

NATO: RELEVANT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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In 1991, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) main adversary, the Soviet Union, ended the Cold War with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. To ensure their alliance's relevance, NATO members then re-evaluated NATO's strategic purpose, nature, and past Cold War responsibilities. Initially postured in Western Europe as collective defense against eastern aggression, NATO must once again review its long-term strategy. With no Cold War adversary and with the explosion of globalization, NATO has expanded its missions to meet global challenges; it now includes 26 member nations and is still growing. The alliance has restructured and accepted the challenge of transforming to meet future challenges. This research paper analyzes NATO's relevance in the 21st century security environment. It discusses the implications of recent NATO enlargement, reviews recent NATO transformation, and assesses the value of current NATO missions in Iraq, Darfur, Sudan, and Afghanistan.

NATO: RELEVANT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

On 4 April, 1949, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed an alliance among European countries along with Canada and the U.S. to oppose the Soviet threat of communist aggression. NATO established a system of collective defense in which its member states agreed to a mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. NATO then developed a static defense of conventional forces and nuclear weapons to repel a large scale invasion from the east. Originally composed of 12 members, NATO had expanded to 16 by 1982 and remained at that number until the end of the Cold War. In 1991, the Soviet Union, NATO's main adversary in the Cold War, collapsed and NATO's counterpart the Warsaw Pact dissolved. With no remaining adversary or short-term threat, NATO soon began to reconsider its strategic purpose, its nature and its responsibilities. NATO wants to expand its missions to address new global challenges; it has opened its membership to the eastern European nations. This strategic research paper analyzes NATO's military alliances' relevance in the 21st century. It discusses the implications of recent NATO expansion, reviews NATO's transformation, and assesses the value of recent NATO missions in Iraq, Darfur, Sudan, and Afghanistan.

Early NATO

NATO is one of the longest and strongest military alliances in the world, established a system of collective defense in which its member states agreed to mutually defend against an attack by any external party. In its early days, the Soviet Union posed NATO's primary threat of an invasion of Western Europe. To deter this threat, NATO allies developed a static defense of conventional forces and nuclear

weapons to thwart an anticipated large scale invasion from the east. U.S. participation in NATO was vital, since only U.S. military power was significant to counter the Soviet threat. NATO members regard the Treaty's Article V as the core of the alliance. Article V specifically states:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the (U.N.) Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.¹

With this collective defense, NATO provided a "security blanket" from Soviet aggression; this security enabled post-World War II nascent political and economic institutions to continue to develop without disruption or interference. Regional stability was a key part of NATO's strategy to contain future Soviet advancement into Western Europe. During the forty plus years of the alliance, NATO countries faced their Cold War adversary head-on with the resolve and commitment to ultimately eliminate the Warsaw Pact threat.

The New Challenge

After the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO members agreed that the alliance should continue because they still faced security risks. NATO had, in fact, declared in 1990 that it intended to become "an agent of change."² The reoriented alliance then addressed the possibility of instability and crises from the former eastern bloc Warsaw Pact

countries. NATO's strategic concept, updated in 1991, was designed to provide the political and military solidarity to execute the alliances' strategy.

The Washington Treaty of 1949 is NATO's cornerstone; the Strategic Concept is its framework, explained U.S. Air Force Col. Chris D. Miller. The treaty sets out why you have an alliance. The Strategic Concept sets out what the alliance is, where it's going and, in a very top-line, general way, how it's going to get there.³

Since 1991, NATO's security focus has shifted from a collective European defense to potential conduct of a full spectrum of military operations to resolve issues possibly outside of NATO traditional territories.

So for several years, NATO has been shifting its focus and developing capabilities to meet the future challenges of a changing Europe. NATO partners acknowledge that their mission would now extend beyond safeguarding only NATO territories on the European continent; indeed their post-Cold War responsibilities may potentially involve more high intensity conflict. For decades, U.S. forces in Europe and their NATO allies prepared for large scale mechanized combat operations across Central Europe-- training for tank gunnery to small unit and small-unit maneuvers. The German combat maneuver training centers of Grafenwohr and Hohenfels, now exemplify the change in military missions. Soldiers there are training for the upcoming Implementation Force mission in Bosnia. American soldiers at mock villages wearing costumes of Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs provide the best type of training to approach the upcoming mission. Although tank gunnery is a traditional NATO mission of collective defense, mock villages and role-playing represent the new NATO role in operations other than war.⁴ Lieutenant General (Retired) Daniel Christman's article on NATO's military future remarks that,

