

## 34. The Future of NATO

THE North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), almost alone among the alphabet soup of multilateral organizations, actually has a track record of working. During the Cold War, NATO played a vital role in militarily deterring Soviet aggression while at the same time politically uniting the Western alliance. However, there is little doubt that, following the victorious end of the Cold War, for which NATO was specifically designed, it has been passing through a period of crisis both militarily and politically.

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### Recommendations

**1. Encourage the reconfiguring of NATO troops within Europe.** Militarily, the spending disparities, always a source of tension during the Cold War, have grown worse between the U.S. and its European allies, along with a commensurate capabilities gap. After 1989, Europe quickly cashed its peace dividend, further heightening already existing disparities. The European allies as a whole spend roughly two-thirds of what the U.S. spends on defense while accounting for only 15 percent of NATO's overall capacity. This is not a politically sustainable situation. At present, only Great Britain and France are capable of performing all military missions with the U.S., from high-end, high-intensity war fighting through low-end peacekeeping. Germany, Italy, Spain, and Poland are nowhere near capable of performing the full range of missions.

**2. Condition support for a European Union force on NATO's remaining the premier defense alliance in Europe.** The United States should support European efforts to create a common defense only if the Europeans clearly articulate that NATO has the first right of refusal before a European alternative can be implemented.

**3. Think more globally about future NATO membership.** The organization should take in only new members with significant military capabilities, a record of stable democracy and a commitment to markets, a desire for closer ties to America, and a strategic location that is of significant geopolitical interest to the U.S. For example, given the

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brewing Iran crisis, Israel should be seriously considered for membership. NATO must be able to go out of area, or it will go out of business. Its peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan is a symbol of one sort of out-of-area function; it must now follow this by considering a more global membership.

This must be done very carefully, however, for there is a great danger that NATO could be expanded into impotence or irrelevance, as is happening to the European Union, losing the very cohesion that has made NATO so valuable. On the other hand, a NATO that lacks direct relevance to the fight against Osama bin Laden and the larger war against radical Islam is unlikely to remain very important. The criteria for new members must therefore be strict while current alliance members retain an open mind about future accession.

**4. Support compliance with the Prague goals.** The Prague goals aim for NATO members' commitment to a modernization that allows them to be more deployable, more quickly, to more places. During the Cold War, NATO proved itself to be adaptable through the era's various phases, remaining relevant to the preeminent global conflict of the time. This kind of adaptation is no less important now. All NATO members must share military risk if the alliance is to continue to flourish. NATO instituted the Prague goals in an attempt to see that more European countries are capable of being at the thin end of the spear, able to be deployed quickly in high-end war fighting for longer periods of time. If the military aspects of the alliance are to remain credible, the Bush Administration must urge a renewed push to meet these goals.

**5. Make it clear that other countries desire to move diplomatically closer to the U.S.** For example, following the outrageous comments from the Iranian president and the unquestioned desire of Tehran to produce nuclear weapons, the Bush Administration should carefully consider Israel as a candidate for NATO accession.

## Facts and Figures

■ Perhaps the most alarming statistic with regard to NATO has been the ever-widening disparity in defense expenditures between the United States on the one hand and Canada and Europe on the other. For the fiscal year 2007 defense budget, the United States has allocated \$439.3 billion (3.2 percent of GDP) for the Department of Defense—an increase of 7 percent from FY 2006. This sum dwarfs the respective defense budgets of fellow NATO members: United Kingdom \$65.25 billion (2.7 percent of GDP); France \$45 billion (2.6 percent); Germany \$30 billion (1.2 percent); Italy \$28.2 billion (1.8 percent); Spain \$9.9 billion (1.2 percent). Consequently, the United States now represents 85 percent

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of NATO's military capabilities. As NATO considers the possibility of further enlargement or the emulation of missions in troubled states such as Afghanistan (ISAF), the alliance's robust and flexible nature could well be under threat if these massive discrepancies in defense spending are not addressed adequately.

■ Often cited as NATO's "transformation" conference, the 2002 Prague Summit sought to tackle the challenges of the 21st century, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism. Each member state pledged to take the appropriate steps to upgrade its military capabilities to face these daunting challenges. However, this will require significant investment in military technology, which is a dilemma for NATO with 65 percent of European defense budgets spent on personnel compared to the 36 percent designated by the United States. Nevertheless, aside from the United States, only the United Kingdom and France are capable of fulfilling all of these obligations. Inevitably this would prevent an enlarged NATO from fighting, as George W. Bush stated, "side by side."

■ The creation of the EU's 60,000-strong Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) coincided with the establishment of NATO's 21,000-strong Response Force (NRF). This begs the question as to whether the EU is enhancing the security of Europe through new military capabilities or merely "re-hatting" existing forces. The collective defense budgets of all 25 EU member states amount to \$200 billion—less than half of the U.S. defense budget. The likelihood of an effective RRF—presumably under the direction of a nonexistent European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP)—is therefore doubtful.

■ Attempts to modernize European defense capabilities are being obstructed by a French initiative to harmonize the continent's military procurement process. As a result, even the United States' staunchest ally, the United Kingdom, is beginning to amalgamate defense procurement with the rest of the EU. Although the EU spends a modest \$66.6 billion on defense procurement compared to the \$84.2 billion spent by the United States, these funds are injected into a highly protected European market that accounts for 90 percent of production. As a result, the United Kingdom has opted to replace rather than replenish their fleet of U.S.-built C-130s and C-17s with the new A400M Eurofighter. U.S.–U.K. plans to pursue a 155mm howitzer have also been abandoned in favor of a European alternative. Thus, attempts to isolate the U.S. market could move Europe further out of sync with the United States militarily and threaten the coherence of NATO.

## Notes

## Additional Reading

“Transatlantic Relations: The Good News Is the New Conventional Wisdom Is Also Wrong,” *Newsweek Poland*, November 25, 2005.

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John C. Hulsman, Ph.D., “Overview of Transatlantic Relations Prior to President Bush’s Visit to Europe,” Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats, February 16, 2005, at [www.house.gov/international\\_relations/109/hul021605.pdf](http://www.house.gov/international_relations/109/hul021605.pdf).

John C. Hulsman, Ph.D., and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., “A Conservative Vision for Europe,” *European Affairs*, Vol. 6, No.1 (Winter/Spring 2005).