NATO AND THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST

A MISSION TO RENEW NATO?

by

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SUMMARY

The key challenge for NATO in the 1990s was whether to accept the call for “out of area” missions. Since Bosnia and Kosovo this has been no longer a question. After 9/11/2001, the main question remains whether - in the context of fighting international terrorism - NATO should “go global”, and if so, what should be the rationale, the scope and the goal of such a mission.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that there exist powerful rational arguments for a mission of NATO in the Greater Middle East. At the very least, the idea deserves an honest and thorough discussion among the Allies.

The main rationale for NATO’s engagement in the Greater Middle East lies in the very nature of threats emanating from the region – terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), poor or irresponsible governance (failed or rogue states), often with virulent anti-American and anti-western rhetoric as the sole coherent policy, as well as local conflicts with global repercussions. Allies should take up the gauntlet and make an effort to design not only a common strategy but also to agree on joint measures within NATO itself. A failure of the U.S. and Europe to face up to these challenges would be detrimental to security on both sides of the Atlantic.

The following seem to be the possible scenarios and their consequences:

1. Both for the U.S and the EU, it is a policy option to bypass NATO in pursuing their security goals. However, it would be equal to giving up on the political potential of the Alliance. Therefore it is the least desired option, especially for new NATO members since it would devaluate their hard won membership, and consequently relegate NATO into oblivion.

2. To turn NATO into a common toolbox that is to be used either by the U.S. – in building coalitions of the willing - or by the EU - in providing muscles for CESDP ambitions – seems to be a tempting "middle-of-the-way“ option for some. However it would put a constant pressure on NATO’s cohesion. Sooner rather than later, we might find that many of the tools in the box are broken, or even worse, that the toolbox is empty.

3. If enough political will is present, NATO could serve as a proven framework for building a coherent strategy and providing joint or at least common capabilities. In this case, NATO would maintain an independent ability to project power in order to protect the interests of its members in NATO-led “out of area” operations. We tend to view this
option as an imperative task for the Alliance. However, we could be risking possible overstretched\footnote{5}. At this moment, there prevail obviously different policy approaches on the two sides of the Atlantic: the U.S. tends to rely on ad-hoc coalitions (or multilateralism \textit{à la carte}) rather than on the Alliance, whereas some Europeans view this as unbounded U.S. unilateralism that should be countered. It is NATO that can bridge this potential trans-Atlantic rift – the U.S. should perceive NATO as a formalized ‘coalition of the willing’ and Europeans should use NATO as a primary multilateral venue for cooperation with the U.S. It seems to be clear that using NATO is advantageous both for the U.S.\textsuperscript{6} and European\textsuperscript{7} NATO members.
INTRODUCTION – NATO AFTER IRAQ

The fact that the Iraqi operation was conducted by a ‘coalition of the willing’, outside of NATO structures, is often interpreted as a failure of NATO. Others, e.g. Richard Lugar, vehemently oppose this view.

NATO Secretary General Robertson has recently addressed the key question – why should NATO be involved in stabilizing Iraq? Other analysts have concluded that Iraq created another political challenge for NATO members. As a matter of fact, difficulties in post-war management in Iraq have led the U.S. to seek broader support materialized in military contributions and providing greater political legitimacy. In principle, few U.S. policy-makers would like to see the U.S. as a lonely global policeman supported by various ad-hoc coalitions.

So far, the role of NATO in Iraq has been limited. NATO’s involvement in postwar Iraq extends only to provide logistical support to the Polish-led division of the multinational stabilization force. Nevertheless, NATO has been always dealing with current principal threats, as has been recently manifested in its takeover of peace operations in Afghanistan. It is no wonder that a discussion about the future of NATO’s role in Iraq and the Greater Middle East is looming.

NATO IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST – KEY QUESTIONS

This paper addresses the topic from the following angles: the nature of new security threats, NATO’s capacity to cope with them, the “out of area” concept and its geographical and resource limitations, the possible role for NATO in Iraq or in the Middle East peace process based on NATO’s niche capabilities, potential political implications of NATO’s Middle Eastern engagement, and, finally, the possible “democratizing” effect of NATO’s involvement.