this highlights an essential truth: the military future of NATO depends on achieving a balance between continuity and change. For the United States in particular, this means balancing readiness and training for high intensity combat with preparation for non-Article V operations such as those in the former Yugoslavia. European militaries, on the other hand, must maintain their combat competencies in the rush to adopt missions. Striking a balance is not easy, especially in a period of constrained resources.⁵

New Mission for NATO in the Balkans

In early 1990s, NATO Foreign Ministers believed that the Alliance was prepared to conduct peacekeeping operations on a case-by-case basis under the authority of the United Nations Security Council. The Alliance viewed their role in the Former Yugoslavia as an opportunity to demonstrate their versatility as an organization that could now do more than collective defense; the Alliance has the resources and expertise to conduct a full range of operations outside of the Alliance's original territory. The Alliance thus provided the necessary resources and expertise to conduct peacekeeping operations in Bosnia. To date, this is NATO's largest land operation; its deployment of a 60,000 multinational contingent in Bosnia provided a big test for NATO's new security environment. Known initially as the Implementation Force (IFOR), its initial objective was to supervise the ceasefire and oversee the separation of forces.⁶ NATO then commenced its first post-Cold War military operation with air strikes against Bosnian Serb forces to help end a civil war in the former Yugoslavian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The air strikes eventually helped bring the Balkans conflict to an end, culminating with the Dayton Peace Agreement.

However, the NATO force did experience growing pains in carrying out air strikes. Overall, the Balkans military operations revealed NATO's inflexibility. During the bombing campaign against Serbia, each target had to be approved by the North Atlantic

Council (NAC), NATO's highest decisionmaking structure.⁷ The NAC exercises political authority and decision-making powers. With members from all NATO partners, the NAC is one of the most important decisionmaking bodies in NATO. The NAC normally meets once a week however, it can convene on short-notice as necessary.⁸ The Balkans campaign provided NATO with lessons for the future, not only for addressing military operations but also for dealing with the changing environment in Europe. If the alliance was going to remain strong and capable of meeting the future challenges, NATO would have to make dramatic changes in its policy, structure, and composition. The emerging awareness led the current members to consider several options: 1) to begin transforming NATO's structure to be more responsive and adaptable to handle a myriad of operations, potentially out of NATO's normal boundaries and 2), opening NATO to the former eastern European countries, thereby enlarging its membership in an effort to maintain a stable Europe. In the final decade of the twentieth century, NATO's first priority was to start the process of enlarging the alliance.

NATO Enlargement

The idea of enlarging and expanding NATO is not a new initiative; NATO has always endorsed an open door policy. NATO has always wanted to expand its membership to become a global military force. One of its objectives as a military alliance is to ensure the "energy security" of its member states--which portends the militarization of the world's arteries, strategic pipeline routes, maritime traffic corridors used by oil tankers, and international waters. "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this

Treaty.”⁹ Since its inception, NATO has gone through several iterations of enlargement. Greece and Turkey were admitted in the first round in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1982. These additions brought NATO membership to 16 nations.

In 1990, the unification of the former East Germany and the Federal Republic of Germany thereby became NATO’s first post- Cold War expansion. In order to secure Soviet approval of a united Germany remaining in NATO, its members agreed that foreign troops and nuclear weapons would not be stationed in the east and conceded also that NATO would never expand further east. In December 1994, a consensus decision by the Allied Foreign Ministers investigated the “why and how” of future admissions into the Alliance. The resulting study on NATO Enlargement was shared within the Alliance, and then in September 1995 the information was made public. The principles outlined in the study established the basis for NATO’s open approach to inviting new members to join. With regard to the “why” of NATO enlargement, the study concluded that, with the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, there was both a need for and a unique opportunity to build improved security in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area, without observing obsolete dividing lines.¹⁰ At NATO’s 1997 summit in Madrid, Spain, the Ministers announced that one or more countries seeking to join NATO would be invited to begin accession negotiations, with acceptance of new members targeted for 1999--NATO’s 50th anniversary.

