do not face the risk of military attack on their territories – and global threats, including terrorism, are first of all of a non-military nature;
- NATO's community of values has given way to fundamental transatlantic disagreements across the full range of topics from climate-change policy to pre-emptive armed intervention;
- NATO's role as a framework for US deployments in Europe is expendable because US forces in Europe have been shrinking for over a decade to a fraction of what they used to be;
- and NATO's institutional role as a forum of effective multilateral decision-making is being eroded by too much enlargement and, in addition, close cooperation with Russia.

The strategic debate over these and similar assertions, necessarily imprecise as it deals with the uncertain future of political interaction, is often additionally obfuscated by the failure to distinguish sufficiently between NATO's political and diplomatic existence based on the Washington Treaty, on the one hand, and its historically grown and constantly adapted military structures and operations, on the other hand. It is also quite obvious that positions taken by various commentators in this debate reflect, to a large extent, not so much their insights on NATO as it really exists and functions but their views on other, more general issues of contention, above all US leadership, EU autonomy, Russia, the Middle East, free trade, and the spread of Western values and institutions in response to global challenges.

The fact of the matter is that NATO is quite alive:

- There is widespread, strong desire to win membership in this institution.

- NATO is, in close and successful coordination with the EU, successfully acting as an indispensable security anchor and strategic enabler for almost all nations in the former Soviet empire, including Russia, and in the Balkans.
- Worldwide, NATO invariably comes up as the only available effective framework for multilateral military operations in contingencies above the level of traditional peacekeeping. The Alliance invoked Article 5 after the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001, and is now taking the lead in Afghanistan step by step. Similarly, the US has expressed its openness and desire for multilateral NATO involvement in Iraq. While it is true that the terms of such engagements in support of US-led operations will always need to be defined carefully, the main point is that multilateralism in NATO is a viable alternative to US unilateralism, and probably the only available one.
- Since 1998, the EU's security and defence policy is being implemented by deliberate choice, informed by the Balkans experience, in close and trusted cooperation with NATO and SHAPE; this effort has resulted in a remarkable success story in spite of all political doubts and practical difficulties.

Essentially, NATO is going to be what its members will decide to make of it. Arguably, since all but two of the members of NATO are European, this is above all a European responsibility. For the US, NATO may be nice to have, but it is unlikely that Washington will ever again volunteer to spend much of its political energy on shaping this particular institution. Even in 1949, it took sustained European lobbying to launch this alliance successfully in the US. It is up to Europeans to develop a mutually agreeable answer to the question what kind of transatlantic security and defence alliance they wish to cultivate in the future, for which purpose, and on which level of commitment.

In the strategic environment that is likely to unfold in the course of the coming decades, for two reasons NATO's sustained vitality will remain crucial for Europeans:

- Confronted with political instability and potential turmoil in several important parts of the world, combined with large-scale global terrorism and the spread of strategic military capabilities that can not only affect NATO forces in the field but also reach NATO territory, the resources and the ability to act for projecting stability and security to locations where acutely threatening developments are taking place will be increasingly in short supply. It makes eminent sense to continue the existing and

functioning teaming arrangement with the relatively most resourceful player in international security, the US.

- The scenarios of the future international environment that are currently developed and explored by policy planners invariably fall in two categories: those where the US and Europe continue to engage in the task of global governance cooperatively, and those where they turn against each other as rivals. Needless to say, the second category translates into chaos and misery far beyond the North Atlantic region. As recent analyses such as Joseph Quinlan's (at the SAIS Center for Transatlantic Relations) have reminded us, it is above all the economic and political union forged between North America and Europe after 1945 that continues to be the indispensable engine of peace, growth, freedom and security in the world as a whole.

Giving in to alienation across the Atlantic on political and security matters would make it almost impossible to maintain this engine, as disputes over trade, investment, or monetary policy would be likely to escalate while the willingness to forge viable compromise fades. NATO is not, as some have it, an antiquated tool of US domination but a cornerstone of Europe's influence in pursuit of key interests, and essential to Europe's idea of a multilateral, cooperative and integrative international system. Losing this environment also means losing the necessary political and economic basis for continued integration in the EU.

Today, these notions are not generally accepted throughout Europe. In particular, the French government appears to be giving in to a mood described as "anti-Western" by President Chirac in his interview with the International Herald Tribune in September 2003, with a vision of Europe that keeps its distance in cultural distinction from the rest of the world and organises itself in the corporatist tradition. This policy, rooted in specific French conditions, has little chance of being adopted in the majority of other European countries.

Its international dimension became visible in early 2003 when France blocked the UN Security Council from giving explicit support to the US/British push to end Iraq's defiance of its international disarmament obligations and terminate the ceasefire of 1991. In spite of demonstrative closeness during the Iraq war, it would be an error to assume that German policy is fully in agreement with this French line. As Chancellor Gerhard Schröder stated in his address to the Bundestag on 13 February 2003, it is part of Germany's responsibility to never allow France to be isolated in Europe. Schröder has however expressed agreement with the British view that the international system is in fact unipolar, and that it is not in Europe's interest to establish a second pole to rival the US but to foster multinational institutions that give Europe its proper degree of influence, with the US, in this unipolar world.

