

THE CENTRAL ISSUES FOR NATO

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“As an alliance we have never been stronger. We have never been more united. We have never been more resolved to move forward together”.

Paul. D Wolfowitz, Munich, Feb. 2nd, 2002.

Nobody would say, that this statement reflects the present day reality. One can argue, was this statement true even at the time of the year 2002? Right after 9/11 the question “Is NATO still relevant?” was asked by many prominent politicians on both sides of the Atlantic. Iraq has not dispersed the clouds over the future of the Alliance. The general feeling is that NATO is on a crossroad. De Gaulle once said that all alliances are like roses – they wither and decay. If NATO does not want to share that fate some serious issues have to be addressed.

1. Reaffirm basic principles

First is the question – what NATO wants to be? Everybody knows what NATO used to be for the whole Cold War period and even afterwards. The goals of the alliance were repeated in the Strategic Concept adopted in Washington in 1999. According to this document “NATO’s essential and enduring purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its’ members by political and military means”. NATO developed an aura of reliability, efficiency, and solidarity epitomized in famous Article 5 security guarantees. Everybody believed that in case of an aggression once Article 5 is invoked, it is NATO which takes care of confronting the aggressor and organizing a collective response involving every member country.

Unfortunately it did not happen after September 11th, and the debates over addressing Turkey’s security concerns during the Iraq crisis cast a shadow of doubt not only on Article 5 but even on Article 4. Declaration of one of the member states that combat troops sent to Afghanistan will be withdrawn in case fighting breaks out contributed further to the destruction of the faith in the Article 5.

So, the question arises, will NATO remain first of all a common defense structure, an alliance centered around mutually binding security guarantees, or will it drift towards much looser common security structure?

True, the classical type aggression, under present political circumstances is rather remote. However, it would be important to remind what has been said in Washington in 1999, namely, that “notwithstanding positive developments in the strategic environment and the fact that large scale conventional aggression against Alliance is very unlikely, the possibility of such a threat emerging over longer term exists”. The crisis of credibility of security guarantees already prompted some debates in NATO border countries about the need to pursue more national approach to basis security requirements. If this issue is not promptly addressed, we may see a destruction of one of the greatest NATO achievements that is an internationalization of the defense policy in Europe.

Naturally, NATO cannot be something else than what the member countries want it to be. It applies first of all to the US. "Tool box" concepts reduces NATO from an important forum of transatlantic political debate to a minor technical instrument of American policy. However, if the US loses an interest in NATO, the Alliance will be doomed. Without US leadership, NATO very likely will not be a dynamic, innovative structure and soon will become another WEU. On the other hand, strong and attractive NATO should not be seen as detrimental to justified and legitimate ambitions to make CFSP and ESDP important factors.

2. Strengthen NATO military capabilities

The best way to make NATO not only relevant but indispensable for the security of Europe against old and new threats, it is necessary to improve NATO capabilities. NATO's shortcomings were among the reasons for the US to go it alone in Afghanistan. It is worth noticing that various European countries embarked on programs of modernization of their armed forces. Procurement of large transport planes; British and French plans to build new aircraft carriers are good examples of these efforts. NATO Response Force could be a visible sign of change from ground defense posture of the Alliance to new missions.

Equally important, are radical changes in the command structure. Swift implementation of these changes will be essential for the reliability of the Alliance. In response to potential threats, it is the SACEUR who will play the central role. However, as far as "out of area" actions are concerned the most likely regions that NATO as a whole might be engaged, is the wider Middle East, and Central and East Asia (Africa, as Congo recent operation shows could be easily handled by Europeans alone, either under NATO or EU flag). This is why SACEUR would be rather SAC World.

Only after the completion of this task, NATO will be able to address new challenges. To perform these duties, the second hat SACEUR wears (the commander of the US and EUROCOM) would not help that much. Taking into account, the above-mentioned areas NATO could be engaged, there is no single US command which could be given to SACEUR as a replacement for the EU Command. On the other hand, in Kosovo, General Clark was in two chains of commands, one the US and one NATO, which created a lot of bad feelings among Europeans who felt being bypassed by the US line. That is why it might be better to separate NATO command posts (including SACEUR) from the national ones.

3. Strengthen NATO as a political transatlantic forum

One of the reasons why NATO is in crises is the rift between US and Europe, and to lesser extent, divisions within Europe. Although the threat perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic are very much the same, there are serious differences about how to deal with them. Therefore, NATO should become a central forum to discuss such issues like the sufficient conditions for waging a preemptive action, more comprehensive definitions of aggression and terrorism, as well as under what conditions a non-Article 5 missions could be carried out without the UNSC mandate (but only with unanimous support of all NATO countries), etc.. Other perhaps more

important political issues for a common debate are Israeli Palestinian conflict, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, or Caucasus.

It is worth mentioning that NATO is not only a defense alliance. NATO is also a hard core of a very extensive system of concentric circles of cooperation in security issues. Going from the center outwards we have: NATO, candidates to NATO, EAPC, PfP countries and countries from outside the PfP but cooperating with NATO on various peacekeeping missions. On top of that we have NATO Russia Council, NATO Ukraine Commission, Mediterrean Dialogue, North Atlantic Assembly with observer countries, etc.. It is clear that the political potential of this system is far from being exhausted. In particular, the EAPC meetings, which are quite routine and rather dull events, could be transformed into a vibrant forum debating important issues.

4. Integrate new member states and maintain the cohesion of the Alliance

The process which may have a negative effect on the cohesion of the Alliance is the process of expansion. The common defense in a situation when there is no obvious well-defined enemy can be permanently, structurally organized in reliable fashion could be done only when there is a strong bond of common values, perceptions, interests, and shared political culture between member countries. Hopefully, the forthcoming round of expansion will not affect this foundation of NATO, especially when the effort will be made to integrate fully all new member states. Further enlargement, however distant, involving countries like Croatia or Ukraine, may not adversely affect the Alliance either. On the other hand, potential membership of – for example – Russia may create in foreseeable future an insurmountable problem. A group of prominent political figures such as Bronislaw Geremek, Jacques Lanxade, or Klaus Nauman rightly said: “an expanded NATO with Russia linked to it could well be so political that its defense guarantee would look hollow. NATO would no longer be used in crisis. It would be the end of NATO a disaster for Europe and a severe blow to American national interests”.

To preserve the cohesion of the Alliance of 26 or more member states, it seems necessary to introduce some disciplinary measures. As things are at this moment, NATO membership is a one-way street. There is no way of getting rid of a country which challenges basic principles of the Alliance or is ready to paralyze functioning of its structures. Therefore, there must a legal possibility to limit the participation of such a country in some NATO institutions or fora or in more drastic cases suspend or exclude country which may put the very existence of the Alliance at risk.

5. Restore the attachment to the indivisibility of US and European Security

One of the greatest dangers of the post 9/11 and post Iraq period is a feeling that US does not need Europe and vice a versa. However, there are very good reasons to believe that decoupling the US and European security would have disastrous consequences. This is why we all need more evidences that we are still together. US should therefore become a self-limiting super power. It means that even if the US can carry out an operation like in Afghanistan alone, it would be worthwhile to sacrifice some efficiency for the sake of taking on board at least some European partners. Symmetrically, if Europeans will see the need to launch another operation in Africa, it would be important to have at least a symbolic American contingent.

On 40th anniversary of the D Day, President Reagan said, “we are bound today by what bound us then – the same loyalties, traditions, beliefs. We were with you then, we are with you now. Your hopes are our hopes and your destiny is our destiny”.

Let us hope that on 50th anniversary of that day, we shall be able to say that again.

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