Between 1994 and 1997, NATO initiated wider forums for regional cooperation among its neighbors, seeking to expand beyond their military approach to global security. Although the organization was pushing for enlargement, other initiatives were

pursued: the Partnership for Peace program, the Mediterranean Dialogue initiative, and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. In 1997, three former communist countries - Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland--were invited to join NATO; they were finally admitted in 1999. In 2004 NATO's admissions introduced seven new countries, making it NATO's biggest enlargement round in the alliances' history. To date, the alliance has grown to 26 members, and it continues to consider another expansion. But enlargement carries inherent risk for the alliance. On the plus side, enlargement increases stability and security in the European region by extending monitoring and containing conflicts that would otherwise go unnoticed. Enlargement expands support for Eastern European countries trying to establish democratic societies and, enlargement invites greater U.S. involvement in Europe. But enlargement may cause uneasiness with Russia, which could perceive enlargement as alienating or even threatening Russia and other nations that are not NATO members. Moreover, future enlargement risks the possibility of over-extending NATO members as they seek both to reduce forces and to extent security guarantees to a wider area. Enlargement is costly because it requires investments in reorganizing NATO command and political structures, just as acquiring new equipment poses a substantial, yet undefined, challenge. Even so, NATO is determined to expand its membership; it aspires to grow into a global military alliance that will ensure the security of its member states. As NATO continues to expand it is meeting with both support or and opposition to its ambitious expansion.

Supporters of Enlargement

The United States and the Clinton administration, in particular, have supported post-Cold War NATO since initial discussions begin in 1994. NATO enlargement

provides a political means to promote three U.S. strategic goals in Europe: “integration of the region, a cooperative trans-Atlantic relationship with Europe on global issues, and fostering opportunities while minimizing proliferation risk.”¹¹ However, looking at the process as a whole, the challenge of building a Europe that is fully prosperous, democratic and integrated, and stable provides a fundamental rationale for U.S. support of NATO expansion. This rationale is evident in statements from previous administration when President Clinton declared that “Expanding NATO will enhance our security. It’s the right thing to do. We must not fail history’s challenge to build a Europe that is peaceful, democratic, and undivided,”¹² Clinton said in a commencement address at the U.S. Military Academy. The Bush administration has maintained this U.S. commitment to support its allies. The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2006 directs that: “The fight must be taken to the enemy, to keep them on the run. To succeed in our efforts, we need the support of others and concerted actions of friends and allies. We must join with others to deny terrorists what they need to survive: safe haven, financial support, and the support and protection that certain nation-states historically have given them.”¹³ Certainly, NATO is among the significant “others” who can vitally support U.S. efforts to defeat the terrorists.

Thus NATO has continued to expand with the accession of seven more Northern European and Eastern European countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. They were first invited to undertake membership initiative during the 2002 Prague Summit; then they joined NATO on 29 March 2004, shortly before the 2004 Istanbul Summit. Earlier in the year, both houses of the U.S. Congress approved the “NATO Freedom Consolidation Act of 2007.”¹⁴ This Act

supports NATO's enlargement into the Western Balkans, including Croatia, Serbia (including Kosovo), Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania. Others countries that have expressed interest in joining the alliance include the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the former Soviet state of Georgia, and the Ukraine. When NATO celebrates its 60th birthday in 2009, the alliance may be adding Bosnia as a full-time member. "The ball is in our yard and our acceptance to NATO mostly depends on us. That means that we have to meet certain conditions,"¹⁵ noted Sven Alkalaj, the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs. "Bosnia should also put in some effort and help its partner countries, not only get help. That is one of the conditions our country should meet,"¹⁶ Alkalaj added. As the enlargement process continues to be a growth industry on the European continent, there is some opposition to enlargement from both non-NATO countries who feel threatened and from within the U.S.

Enlargement Opposition

In general, the United States supports NATO enlargement; however, some members of Congress have questioned the enlargement. Congressman Ron Paul, (R-Texas), voiced his objection to NATO's expansion in a 30 March 2004 House of Representatives meeting. Paul claimed that NATO is no longer relevant since Soviet Union has disappeared: "NATO achieved its stated mission. With the fall of the Soviet system and the accompanying disappearance of the threat attack, in 1989-1991, NATO's mission ceased to exist."¹⁷ He went on to argue that NATO and the U.S.'s involvement in the Former Yugoslavia was an attack on a sovereign state that threatened neither the U.S. nor its own neighbors.