1. TERRITORIAL CORRELATIONS / CONTEXT OF NEW SECURITY THREATS – TERRORISM, PROLIFERATION, FAILED AND ROGUE STATES

The end of the Cold War changed the very substance of European security. Territorial defense against a massive military conflagration in Europe ceased to be the main concern of the Alliance. Wars in the Balkans and accelerated trends toward autonomous European security capabilities forced a drastic change in the security policies of NATO.

After Kosovo new threats emerged into prominence. Terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and means of their delivery, concern about failed or rogue states (non-cooperating states or states of concern, non-state actors, etc.) – these threats seem to dominate any post 9/11 analysis of the international security environment. As a consequence, the geopolitical focus moved beyond Europe, or at least to its periphery. The emphasis has shifted from Article V of...
the Washington Treaty towards dealing with non-traditional threats\textsuperscript{18}. Inevitably, this has raised concerns of some NATO members – both old\textsuperscript{19} and new – fearing that the exclusive club is losing its prestige by diluting its commitments\textsuperscript{20}.

The Greater Middle East\textsuperscript{21} (GME) seems to be a conundrum of the above-mentioned threats in the potentially most explosive combination\textsuperscript{22}. Moreover, GME is the region where both America and Europe share fundamental interests\textsuperscript{23}, although – due to various differences - they do not necessarily agree on the policies to pursue these interests. However, there is a powerful incentive to come to an agreement since “neither the U.S. nor Europe can fix the Greater Middle East by itself”.\textsuperscript{24} In any case, “NATO’s ability to deal with new threats faces an early test in the Middle East”.\textsuperscript{25}

2. **How can NATO react? What can the enlarged NATO offer in dealing with new security threats?**

The concept of collective defense (Art. V) has not outlived its relevance. Solidarity among liberal democratic states in defending common values and interests remains vital for the future of democracy. NATO has to maintain its core functions even as it is advancing new ones\textsuperscript{26}. The nature of the new threats deserves an appropriate response: “To combat transnational terrorist networks effectively, NATO should more closely resemble a network itself.”\textsuperscript{27}

The conceptual answer to the new challenges is territorial enlargement, although that has been motivated also by other factors, and functional extension\textsuperscript{28} or expansion\textsuperscript{29}. Any future enlargement of NATO remains geographically confined to the Euro-Atlantic area. However, if NATO is to assume a global role, it cannot do so without closely cooperating with non-European allies (e.g. Australia). In principle, NATO should keep the door open to all eligible allies\textsuperscript{30} (e.g. Israel). Any functional expansion requires intra-alliance consensus – the current position of NATO is reflected in the Strategic Concept adopted at the Washington summit in April 1999.

2.1 **The shift from military to non-military roles (‘nation building’)**

The new security environment is often characterized by the growing relevance of non-military\textsuperscript{31} and non-state factors. Some analysts argue that NATO and EU should divide labor as if the non-military tasks were solely EU business\textsuperscript{32}, whereas others think that NATO is also capable of nation building tasks\textsuperscript{33}. NATO’s contribution to the democratic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe as well as to similar transitions in some of the older member states - e.g. in cultivating civilian control of armed forces – cannot be denied. This might be of utmost importance in societies where the military serves as a backbone.

The question arises whether EU is better equipped for the so-called soft security tasks or whether it is simply making a virtue of its inability to deal with the hard ones. It is unclear why European
NATO members should be ready to offer more capabilities under the EU flag than they are offering as a part of the Alliance.

In this context, it is important to argue that NATO rather than the U.S. – EU format should remain the main framework of transatlantic security cooperation. It is obvious that NATO provided the necessary political element in containing the Soviet military threat. Coping with the current threats again requires the kind of political legitimacy that can best be secured through NATO.

On a deeper level, it could be argued that NATO - as the traditional repository and defender of “western” values: liberal democracy, free market, rule of law - should be the appropriate vehicle for responding to the new non-traditional threats since they seem to be targeted against this very body of values rather than against any single country, specific territory or specific policy.

