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NATO and Deterrence

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Bridging the Gap: Reviewing NATO's strategic posture and capabilities

Summary report

Workshop I

NATO and Deterrence

December 3rd and 4th, 2015

CWS, University of Southern Denmark
Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense M, Denmark

NATO and Deterrence

In December 2015, the Center for War Studies, Chatham House, and the Polish Institute for International Affairs convened a group of international security experts and policy practitioners from a number of NATO member states. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how and whether NATO can effectively use deterrence as a tool to address today's dynamic security environment. This report reflects many of the main themes and conclusions from the discussions, and includes recommendations on priority issues that should be addressed in the upcoming 2016 Warsaw Summit. This is not intended as a full description of the debate, nor should it be seen as a consensus document.

A Strategic Context of Uncertainty

- **A dynamic and changing security environment requires NATO to speed its decision-making procedures and culture.** NATO consensus is a key element of NATO's deterrent capacity, but the way in which consensus is generated and maintained may not be adequate to deter new and fast-moving threats. The speed of political decision-making is a key issue; the authority to mobilize and deploy forces delegated to the military chain of command another. In the post-Cold War years, NATO delegated very little such authority and grew accustomed to an easy pace of decision-making. Business as usual is increasingly not an option in today's environment.
- **The dividing line between deterrence and defense can be hard to draw.** In theory, the distinction is easy: deterrence is about avoiding war by threatening intolerable pain; defense about the capacity to hold your ground in a fight. In practice, it is not that simple. NATO has always blended defense and deterrence, as in the Flexible Response strategy of the Cold War. Allies simply differ in their preferences regarding the right mix, and NATO's challenge is to generate both consensus and strategy. It was difficult during the Cold War, and it remains difficult today.
- **U.S. leadership remains critically important but the long-term implications for NATO of transitioning U.S. strategic priorities (e.g. the rebalance to Asia) are unclear.** The United States has taken the lead in reassuring NATO's eastern-most allies in response to Russia's aggressions in Ukraine, but has simultaneously made clear its expectation that European allies must do more of the heavy lifting and that the United States may prefer to contribute to a coalition rather than lead one. The lack of alternate leadership complicates the task of crafting the political resolve on which a policy of deterrence must rest.
- **NATO's force posture is challenged in several respects.** NATO's conventional forces have become too slow and too light, and while the reforms agreed upon at the 2014 Wales summit point in the right direction, more work needs to be done. NATO is politically divided, moreover, on the need to revise the 1997 Founding Act with Russia, which not only promised partnership but also established that NATO would not forward deploy forces to the east but rather reinforce as required—a posture now overtly challenged by several allies.

NATO's Current Deterrence Capacity

- **Effective deterrence requires: a) credibility; b) capability; and c) cohesion.** All are in question today at NATO. Political will (credibility) is at times uncertain, capabilities are too slow to get off the ground (or back up), and while there is cohesion in action, it is not necessarily there for deterrence.
- **While questions regarding NATO's deterrence capabilities abound, there are signs that NATO deterrence might already have worked.** Russia has not challenged Baltic sovereignty since their inclusion in NATO; allies have acted cohesively on sanctions against Russia even at the cost to their own economies; and the effort to modernize NATO's deterrence posture is strong and focused.
- **NATO must be cognizant that deterrence at heart is about the credibility of its response.** NATO must move forward with deterrence and keep it simple. A clear message and political resolve define NATO's most urgent task, even as there is work to do on NATO military forces.

Hybrid Threats

- **NATO does not have to go hybrid in order to deter hybrid threats.** Russia's hybrid warfare is novel compared to the 1990s, but contains the same elements of subversion, propaganda, espionage, and resort to force that are familiar from the history of the Cold War and beyond. There should be a division of labor between the national level where nations must prepare broadly resilient societies and then the collective NATO level where adapted military forces must be in focus.
- **NATO must broaden its deterrence thinking from the land milieu to the other milieus of sea, air, and space.** Russia can challenge NATO in all domains, and NATO should have responses ready, for instance to safeguard transatlantic fiber optic cables.

Radical Threats

- **NATO has difficulty in generating consensus among the allies most affected by radicalism and terrorism.** These radical threats emerge from failed states along NATO's southern border, but they affect southern allies differently and connect to distinct national perspectives. To illustrate: France is 'at war' with Islamic State in Syria and Iraq; Turkey is concerned about a broader set of developments in Syria; and Greece and Italy are consumed by the influx of refugees and immigrants. NATO's challenge of cohesion is thus greater to the south than to the east.
- **Deterrence is elusive when dealing with failed states. But preparedness, or resilience, can be an effective deterrence strategy for such threats.** Resilience is necessary among NATO members as well as partners. Domestic resilience - to withstand economic, security and political pressure - is vital. NATO members must do this nationally, and can assist with partners. But militarily NATO can also do more to broadly 'prepare' its own force posture by defining the right mix of tools, positioning forces, connecting them, and tying the prepared posture to its collective defense policy. Preparedness can play a significant role in particular to affect calculations of southern adversaries.
- **Crises to the south will pull NATO into the business of crisis management and capacity building and cause NATO's distinction between collective defense and crisis management to blur.** NATO should, therefore, be clear on what this distinction entails strategically and operationally. NATO can do both, but should not confuse the two. NATO should be attentive to the distinct meanings of preparedness and capacity building in each context, notably as they relate to NATO's resolve to use

force—a critical issue notably in collective defense—and the role and weight of external partners, which increase in matters of crisis management.