The result of the illegal and immoral NATO intervention in the Balkans speaks for itself: NATO troops will occupy the Balkans for the foreseeable

future. No peace has been attained, merely the cessation of hostilities and a permanent expansion of US foreign aid. The further expansion of NATO is in reality a cover for increased US interventionism in Europe and beyond. It will be a conduit for more unconstitutional US foreign aid and US interference in the internal politics of member nations, especially the new members from the former East.¹⁸

Paul further argues that to gain NATO membership, new members must increase their military spending when they no longer face external threats. Some countries can ill afford these unnecessary expenses. He believes this provides an opportunity for the U.S. government to step in, offering aid and loans to NATO members so they can purchase military equipment. Moreover, Paul's final argument opposed NATO's provision of military bases so the U.S. can establish its presence in close proximity to the borders of the former Soviet Union. Paul asks, "Does no one worry that this continued provocation of Russia might have negative effects in the future? Is it necessary?"¹⁹ NATO's ambition to gain more members has indeed become increasingly troublesome for Russia. NATO's acceptance of East European members into the alliance conflicts with Russian national interests and may heighten regional tensions. Security relations between the U.S. and Russia have become strained, so that US-Russian bilateral relations have deteriorated in the past decade. Although Russia's future policies are uncertain, Russia is problematically engaging with China and Iran. Also, Russia could respond to the growth of the alliance by exercising more of its veto power in the UN Security Council. Russia may emerge as the wild card in international politics in the post-Cold War. From the Russian perspective, NATO's enlargement clearly breaches the agreement between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President George H. W. Bush which allowed for a peaceful unification of Germany. Russia views NATO's expansion policy as a continuation of a Cold War attempt to

surround and isolate this vast nation. Russia is likewise unnerved by NATO initiatives to strengthen energy security. If an energy-access doctrine were adopted by NATO, it could be used as a justification for the imposition of economic and political sanctions against Russia and other energy producing countries. The clause could also provide a rationale for attacking Russia or any other energy exporting country, such as Iran, Turkmenistan, Libya, and Venezuela, to commandeer the energy and natural resources of such countries.

As NATO has continued to enlarge and expand its membership, the Alliance realized that its structure, especially its capabilities to respond to global crisis, needed reevaluation. NATO then embarked on the challenge of transforming the organization.

NATO Transformation

NATO is reorganizing its military structure from a Cold War posture to meet the global demands of the 21st century. "It must modernize or be marginalized,"²⁰ according to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General James Jones, USMC. He emphasized the need to move NATO beyond its Cold War strategy of static defense and to capitalize on its capabilities to shape and influence the 21st century security environment: "We have too much capability for the past and not enough capacity for the future."²¹ To meet the challenge, NATO realigned its command structure from a static defensive posture and established two strategic commands, two regional operational commands, and several joint sub-regional commands--transforming into a more streamlined functional structure. With assistance from the U.S. Defense Department, NATO has developed a new command structure on American soil. The U.S. Atlantic Command was decommissioned and the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) was

established to take its place. “The role of ACT will be to promote transformation and interoperability of Alliance militaries in order to ensure NATO’s forces are trained and structured to meet the challenges of the new security environment.”²² NATO’s reorganization designates the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe (SHAPE), in Mons, Belgium, as the NATO combatant commander’s arm of operations.

Meanwhile, ACT will support transformation and interoperability of NATO’s forces to ensure they are structured, trained, and ready to meet the new missions and threats of the emerging environment. According to the NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson,

ACT will shape the future of combined and joint operations. It will identify new concepts, and bring them to maturity. It will then turn these transformational concepts into reality; a reality shared by the entire NATO Alliance.²³

NATO is continuing to reform and streamline its command structure, investing in capabilities where the Alliance now has critical shortfalls. It is creating a military response force with 21,000 personnel, designated the NATO Response Force (NRF).

