

# The problem of dysfunctional states in the debate about NATO strategy regarding new challenges

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The purpose of this article is to discuss the international security challenges facing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in the context of actions taken with respect to highly dysfunctional countries. However, these topics need to be discussed with a separate focus on the United States, which is the pillar of NATO, and at the same time, the key partner and ally of the European Union. After all, the relations between the UE and NATO involve, among other things, the issue of double membership of most European countries in both organisations. Therefore it seems obvious that the U.S. plays a key role in the NATO/EU relations, with the attitude of individual European countries towards the superpower determining these relations to a great extent.

From the moment NATO was established until the end of the Cold War, the organisation was a guarantor of security in the West under the powerful military umbrella of the U.S. However, with NATO being a classical military alliance of a transatlantic nature, maintaining peace and safety on a global level rested on the shoulder of the UN, which, despite the bipolar division of the world into two hostile political and military blocs, tried to fulfil its mission – with mixed results. After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the end of the Cold War, it seemed that time had come to establish multilateral cooperation and entrust peace-enforcement and peace-keeping missions to the UN. The peak of optimism in this respect came with the Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations conducted by the international community under UN auspices in the 1990 and 1991 against the regime of Saddam Hussein, who had invaded Kuwait. Notwithstanding the hailing of a triumph of multilateralism and success of the UN, in fact, of the total number of 950 thousand

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troops from 31 countries allied in the UN coalition, nearly 700 thousand were U.S. soldiers. Irrespective of the number of troops, given the assets (battleships, air force, armoured weapons) and new combat technologies used, it was actually a large-scale military operation of the U.S. army. Europe sent slightly more than 62 thousand troops, i.e. 6% of the total number<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, there can be no doubt that without U.S. participation, the operation would have been difficult to accomplish, if not altogether impossible. The broad public realised the fact in the early 1990s, when the UN was evidently overwhelmed by the challenges it was faced with. The ineptitude of the UN was clearly shown by the failed missions in Somalia 1992-1994, Yugoslavia 1992-1995, and Rwanda 1993-1996. The hasty and largely makeshift solutions used at the time involved sending NATO-led missions, which, however, raised serious controversies from the start, as it was claimed that with those operations the largest country of the Alliance, i.e. the U.S., was seeing to its own strategic interests. Following the failure of the UNPROFOR forces (1992-1995), which were to establish peace in the republics of former Yugoslavia, an international NATO-led peace force, legitimised by the UN Security Council, started a mission of enforcing the provisions of the Dayton Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995-1996). The armed forces of the United States of America, which was considered to be the only superpower at the time, became not only the pillar of NATO but also of UN operations.

The role of the 'World's Policeman' (or as the Americans would rather like it – the 'World's Sheriff') did a disservice to the image of the USA. There was a growing number of disagreements about the goal and tactics of peacekeeping operations. For instance, after the fiasco of the *Restore Hope* peace-enforcement operation in Somalia (1992-1994), which was sanctioned by the UN but was initially conducted mainly by U.S. forces, there was a serious disagreement between US officials and the UN as to the way the mission should proceed, in particular regarding the conditions for the deployment of interventions, even those of humanitarian nature. The United States criticised the rules of engagement, claiming that they reduced combat capacities and exposed troops to losses. The U.S. requested a 'blank cheque' from the UN to deliver interventions according to its own vision. It was proved afterwards, the Somali operation had tremendous consequences for later developments, leading to passivity on the part of the United States in those crisis situations that were irrelevant for the vital interests of the U.S. Incidentally, the attention of Western politicians at the time was focused on the Balkans, where a bloody war broke out after the breakup of Yugoslavia, leading to ethnic cleansing. In 1999, NATO carried out a military operation which led to heated doctrinal disputes about the limits and legitimacy of humanitarian intervention. As a result, countries located in the world's peripheries, such as Somalia and Afghanistan, were left to themselves or fell pray to extremists or anarchy. The abandonment resulted in a series of humanitarian disasters and genocide, such as in Rwanda in 1994, when Tutsi

were mass-slaughtered in acts of genocide continuing in front of a small UN contingent, once again showing the helplessness of the United Nations. This raised an enormous wave of criticism against the organisation. Following that, EU politicians started to stress the need to create a European force, which could shoulder the responsibility for stabilising non-EU territories with crucial importance for the EU security environment. Thus, some EU countries started to propose speeding up the development of an independent security and defence policy with the Union's own armed forces, independent of NATO.