3. Is NATO’s “out of area” concept applicable in the Greater Middle East?

The main question considered during the 90s was whether NATO had to expand and accept new missions beyond defending its own territory. As Richard Lugar argued in the early 1990s “NATO has to go out of area, or out of business.” However, NATO strategic and conceptual documents (Rome Declaration of 1991 or Madrid Declaration of 1997) kept referring to European or trans-Atlantic security. The Strategic Concept adopted at the Washington summit in April 1999 reflected the growing awareness of the changed global security environment. Terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 showed how urgent the question about the place of NATO in the global security system really was.

3.1 Should NATO ‘go global’?

No consensus on this question has been achieved. The debate about the global role for NATO has on the one hand revealed a growing awareness of global challenges, inhibited on the other hand by fears of overextending NATO’s obligations. Talbott and Kugler tried to formulate a balanced view by rejecting global ambitions of NATO. In recent years, opinions among NATO members have shifted significantly: even NATO’s Secretary General suggested that the once unthinkable is no longer taboo. After 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq, one may witness a new dynamism of this debate and some go even further by calling unreservedly for a global NATO.

3.2 The Greater Middle East as a key global challenge?

As we mentioned earlier, the Greater Middle East is the most prominent source of mutually correlated threats at the intersection of vital interests. Not incidentally, the region is denoted as the Rubik Cube. Emerson & Tocci identified four main interrelated crises in the GME – the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict, threats of Al-Qaeda, the crisis over Iraq and the overall development of the region, or rather the lack thereof. However, due to their preferences for the UN, the US and the EU engagement, the authors have assumed only a minor role for NATO in the region. Others suggest that any engagement of former European colonial powers in the region may raise old fears and resentments.  

### 3.2.1 NATO and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been traditionally viewed as the very source of Middle Eastern instability. In the past, one might come to the conclusion that without solving this conflict one cannot envisage stability in the Middle East. At the same time, before the occupation of Iraq one could not realistically expect a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (many Israelis still think that that conflict management is the best possible outcome). Rolling back Iraq changed the strategic map of the whole Middle East and paved the way for the Road Map – a new attempt to move the Israeli-Palestinian track forward. In fact, the Pandora box of GME has been opened in a different way than expected.

The truth is that without international engagement the Israeli-Palestinian relations are likely to deteriorate even further. The idea of international monitoring of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement is supported from various policy perspectives:

- **NATO peacekeeping role after the settlement**
- **UN or NATO presence as crisis management**
- **U.S.-led trusteeship**

Any international presence would be highly sensitive for Israel and it is perceived with caution in Washington, too. On the other hand, Palestinians consistently call for international involvement as a counterweight to Israel. So far, Europeans have preferred to be involved as the EU in the Quartet format (US, EU, Russia, UN) rather than going through NATO. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that at a certain stage of future settlement NATO – alone or in concert with others - might contribute politically rather than militarily on the ground.

There is also a defensive rationale for channeling any western involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through NATO. A dual-track (US, EU) or a multiple-track (US, EU, UN, and Russia) approach might in the course of time transform the so far differing perspectives into conflicting ones, with disastrous consequences both for the Atlantic cohesion and for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself.
3.2.2 NATO AND THE GULF – IRAQ

The Persian Gulf is of primary concern to NATO allies because of two reasons: proliferation of WMD and securing energy supplies. It seems that Americans are more aware of the coincidence of NATO member countries’ interests in the Gulf and see more European engagement as desirable. It is the European reluctance that stands in the way of more allied cooperation in the Gulf. As was shown in the Iraqi case, some Europeans do not subscribe to the U.S. policies in the Gulf. Nevertheless, in the current circumstances the way for NATO to the Gulf leads through Iraq.

4. POTENTIAL ROLE FOR NATO AND ITS TOOLS

The key question is whether there are any niche capabilities that neither the EU nor the US alone can provide. What may be the unique contributions of NATO in the GME? Are they primarily in the military or in the political areas?