The NRF, an operational concept designed to deploy modern, flexible, rapidly expeditionary, deployable joint forces on a full spectrum of operations, from humanitarian missions, to counterterrorist operations, to engagement in high intensity conflicts. This is not a permanent or standing force; it consists of units assigned by member countries in rotation, for set periods. They are trained and certified together. NATO plans for the NRF units to remain on-call for six months at a time; these multinational forces and will train and exercise together, remaining ready to engage in intense combat if needed.²⁴ The force is scheduled to include air assets and command-and-control capabilities to support up to 200 combat sorties per day. Additionally, it will

field a brigade-sized land force element and maritime forces up to the size of a traditional NATO standing naval force.²⁵

NATO transformation will restructure its regionally based command structure into a more flexible, operationally based hierarchy with land, maritime, and air commands. NATO has thus begun to slowly change its military structure to provide more responsive forces and with a global reach. A successful Alliance is becoming a global expeditionary force. NATO has demonstrated its commitment to support global operations by assisting in national-building in the war in Iraq; by supporting the African Union in peacekeeping operations in Darfur, Sudan; and by supporting the U.S. in the War on Terrorism by contributing a NATO contingent to operations in Afghanistan.²⁶

NATO in Iraq

At NATO's 28 June 2004 Summit meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, the partner nations agreed to assist Iraq with the training of its security forces. At the request of the Iraqi Interim Government, the NATO Training Mission- Iraq (NTM-I) was established. Member nations are contributing advisors, financial contributions, donations, and equipment to this effort. NATO is involved in training, equipping, and providing technical assistance--but not in combat. NATO's objective is to assist the Iraqi government in developing the capability to address the security needs of the Iraqi people. NATO is training, mentoring, and developing mid-level and senior personnel from the Iraqi security forces both in Iraq and outside of Iraq, at various NATO schools and training centers.²⁷ Most NATO support goes to three main organizations of the Iraqi Army: the Joint Staff College, the Iraqi Military Academy, and the Iraqi Training and Doctrine Command. NATO also established an Iraqi Defense Language Institution (DLI), which

trains and advises Iraqis to develop an organic capability for teaching English to military and government personnel. DLI trains English language teachers, who are then deployed to military bases in Iraq to increase the English language skills of Iraqi military personnel. "DLI is currently looking at a strategic direction for English training,"²⁸ according to DLI Advisor Major Caroline Taylor, United Kingdom Army, NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I). This broad-based program offers instruction in general English as a basic level as well as a technical or purpose-specific English program for pilots and other technicians. "English language is critical at the moment," she said. "Training on new western equipment can't take place without it."²⁹ NTM-I has also placed teams in the Joint Operations Center in the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, in the National Operations Center, and with the Iraqi Ground Force Command as well. These teams offer classroom training in basic computer skills, along with basic officer courses.³⁰ The first Junior Staff Course began 25 September 2005, following a two-month preparation course in English and computer skills. The candidates studied a myriad of military modules under NATO supervision with competent advisors. The class also studied tactics and operations, with a general focus on counterinsurgency. After completion of this course, these young officers are ready for key staff appointments at the battalion and brigade levels.³¹

The Senior Staff Course includes students ranked from Lieutenant Colonel to Brigadier General. The course focuses on international relations, national security and defense policy, leadership, international and humanitarian law, and operational planning. Members of NTM-I helped the Iraqi Joint Staff College Directing Staff to develop the curriculum and then served as mentors, partnering with the staff and

assisting in supervising and guiding the students through the program.³² NTM-I is satisfied with the developments of the Joint Staff College. The second year of both the senior and the Junior Staff course is now underway, and the Joint Staff College is becoming an established organization, fully operational by the summer of 2008.

NATO in Darfur

This incident began in an arid and impoverished African region early in 2003 after a rebel group began attacking government targets, saying the region was being neglected by the Sudanese government in Khartoum. Indeed the Sudanese government and the pro-government Arab militias have been accused of war crimes against the region's black African population, although the United Nations (UN) has stopped short of calling it genocide. While many in the international community openly acknowledge the situation in Darfur as one of the world's gravest humanitarian crises, national governments and international organizations have failed to find an effective way to halt the atrocities. More than two million people are living in camps after fleeing more than four years from fighting in the region. They remain vulnerable without peacekeepers and humanitarian relief.³³ NATO began supporting the African Union (AU) in the Alliance's first mission in Africa.