German Foreign Minister Fischer has underlined repeatedly that the Europe of the future can be strong only together with the United States, and not as its rival. Similarly, Javier Solana's draft EU international security strategy states that when acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world.

Over the coming years, the fundamental political question whether Europe chooses to be an inward-looking island or a responsible, active partner in the management of world affairs, building on the tradition of the Atlantic Charter in support of the United Nations, needs to be debated and resolved by Europe's democratic mechanisms. It is necessary for European political leaders to develop the right language vis-à-vis their own electorate to bring the intercontinental connectedness of today's world, in security as well as in other fields, closer to Europeans' minds.

Two very different views of history are competing for the soul of Europe today:

- For one, Europe has now the chance to move beyond the interlude of US domination after 1945 and return to a specifically European course.
- For the other, the outcome of the two world wars and the subsequent decades of globalisation have created a new situation in which Europe's fate, as a matter of fact, is going to rise or sink in parallel to that of the US and other major powers, underlining Europe's interest to work with these partners in an active, global role.

One ought to remember that in the course of their integration process, the member states of the US went to war against each other over similar issues. While this is certainly not an option in Europe, it would be a grave mistake to ignore or underestimate the important need to reconcile these competing visions in Europe, especially against the background of continental Europe's catastrophic record of making all the wrong choices in the first half of the last century.

While the grand debate about Europe's role will be further unfolding in the years to come, efforts to preserve and improve the political and military tools that NATO is adding to Europe's own capabilities for dealing with international security challenges must continue. As a guiding principle, NATO members share an interest in shaping and adapting this institution as an effective group for generating the pooled resources they will need to cope with violent chaos and with the threat of a collapse of the international order on which not only Europe's own way of life depends but also the hopes of many people in other parts of the world. Leaving this task to a single nation such as the US would itself contribute to undermining the

international system by diminishing available resources and feeding resentment and rivalry. Active engagement in NATO, in a world-wide perspective, is the best remedy.

On the *political* side of NATO, this translates into a threefold agenda:

- **Consultation:** As always in NATO's history, Europeans – including the British – are dissatisfied with the level of respect and attention their views are getting in Washington. At the same time, there are US fears of being marginalized in some important respects as European decision-making is increasingly centred at the EU level. Intra-European efforts to create common policies and the desire for true consultation with the US need not be in competition as long as the temptation is resisted to label all good ideas “European” and all bad one “American”, and as long as effective problem-solving remains the focus.

It is generally insufficient for Europeans to wait for formal diplomatic consultations since they will usually only take place after decisions have already been made. Luckily, the open political system of the US offers invaluable opportunities to make one's views and interests known and taken into account by US decision-makers early in the process. Much more skill and effort could be invested by Europeans to turn the transatlantic marketplace of ideas into a shared transatlantic policymaking machinery.

- **Commitment:** The collective defence of the alliance remains its key element. US president Bush has renewed this crucial commitment in Prague by stating “Anyone who would choose you as an enemy also chooses us for an enemy.” Europeans, especially as they gain in capabilities and profile, will be expected to make a similarly clear commitment to come to the defence of all against the threats of aggression the future holds. This requires, in some countries, to change the public mindset on defence from being a demandeur of protection to becoming a dedicated provider. While potential aggressors are likely to view all NATO members as a single strategic target, NATO's strategic unity of action is not yet sufficiently established in the new global security environment.
- **Comprehensiveness:** The collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the East-West confrontation have already made it possible for NATO to develop a productive partnership with Russia that holds the promise both of benefiting from its international security tools in a coordinated fashion and to influence Russia's definition of its own

interest in a benevolent way. As global strategic challenges move beyond Europe, other important actors and necessary partners in the search for international security, both in Europe's immediate periphery and further away, should also increasingly be addressed by NATO. Europe should be interested in developing the new global alliance network in response to new security challenges together with the US if it wants to prevent a hub-and-spoke system centred on Washington and preserve the benefits of multilateral alliance.

Will the US be willing to engage in multilateralism with a Europe that positions itself in the way described? In spite of US dominance, US resources are limited both in terms of manpower and funds. US voters are likely to expect more sharing of the burden vis-à-vis shared vulnerabilities. There is good reason to assume that effective partners will be respected.

On the *military* side of NATO, challenges are much more demanding. They are likely to involve major restructuring of armed forces, changes in the way the roles of armed forces and other security-sector institutions are defined constitutionally and politically, and above all money. Three issues stand out from the rest:

- **Capabilities:** Most European forces have not yet been adapted to the changed spectrum of operations they need to be prepared for. This applies to the various war-fighting and peacekeeping components of the military as well as to the multitude of guards, police, judiciary, civil engineering and administrative elements that will be required for future operations. Equipment, training and structures are changing too slowly. Even in countries such as the UK where early progress has been made, the limited resources of any single European country make the current, almost still exclusively national basis for planning, procurement and operations insufficient for the future. The path chosen by Europeans since 1998 is the right one, but it needs to be pursued more vigorously: Combine the strengthening of capabilities in the name of Europe with increased contributions to NATO while avoiding intra-European duplication of efforts and undue limitations on the flexibility of use.
- **Coherence:** The strategic advantages that can be derived from the systematic exploitation of cutting-edge information and communication technologies, both for keeping and restoring peace, are currently splitting the alliance into haves and have-nots, with serious negative consequences for political and operational cohesion. Through the establishment of the Allied Command Transformation and the new

NATO Reaction Force, Europeans and Canadians are offered the chance for a privileged level of access to the experience gathered in the US on the basis of its unique level of advanced defence R & D and critical mass of defence spending. If actively pursued, this will enable allies to include attractive elements into their own adaptation and transformation strategies on a faster track.