## **Dysfunctional states in the discourse about international security**

The notions of a 'dysfunctional state' and a 'failed state' have become well-established concepts in modern discourse about international security. When after the end of the Cold War the establishment of a 'new world order' and harmonious cooperation of the international community towards stability and security were proclaimed, few politicians and commentators pointed to the reverse trend of growing instability. However, at the time, the problem of far-reaching dysfunctionality and failure of states was treated by most Western policy-makers as a marginal trend, occurring only on the fringes of international relations. It was considered to be a local ill typical of the Third World, with little impact on the world's security. In a short time, the problem of Somalia and Afghanistan showed politicians that negative phenomena in distant corners of the world may spread, hitting even the greatest superpower of the modern world.

Historically speaking, international security had been usually threatened by strong and aggressive countries. However, at the beginning of the 21st century it became clear that international security is growingly jeopardized as a result of state failure processes. Threats to peace and stability no longer depend exclusively on the relationship between competing countries, but issues traditionally considered to be internal, including an array of political, social and economic factors<sup>2</sup>. On top of this, state dysfunctionality has tended to go hand in hand with asymmetrical phenomena, such as international terrorism, proliferation of mass destruction weapons and transnational organised crime<sup>3</sup>.

Regions most affected by state dysfunctionality cover vast territories of Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, but also the Balkans, which, after all, lie in Europe. Dysfunctional states are characterised by inefficient public administration and economic failure. Regular armed forces are small, poorly trained and under-equipped. In addition, they are often faced with irregular armed militia, which are recruited by local tribal leaders, separatists or groups seeking profits. Such countries are often affected by internal instability and tend to experience permanent civil wars or cyclical internal conflicts, which are ended only by external intervention or destruction of the opponents. Such countries are also 'breeding

grounds' for war, as absence of control over their borders and territory allow military groups to penetrate the neighbours' territories and destabilise their internal situation. Fighting generates humanitarian disasters, such as genocide, displacement, starvation and epidemics. Weak and often illegitimate governments are unable to control the state, which actually becomes a haven for international crime and terrorist organisations.

Recent years have shown to what extent state dysfunctionality contributes to destabilising not only the direct neighbourhood but also entire regions. This was the case with the civil war in Rwanda, which drew in the neighbouring countries, as a result of which the internal conflict spilled over to Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo), fully destabilising the country and causing the death and suffering of millions of citizens. The outbreak of another internal conflict in the years 1998-2003 sparked what is referred to as the Great War of Africa, involving eight African states and 25 armed groups, killing 4-5 million people<sup>4</sup>. The conflict in Afghanistan has been destabilising the internal situation in the country's neighbour, Pakistan, and some young post-USSR states, such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan<sup>5</sup>. A recent example of how events in a country can destabilise the entire region is the civil war in Libya, which led to the collapse of the neighbouring Mali and was stopped only by an external military intervention. Present-day internal armed conflicts caused by a serious state dysfunctionality include Somalia, Central African Republic and Southern Sudan.

The 9/11 attacks were a breakthrough in the perception of dysfunctional states as a potential threat to international security, changing the attitude of the West to the perception of the problem of international security. To politicians and commentators the attacks become a turning point, marking the actual end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new era in international relations<sup>6</sup>. Beforehand, dysfunctional states had been treated rather as a source of never-ending humanitarian crises or occasional regional threats to security and stability<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, as has been shown recently, they can create a multitude of diversified security threats: such as terrorist safe havens<sup>8</sup>, countries contributing to the proliferation of mass destruction weapon or destabilising situation in the region, as well as crucial operational hubs of the global drug business. Dysfunctional states are also mentioned in the context of piracy and mass migration<sup>9</sup>. There is also a growing concern about the impact of dysfunctional states on the natural environment and the resultant threats to ecosystems<sup>10</sup>.