Following a request by the AU, NATO has helped the AU expand its peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan, by providing airlift for additional AU peacekeepers into the region and by training AU personnel. The Alliance has agreed to continue its assistance--including airlift for troop rotations, as well as additional mentoring and training of peacekeepers--until 30 June 2007, in a further effort to strengthen the AU's capability to end the violence and improve the humanitarian situation in Darfur.³⁴ Since

July 2005, NATO has helped provide air transport for some 24,000 peacekeepers, along with over 500 civilian police from contributing African countries. NATO also has provided training for AU officers, mainly on how to run a multinational military headquarters and manage information effectively.³⁵ The Alliance works in close coordination and consultation with the European Union, which is also supporting the AU. Although NATO's providing air transport for peacekeepers along with military advisors, the international community is putting pressure on NATO to do more in Sudan. Recently, the Bush administration urged the NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, to encourage NATO to play a much bigger role in the region to support efforts to stop the war, to alleviate starvation, and to stop abuses of human rights.³⁶ The Bush administration also wants the number of peacekeepers to be at least doubled and probably even increased to 20,000 troops--with major assistance from NATO. A NATO Spokesman indicated that no formal request had been received from Washington. However, other NATO officials, speaking on conditions of anonymity, admit that proposal to expand the Alliance mission have met with serious political and cultural problems. Because this issue is so sensitive inside NATO, a diplomat said that neither the Sudanese government nor the AU, which has major responsibility for the existing peacekeeping mission, "want to see white, European troops coming into Sudan."³⁷

NATO in Afghanistan

Perhaps the Alliances' most challenging mission since the inception of NATO--one that will test the political will and military capabilities of NATO--is its current involvement in Afghanistan. The debate concerning NATO's role and the concerns of the wider international communities over NATO expansion have continued throughout its

expanded military activities. The expansion of its activities and geographical reach of NATO grew even further following the September 11 attacks on the U.S. On 12 September 2001, NATO members unanimously declared the terrorist attacks on the U.S. as an assault against all member states. Article V in NATO's treaty declares that an attack on any member state will be considered an attack against the entire group of NATO partners. NATO's Secretary-General George Robertson, declared that "the U.S. would receive support for military action from its 18 NATO partners if it is found the assaults were committed by foreign nationals."³⁸ While the U.S. appreciated its European allies coming to its aid in a time of crisis, NATO had just entered a realm of operations that would clearly put the Alliance on the world's center stage. From a political and military perspective, the terrorist attacks on the U.S. were the first such attack on the soil of a NATO member during its 52 years of existence.³⁹ So NATO allies became quickly involved in humanitarian operations, nation-building, and combating the war on terror. NATO has indeed accepted responsibility for supporting the global war on terror.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), NATO's first mission outside of the Euro-Atlantic area, was established to stabilize and reconstruct Afghanistan and to assist the Afghanistan Government and the international community in maintaining security within its area of operation. The German commander, Lieutenant General Norbert Van Heyst, noted the significance of this NATO mission:

During the 1990s, we saw NATO starting to take on peacekeeping duties, first in Bosnia and later in Kosovo and Macedonia. But that was limited . . . to the Euro-Atlantic region. But as of today, the Alliance will for the first time be leading an operation outside Europe, in Asia, and that is quite unique.⁴⁰

ISAF initially provided security in and around Kabul, but the mission soon expanded to other parts of the country. Then provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) became the main effort. These small teams of international civilian and military personnel help provide security and help the Afghan government extend its authority further afield. PRT members establish relationships with local authorities, support sector reform activities, and help facilitate reconstruction efforts in the provinces. Additionally, they help mediate conflicts, build and supply schools, repair roads, and support training and education initiatives.⁴¹ The PRTs are also coordinating hundreds of civil-military projects that are providing for basic human needs of Afghans and improving the quality of life in Afghanistan.

In December 2003, NATO-led ISAF troops took command of the German-led PRT in Kunduz as a pilot project. By the end of 2004, ISAF had taken command of the military components of five PRTs in the north of Afghanistan; then in mid-2005, NATO took command of four PRTs in the west. These nine PRTs cover about half of Afghanistan's territory. In the summer of 2006, ISAF troops expanded their area of operations again by taking control of four PRTs in the south, thereby expanding NATO's coverage to three-quarters of Afghanistan. In October 2006, ISAF took command of 11 PRTs in the east that had previously been led by U.S. coalition forces. This final expansion extended NATO's mission to all of Afghanistan.