- **It is very hard to do deterrence in the south—policy instead tends to become focused on development or defense.** In part, it is because we do not understand the extremists' goals and so we cannot use 'deterrence by denial'. And we cannot do 'damage'—deterrence by punishment—as we cannot sustain a campaign to inflict pain as much as they can absorb it.

Extended Deterrence

- **NATO has a dual extended deterrence challenge.** It must be capable of reinforcing across the Atlantic, which has been a core NATO task from day one, and then also reach the relatively new easternmost territory towards Russia. Russia's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capacities are especially challenging, but Atlantic sea lines of communication ought to be of concern as well. The survivability, sustainability, and readiness of NATO forces should be reviewed in this light.
- **Nuclear issues are integral to a strategy of deterrence but politically highly sensitive.** Russia is investing in nuclear modernization and uses nuclear deployments and exercises involving both conventional and nuclear forces to send signals to NATO. The vision of "nuclear zero" as part of a global disarmament deal is thus receding, and NATO allies must redefine the role for nuclear weapons within their deterrence posture. This will notably involve a new common understanding, on the one hand, of how U.S. nuclear weapons can extend deterrence to Europe and, on the other, how extended deterrence and disarmament diplomacy can be linked in new ways.
- **There is a real risk that NATO as a collective mechanism of transatlantic defense coordination is being marginalized.** The United States tends now to bilateralize its defense relations to critical allies, in part because European allies have collectively failed to modernize their defense forces after the counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan. The core business of European defense could thus move outside NATO structures, leaving NATO disempowered.

Compellence

- **NATO's capacity to compel an adversary is intact but eroding.** Compellence is the art of persuading an adversary to take certain actions using threats of force or the measured use of force, all while retaining the capacity to escalate and inflict additional pain. NATO's clearest case of successful compellence is Serbia, which NATO engaged with limited force in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s. This capacity to compel is eroding because NATO increasingly is no longer leading coalitions. Military operations now tend to be run by (mostly U.S.-led) coalitions outside NATO, partly on account of the degree of political controversy generated in the NAC by the active use of force, partly on account of wide disparities in military readiness among the allies. NATO is thus at risk of being reduced to a type of force-generating mechanism.
- **NATO must invest in its capacity to anchor operational coalitions in its midst.** This capacity is largely hidden from view and consists of military and also political interoperability. Militarily it is a question of maintaining connected and ready multinational forces, and also of ensuring that even small or less capable allies inject forces into the packages that will form the nucleus of coalitions. Politically it is a question of strong ambassadorial networks—in Brussels but also and increasingly in Washington D.C.

- **NATO must maintain a collective capacity to compel Russia.** In a more competitive relationship, NATO cannot take for granted Russia's commitment to arms agreements and security guarantees: Russia has, in effect, abrogated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty as well as the Budapest Memorandum safeguarding Ukraine's territorial integrity. To persuade Russia to stick to such rules of the road, or to craft new rules of the road, NATO must compel—and therefore maintain a capacity to issue threats (however subtle) and back them with forces along the steps on the ladder of escalation.
- **Terrorist groups cannot be compelled.** Compellence needs to have an alternative and NATO wants to 'defeat' terrorists. However, it might be possible to compel individuals, whether terrorists or their supporters or sponsors.

Moving Forward

- **NATO should also consider ways to reinforce political engagement at the highest political level.** NATO heads of states and government, and also foreign ministers when meeting in the NAC, should regularly debate and address the fundamental bargains that sustain NATO—including the 'defense and détente' policy vis-à-vis Russia and, most fundamentally, the transatlantic bargain that secures European support for U.S. leadership in return for security guarantees.
- **NATO needs to address the balance between its executive agency and its board of directors in order to deter effectively.** The executive (the Secretary General and the Supreme Allied Commander) and the board of directors (the North Atlantic Council) have struggled to send the same message at times; the former have been criticized by the latter as being too forward leaning in their communication on Russia and deterrence. The messaging from both needs to be clear and aligned—both need to communicate deterrence to be effective. As threats become more flexible and fast moving, ways should be considered to bolster the executive arm.
- **NATO is struggling to locate the balance between speed and weight.** Speed has been the focus of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) that followed from the 2014 Wales summit, and it is both expensive and difficult. In the search to combine speed and weight, there is a real risk of frontloading the high readiness forces so that they become too heavy—too fat to fly. NATO must apply greater thought to the mobilization of its follow-on forces as a smooth and credible reinforcement of its high readiness forces, particularly as exterior lines of communication disfavor NATO in comparison to Russia's interior lines of communication. Initial deterrence must be backed up.
- **NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT) must be reformed.** In its current shape, it is too small and too distantly located from the strategic headquarters in Brussels. NATO might want to consider moving ACT to Belgium and setting up a new Atlantic Naval Command in Norfolk.
- **To solidify its collective nature, NATO should reform its command structure** (which has gone from 35,000 in the 1970's to around 6,500 today). Moving ACT to Belgium was touched upon above. NATO should more broadly consider how it could optimize the value it gains from the 6,500 personnel in the full command structure: by introducing Areas of Responsibility (AOR) into the chain of command (current NATO HQs do not have AORs) and linking them more organically to the regional awareness and training and contingency planning expertise of national headquarters.

This workshop was organized in cooperation with the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Raytheon International, and NATO Public Diplomacy



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