Dysfunctional states are highly attractive places to crime groups or other entities causing asymmetrical threats. Their incapacity to regulate political life and control their own territory creates excellent conditions for non-state organisations to develop their criminal activities and exploit the country's natural resources. Crime and terrorist groups can consolidate their structures within a given territory, in particular by setting up recruitment and training camps. With time, they become strong enough to act internationally. In Afghanistan, al-Qaeda, which had remained

outside the control of the Taliban government for many years, established a network of recruitment and training camps for its terrorist activity. According to the 9/11 Commission, appointed by the U.S. president and Congress, 10-20 thousand terrorists were trained in those camps in the years 1996-2001<sup>11</sup>. There are also well-organised African al-Qaeda networks, which are mainly active in 2 regions: the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and the Sahel. The events in Mali in 2013 showed their strength.

As can be seen, there has been a gradual securitisation of state failure processes, which was not perceived as a national security problem previously. Thus, the broad concept of security will not only comprise the traditional military sector, but also the political, economic, social and even environmental sectors. As a consequence, in the early 21st century countries suffering from dysfunctionality are considered to be a structural deficiency of the international system, which requires the international community to take specific actions<sup>12</sup>.

## **NATO and the new challenges**

The new international security challenges and threats faced by the world towards the end of the 20th century meant a radical change in the thinking about international security and the role to be played by the North Atlantic Alliance as the biggest Western defence organisation. Crisis management in countries affected by the final stage of dysfunctionality required not only military operations, but also actions to rebuild dysfunctional states. A political agreement in this respect was reached during the 1991 meeting of NATO heads of government in Rome. Several years later, the 'New Strategic Concept' was announced as a result of political arrangements made at the Washington summit. The document identified new security threats and challenges, while not questioning the fundamental function of the Alliance. At the same time, NATO assumed the responsibility for supporting security, stability and preventing conflicts by delivering peace operations and humanitarian interventions going beyond its mandate.

The spectacular al-Qaeda attacks on the USA, which had been devised in a highly dysfunctional country, Afghanistan, made the international community realise that such countries are a threat to stability not only on a regional but also global level. Ever since, dysfunctional countries have no longer been seen by the West from the angle of humanitarian and regional problems, but as an element of the global security strategy. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, both Europe and the U.S. started a serious debate about the need to engage more in solving crises of highly dysfunctional states, which resulted in the U.S. National Security Strategy of September 2002, obliging the U.S. government to address the issue of failed states<sup>13</sup>. In a sense, the concept of a failed state was redefined and started to be treated as a major threat for the modern world in the eyes of the West<sup>14</sup>.

The 2002 NATO meeting in Prague built on the U.S. National Security Strategy. As a result of the summit, NATO adopted what is referred to as the Capabilities Commitment, the purpose of which was to strengthen its military potential and ensure that European armed forces are equipped in a way allowing efficient and rapid deployment<sup>15</sup>. The establishment of the NATO Response Force (NRF) was a significant step in this respect. The Force has become the foundation of the Alliance's expeditionary potential, allowing it to deal with a range of missions, from traditional full-scale military operations to operations supporting humanitarian actions in distant parts of the world<sup>16</sup>. The NRF was a turning point, since it was established as a permanent force (unlike the usual ad-hoc NATO forces) to be used for rapid response under any mission the North Atlantic Council deems necessary<sup>17</sup>.

The central focus of the subsequent November 2006 NATO summit in Ryga was to discuss the difficulties faced by the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and propose initiatives aimed to transform the Pact in military terms so as to make it more fit for expeditionary missions<sup>18</sup>. In an interview before the Ryga summit of NATO heads of government, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer expressed a view that the new concept needs to take into account a comprehensive approach and rely not only on military, but also e.g. economic measures. The member countries should keep a balance between common territorial defence and expeditionary missions. The Secretary's General words will best illustrate the point: "Territorial defence remains a core function, but we simply can no longer protect our security without addressing the potential risks and threats that arise far from our homes. Either we tackle these problems when and where they emerge, or they will end up on our doorstep"<sup>19</sup>.