Initially, ISAF numbered around 8,000 troops from 19 NATO countries.⁴² In July 2006, a NATO-led force--made up mostly of troops from Canada, Great Britain, Turkey and the Netherlands--took over military operations in the southern part of Afghanistan from a U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. NATO leaders signaled at the 2006 Riga summit

in Latvia that they could free up more troops to battle Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan if restrictions on their activities were eased to allow them to engage in combat.

President George W. Bush had called before the meeting on allies to provide more soldiers with fewer national limits for the most dangerous ground mission in NATO's 57-year history.⁴³ France, Germany, Italy, and Spain--which initially refused to provide troop support to the Taliban's heartland in south Afghanistan--promised to send help to trouble zones outside their areas in exceptional cases. Bush warned before the Riga summit that "to succeed in Afghanistan, NATO allies must provide the forces NATO military commanders require, and member nations must accept difficult assignments if we expect to be successful."⁴⁴ To date, an estimated 26,000 of the total 32,000 troops in the NATO-led ISAF are now available for combat since restrictions have been eased.

Yet NATO must do more in Afghanistan. NATO is on the world stage; their commitment and resolve to commit forces to a protracted Afghanistan War is being tested. U.S. Marine Corps General James Jones, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Operations, believes the Taliban is in a vulnerable position, ready to be defeated. He has asked for 2,500 additional NATO troops. But the major NATO countries--Turkey, France, Germany, Spain and Italy - have declined to send more because they question whether 2,500 more troops would make any significant difference in a country the size of Afghanistan, with such a difficult terrain. To complicate matters, the United States, one of NATO's staunchest allies, has occasionally questioned NATO's resolve in their support to Afghanistan. "I am not satisfied that an alliance whose members have over two million soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen cannot find the modest additional resources that have been committed for Afghanistan,"⁴⁵ U.S. Secretary of Defense,

Gates, complained to a news conference after a meeting of a separate organization of southeast European countries. Secretary Gates has reportedly written to all NATO nations asking for more support. However, the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer wants the U.S. to stop calling for more troops: "Such calls can give a false impression of a lack of solidarity among NATO allies,"⁴⁶ NATO spokesman, James Appathuari, warned. The NATO Secretary General went on to suggest that more forces will be available to ISAF to create better conditions to aid in the reconstruction and development efforts. "More money will be pledged and spent on reconstruction and development...More personnel and money will be put to training. More equipment will be donated to the Afghan National Army and Police."⁴⁷ The NATO Secretary General then went on describe to mission in Afghanistan as, "one of the most challenging tasks NATO has taken on, but one that is a critical contribution to international security."⁴⁸

Conclusion

As a military alliance, NATO became a relevant military force once the wall came down in 1991. Since then, NATO has made great strides towards transforming the alliance into an entity that will have an impact not only on the European continent, but across the globe. In the last fifteen years, NATO has taken on conflicts from peacekeeping, nation building, and combating the war on terror. Moreover, NATO's Response force was involved in providing humanitarian support during Hurricane Katrina, as well as relief assistance in India after the Tsunami disaster.

The way ahead for NATO in the short term is to show unity and resolve in Afghanistan. Many speculations and conclusions will be drawn from the alliances' efforts in Afghanistan. Politically, the U.S. has invested 50 plus years in the alliance

and is not willing to see it dissolve or not be a player in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. NATO needs to reform its decisions on unanimous consensus votes of approval before taking actions on crisis. As NATO continues to expand its membership, consensus may not be possible to attain on future missions that may require immediate responses. With the added dimension of new members with different cultures, national interest, and political views, gaining consensus may be hard to do in the future. NATO may want to look at gaining two-thirds majority votes from member nations in the future.

As the world observes all NATO actions in Afghanistan, NATO's resolve and commitment to winning the war on terror will be its litmus test. NATO's relevance as a global force is being tested in Afghanistan. It is vital that the U.S. does not allow NATO to fail.

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