At the same time, allies are provided with a window of opportunity for helping to shape the ongoing US debate on doctrines, especially the optimal future mix between the focus on overwhelming force for war-fighting and the need for successful civil-military engagement in war-prevention and post-conflict missions. Together, these perspectives create the hope that the challenges of jointness and network-centric operations, with their deep impact on the way forces operate, can be dealt with in a coherent way throughout the alliance. This is particularly important in an environment that offers no defined military threat but instead requires flexible, capabilities-based defence planning.

- **Credibility:** Militarily, the continued alliance only makes sense if any potential aggressor would come to expect that it will employ its forces rapidly and effectively in times of crisis. Strengthening cohesive public support in all member states for the spectrum of future roles and challenges, including the use of force to support diplomacy and institutions in the defence of international peace and security, is thus a core requirement. Through forging a visible convergence of strategic outlook, allies should also be able to re-establish a viable formula for shared control of operations that preserves the effective unity of command but also allows non-US alliance members to join the fight on a solid constitutional and political basis without jeopardising acceptance at home. To outside observers, the balance struck in armaments policies between allowing more transatlantic defence-industrial integration and preserving national, or European, control will also continue to be a key indicator of the real future degree of strategic cohesion between the US and its European allies.

On the military side, NATO's relationship with the EU has been developing very well since 1998. The mechanisms of joint and shared action, envisioned at Berlin in 1996, are now in place. EU-led operations with or, if necessary, without support from NATO have become available as an option in this architecture, and a necessary one in the light of the Balkans experience.

It would be unfortunate if the well-balanced common approach agreed in the alliance, working with the EU, for fostering a strong European security and defence pillar were undermined again. The controversial proposals for strengthening multilateral capabilities in Europe, made at the Belgian-hosted summit earlier this year, have come under attack in this context. Undoubtedly, they were ill-timed. However, in substance they are in line with the common effort to address the shortfalls under the Helsinki goal as identified in ECAP.

Sceptics, including in the incoming new EU member countries, are invited to reflect once again the dual rationale that has been driving EU defence efforts since the 1990s: On the one hand, Europeans need to be able to act alone because the US, for reasons of its political system, will not always be available when it is needed; on the other hand, it will be much easier to attract the US to be engaged in an effective and capable alliance if Europeans have their own capabilities and leadership spirit to offer.

The future of NATO is an open story. It can possibly fail, just as the international system it helped to build and sustain might fail, especially if Europe and the US cease to define and pursue their interests in common. The decades of success embodied by NATO, notably also after 1991, provide an excellent ground for getting it right. Unlike at some times in the past, however, it will be up to Europeans more than anybody else to be in the driver's seat and shape the new NATO as their own extended defence alliance, privileged by unique access and communality across the Atlantic.

What is The Center for International Relations?

The Center (Polish abbr. CSM) is an independent, non-government think tank providing advice and ideas on the Polish foreign policy and the key issues of international politics affecting Poland. CSM acts as a political consultant, permanently monitors government actions in foreign policy and reviews Poland's current international position. For this purpose, we bring forth reports and analyses, organise conferences and seminars, publish papers and books, run research projects and set up thematic working groups. In the many years of our activity, we have attracted an expert circle of regular contributors and have provided a foreign policy discussion forum for politicians, parliamentarians, central and local government officials, journalists, scholars, students and representatives of other NGOs. We believe that the challenges of Polish foreign policy justify our support for the public debate on international policy issues in Poland.

The founder and president of the Center for International Relations is Mr. Janusz Reiter.

Our address:

UL. EMILII PLATER 25, 00-688 WARSZAWA
tel. (0048-22) 646 52 67, 646 52 68, 629 38 98, 629 48 69
Fax. (0048-22) 646 52 58
E-mail: info@csm.org.pl

Please, visit our Website:

www.csm.org.pl

Major sponsors of the CSM

- Ford Foundation
- Stefan Batory Foundation
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Poland
- German Marshall Fund of the United States
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation
- Hertie Stiftung
- Bank Przemysłowo-Handlowy PBK S.A.
- Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung

CSM projects have been many times supported financially also by the Polish Ministry for International Affairs.

All of our "Reports and Analyses" are available on-line from the Website of the Center for International Relations:

www.csm.org.pl

If you wish to receive our "Reports and Analyses" on a regular basis, please e-mail us at info@csm.org.pl or fax us at +48 22 646 52 58. "Reports and Analyses" are available free of charge.