The NATO summits in Strasbourg and Kehl in 2009 were dedicated to the New Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic Alliance, which was to respond to the threats to its members in changing international conditions<sup>20</sup>. The High-Level Reflection Group appointed in May 2010, with former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, presented Secretary General with a document which became the basis for the new NATO 'Strategic Concept', approved during the 19-20 November 2010 Lisbon summit. The key provisions of the new strategy concerning extra-European missions, mainly in countries affected by conflicts and crises, were committing the Alliance: "to prevent crises, manage conflicts and stabilize post-conflict situations, including by working more closely with our international partners, most importantly the United Nations and the European Union. NATO has a unique and robust set of political and military capabilities to address the full spectrum of crises – before, during and after conflicts. NATO will actively employ an appropriate mix of those political and military tools to help manage developing crises that have the potential to affect Alliance security, before they escalate into conflicts; to stop ongoing conflicts where they affect Alliance security; and to help consolidate stability in post-conflict situations where that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security"<sup>21</sup>.

The Strategic Concept highlights aspects related to assured security and dynamic engagement. In a sense, this resulted from a compromise reached between the supporters of a military pact focused on delivering traditional NATO objectives, i.e. territorial defence based on Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and those proposing that the Alliance should operate outside member countries' territories, taking responsibility for politically unstable areas, mainly in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The document stressed the importance of crisis response operations, giving it the same priority as traditional allied defence, which is best exemplified by the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, which has been under way since 2003<sup>22</sup>. The assumptions of the NATO New Strategic Concept are consistent with the provisions of the European Security Strategy, which is of crucial importance, as most NATO members are European countries<sup>23</sup>. The May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago was not a breakthrough. Rather it focused on following up the conclusions of the Lisbon meeting and discussing on-going developments, such as the 'Arab Spring', which started in the early 2011. Importantly, the debate also addressed the sensitive issue of cuts of defence spending among NATO member countries.

## Conclusions

The new threats to security, such as highly dysfunctional states, mean that the key way of ensuring security is to contain conflicts and rebuild state structures. Therefore, in the 21st century, NATO and the EU need to work closely together not only to fulfil its tasks related to integration, security and prosperity of the societies of their respective countries, but also to 'export' stability to other regions not being part of NATO and the EU. Collective defence of territories will remain the fundamental mission of NATO, but crisis management operations outside the territory covered by the Treaty are one of three core NATO tasks – next to collective defence and cooperative security. This is also clearly reflected in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, which works towards safeguarding international security by crisis response measures, while leaving the EU's territorial defence to NATO. At a time of globalisation, when the geographic distance no longer protects against threats from areas troubled by conflict and instability, expeditionary actions within the framework of crisis management will continue to be conducted.

Washington has sufficient military potential and its own efficient command structure based on Regional Commands to pursue a global policy without seeking alliance. The 2003 intervention in Iraq is a good example. American operations in the Horn of Africa or the Middle East are currently delivered on the basis of the U.S. Africa Command or U.S. Central Command, in cooperation with the respective countries in the region.

Unlike NATO, the EU does not have its own integrated peace force, and consequently it does not have any specialised commands which would act according to

unified command and control procedures<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, to date military operations have been conducted either under NATO command structures and procedures, or in the case of autonomous operations, according to the Berlin Plus formula, whereby NATO has provided resources for operations conducted first by the Western European Union based on the European security and defence identity, and then by the European Union<sup>25</sup>. However, the formula is outdated, in particular after entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty.

Currently, the U.S.-NATO-UE relations are not free from tensions. The U.S. is increasingly disappointed with the defence cuts among its European allies. U.S. political and military elites and commentators point that the economic crisis has made life difficult for the EU and the United States alike, yet the scale of military budget cuts among the European allies has been high enough to upset the balance, as a result of which the United States are funding the North Atlantic Alliance to a greater extent than previously. Statistical data clearly shows that after the Cold War, the U.S. share of military spending amounted to 60% in 2008 (shortly before the financial crisis) to grow to 68% and as much as 73% in 2013. If Canada were to be excluded (in 2008 – 2%, in 2013 – 1.5%), then the share of the European NATO member countries dropped from 30% in 2007 to 25.5% in 2013. In 2013, only three of the 28 NATO member countries spent more than 2% GDP on defence, with the U.S. spending 4.4%. Between 2007 and 2013, all European countries, except for Poland, Portugal and Estonia, reduced their army budgets<sup>26</sup>.