NATO can provide political legitimacy to stabilization and democratization in the GME. Nevertheless, there will be always a tendency toward using selective formats (e.g. Quartet, Contact Group, etc).

There is the remarkable military record of NATO in planning and running peacekeeping operations including post-conflict stabilization and reforming security structures. Suggestions have been made to use this expertise in the GME.

It is a matter of further discussion whether NATO is capable of providing assistance in nation building and promotion of democracy. Here again, Iraq is a test case.

In 1990s NATO has developed a spectrum of tools to deal with the external challenges it has faced: enlarged cooperation forums (NACC, EAPC), NATO+1 dialogue (NRC, NUC, Mediterranean dialogue), partnership programs (PfP) and even procedures for future membership (MAP). Patterns of dialogue and cooperation, of sharing best practices and standards, and of providing assistance are firmly rooted in the NATO culture. Possible ways of using some of the existing models in the GME region should be considered. NATO should offer a modified PfP program to some of the countries in the region. Whether this may include even a long-term perspective of membership remains to be discussed. The weak point in applying the above-mentioned formats - which were designed for Europe – in the GME is the following: what kind of sufficient incentives – apart from the membership perspective – can NATO offer in reforming the security system in the GME? Security consultations or partnerships not involving full membership do not seem sufficient, especially for some of the smaller democratic or democratizing countries of the region. The problem is that the “added value” of a NATO security
involvement as opposed to a US security guarantee is at the moment not very high. That, however, can and should change in the course of time.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF POSSIBLE NATO ENGAGEMENT IN THE GME (IRAQ, PALESTINE) – CEMENTING TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS OR DESTROYING NATO’S COHESION?

NATO could obviously neglect global aspirations in its further development. The consequence would be the loss of global significance. All depends on policies of member states. The most poignant expression of this fact comes from the U.S. If NATO takes up global challenges – initially in the GME region – it would be a serious test of its interoperability and cohesion. It would have inevitable implications for planning and decision-making procedures within the Alliance, which present some member states with an undoubtedly sensitive dilemma. Authorization of planning procedures and weakening of the principle of unanimity are definitely explosive subjects for political discussions within NATO. However, the alternatives seem to be even worse. The risk of bypassing or marginalizing NATO is evident. Deepening of the Atlantic rift over NATO would be detrimental to both its shores. There is a way out - the U.S. should perceive NATO as a formalized ‘coalition of the willing’ and Europeans should use NATO as a primary multilateral venue for cooperation with the U.S. Thus NATO will be able to deal with the most urgent current crises starting with the Greater Middle East.

To search for a global role for NATO just so that it has some kind of a role would be both wrong and destined to fail. A freedom-loving alliance, just like a freedom-loving country, should not seek adventures abroad, “in search of monsters to slay.” However, in the case of GME, the monsters are already very much there. To address their threats is thus not a question of expanding or transforming NATO’s mission but rather a question of the continued vitality of its original mission and purpose.

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“...the new threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction ... emerge from outside of Europe... they draw US attention away from Europe, ...away from NATO.” Rühle (ibid.)

“Make no mistake, modern-day terrorism and WMD proliferation are ‘Article 5 threats’ in NATO’s parlance... the new threats are capable of violating NATO’s borders and striking the societies of all its members as well as their military forces... This trend is rapidly making NATO’s old distinction between Article 4 and Article 5 obsolete. Kugler, Richard (2002), Preparing NATO to meet new threats: Challenge and Opportunity, U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda, An Electronic Journal of the U.S. Department of State Vol. 7 No. 1, March 2002.

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“The nature of the new threat we face... the interweaving of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and failed and rogue states from Marrakech to Bangladesh... the challenge we face is de facto concentrated in one specific geographic region — the Greater Middle East. That region starts with Northern Africa and Egypt and Israel at the eastern end of the Mediterranean and extends throughout the Persian Gulf to Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Asmus (ibid.)
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“Once unthinkable decisions now appear quite natural. So that NATO Ministers can debate seriously the pros and cons of a more direct Alliance role in Iraq, or even in the Middle East, without storms of theological protest.” Robertson (ibid.)

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