Concerned about the scale of cuts, NATO Secretary General warned European governments that the previous year's reduction of military spending by 45 billion (which is equivalent to Germany's military budget) puts the effectiveness of NATO and its mission at stake, and jeopardises its relations with the U.S, considering further that the U.S. itself is facing economic trouble and slashing military spending. Faced with the situation, the Pentagon is cutting its spending on the U.S. forces stationed in Europe, which inevitably means the downsizing of the troops. NATO deputy secretary general Aleksander R. Vershbow said that the "financial crisis has been corrosive to the Alliance", and that relations between the European Union and NATO remained "dysfunctional"<sup>27</sup>.

The recent NATO mission to Libya conducted by a combined British-French force or the French mission to Mali have exposed the military weaknesses of the European allies. In the former operation, the U.S. supplied intelligence, aerial refuelling and missiles for suppressing air defences, while in the latter, Paris requested NATO for intelligence, drones and military cargo aircraft.

The end of the Cold War resulted in a number of new threats, such as breakup and failure of states, outbreak of a number of internal conflicts, humanitarian crises, growth of terrorism, expanding areas of political instability, forcing the United States to reformulate its strategy. Wars in the Gulf, anti-terrorist campaigns in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, as well as combating state dysfunc-



tionality in Sub-Saharan Africa – all these challenges contribute to America's ever declining interest in security issues in Europe, which was, incidentally, perceived by Washington as an area of stability and security until the Ukrainian crisis. Therefore it should come as no surprise that since the end of the Cold War the number of U.S. troops in the Old Continent has been gradually declining – from 200 thousand in 1990 to 64 thousand at present. Compared to the peak of the Cold War in the 1950s (450 thousand) this represents a reduction by 85%, and compared to 1990 by 40%. The downsizing is even more noticeable in the air force, where the reduction has reached 75% since 1990<sup>28</sup>. The United States are slowly redeploying their troops from Europe to other regions of the world in line with its strategic interests.

However, as the events of Spring 2014 in Ukraine have shown, the loosening of the transatlantic ties and the turning away of America from Europe are dangerous phenomena. For the first time since the Cold War, European countries are facing such a serious security threat, which comes not from distant destabilised countries on other continents, but emerges at the gates of the European Union, in its eastern peripheries marked by the borders of the Baltic States, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. In the worst-case scenario, the Ukrainian state may continue submerging in dysfunctionality. As is clear from recent developments, this is exacerbated by the weakness of its state institutions and separatists tendencies fuelled from outside by the Russian Federation, which is coming back to its imperial ambitions. The situation may lead to unpredictable consequences, not only for the countries of the Old Continent, but also the international community as a whole. In this situation, a most urgent issue is to rebuild the mutual transatlantic trusts and enhance military preparedness. In the years to come, NATO and the EU will keep facing the crucial challenge of building agreement as to the shape and nature of joint allied expeditionary missions, mainly to highly-dysfunctional countries. Yet the most pressing issue is to stabilise the situation in the nearest surroundings and restore a strong Alliance based on common values and real military force.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>9</sup> G. Gil, *Sekurytyzacja upadania państwa po zimnej wojnie*, [in:] R. Kłosowicz, A. Mania (ed.), *Problem upadku...*, op. cit., pp. 27-28; S. Mallaby, The Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States and the Case of American Empire, *Foreign Affairs*, 2002, vol. 81, Issue 2, pp. 2-7; P.N. Lyman, J.S. Morrison, The Terrorist Threat in Africa, *Foreign Affairs* 2004, vol. 83, Issue 1, pp. 75-86; D. O'Regan, Narco-States: Africa's Next Menace, *New York Times*, 12.03.2012, after: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/opinion/narco-states-africas-next-menace.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/opinion/narco-states-africas-next-menace.html?_r=0) (accessed: 24.03.2013).
- <sup>10</sup> A good example here is the war in the Darfur region of Sudan, which is referred to as the first climate change conflict. Its growing intensity is attributed to desertification and the corresponding shrinkage of habitable or farming land. The conflict sparked one of the greatest humanitarian crises in the world. E. Newman, *Failed States...*, op. cit., p. 430.
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