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NATO, OSCE, AND REGIONAL SECURITY ISSUES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS*

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The vast space stretching from the Caucasus to Central Asia is a region where the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been very active. In 1996 the OSCE 'Troika' of foreign ministers paid a visit to all five Central Asian states. In September 1997, the OSCE chairman-in-office, the Danish foreign minister, Niels Helweg Petersen, came to Tashkent, Tbilisi and Dushanbe. The High Commissioner on National Minorities has visited Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan. The OSCE also maintains missions in Tadjikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Chechnya and the OSCE Liaison Office for Central Asia in Tashkent. Likewise, NATO Partnership for Peace activity in this region has been stepped up, and it is addressing post-conflict rehabilitation in the region which could also serve as an important test of the NATO-Russian relationship.

RISKS

OSCE and NATO attention to the Caucasus and Central Asia, despite the major and ongoing challenge in post-conflict rehabilitation in the former Yugoslavia, is hardly surprising, for the challenges and opportunities in various areas of this region are well known:

- Independence left no instructions as to how to build legitimate institutions underpinning nationhood, recognising the different traditions and historical experience of the nations in the region
- Economic reform, in some cases impeded by war, has still to reach the stage of free and competitive markets and eliminating disparities in the wealth among the population
- Implementation of OSCE commitments in areas such as free association, free media, rule of law, and tolerance towards peoples belonging to national minorities—let alone refraining from the threat or use of force—must be strengthened
- The rich natural resources of the region may invite competition rather than co-operation among states both within and outside the region

Different views about regional co-operation may impede common solutions to common problems

- The environment poses a very major challenge, with urgent attention required to the Aral Sea
- Internal and cross-border conflicts, including the crisis in Afghanistan, remain a major security

threat and could turn some areas of the region into arenas of religious and political extremism and social instability

- Organised crime and narcotics trafficking have serious social repercussions
- Border disputes, if left unresolved, could paralyse progress towards democracy, displace additional thousands of people, and prevent all nations and peoples from benefiting from the unhindered extraction of energy resources—although experience shows that a nation's natural resource wealth alone is not sufficient to bring prosperity and democracy, and can make it vulnerable to external pressures
- And, apparently, some still live in the past; they cannot yet put behind them a yearning for zones of influence or the idea of achieving security at the expense of their neighbours.

All of these challenges cannot be addressed by any one country alone, and hence the role of the OSCE. The OSCE itself is not a source of financial assistance, nor can it enforce peace. But, through active engagement in the OSCE, the nations of this region can bring their concerns to the attention of the 54 OSCE participating states, from which can flow practical solutions. The OSCE recognises that security today is no longer synonymous with military issues, but must be comprehensive in scope. It can also play a co-ordinating role among different organisations in trying to achieve solutions.

MUTUALLY REINFORCING INSTITUTIONS AND PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE

Among the interested organizations is the Atlantic Alliance and its Partnership for Peace programme, in which all the nations of the region except Tadjikistan participate. This is why we have encouraged the active participation of nations in this region in the Partnership for Peace, and why we support the Central Asian Battalion, the CENTRASBAT, which began forming in 1996 among Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Uzbekistan.

This multinational unit has just completed the peacekeeping exercise CENTRASBAT '97, held in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Fourteen hundred troops took part, with Danish, Turkish, Latvian, Russian, Georgian and American forces participating alongside the CENTRASBAT forces.

This was, by the way, the longest distance airborne operation in history, with 540 American and CENTRASBAT troops flying in from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the United States.

Exercises such as this not only help develop inter-operability so that we can work together in support of peace, but develop security on a joint, transparent and co-operative basis in this region, in the same way that the NATO integrated military structure has helped avoid a return to a re-nationalization of defence policy while allowing for political consultations on a constant basis.

But Partnership for Peace is not only about exercises or operations such as in Bosnia, where 15 partners have joined NATO nations. It can help share our experience in developing democratic civilian authority over the military which is so essential to stability. Moreover, through the NATO Fellowship Programme your academicians and scientists can establish contacts with other nations. The recently established "Science for Peace" programme is intended to assist partner countries in their transition to marketoriented and environmentally-sound economies, for projects having a duration of up to five years.

In May 1997, NATO came even closer to its partners by establishing an information and documentation office in Kiev, Ukraine, the first of its kind. Why not consider similar arrangements for this region as well?

In addition, in October 1997, the first-ever dedicated discussion on the Caucasus will take place in the newly-established

Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which brings NATO nations and the 28 partners together. This focus on particular regions will be continued, including with respect to Central Asia.

NATO has also always played a key role in the CFE negotiations. It can thus make a direct contribution to resolving current uncertainties about treaty-limited equipment in the Caucasus.

As such, NATO, together with other organizations complements the work OSCE is performing in the region, which ranges over encouraging political dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes, heading off inter-ethnic tensions, monitoring human rights and the media, assisting in economic legislation, facilitating the return of refugees and delivery of humanitarian assistance, and yes, even the regrettable task of assisting in identifying the victims of war. The work of the OSCE, in short, involves conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and building democracy through the use of a wide and evolving array of instruments and working with other organizations.

NEW DIRECTIONS

It is possibly in the Caucasus and Central Asia that we can provide fresh political impetus for OSCE, building on its major involvement in the former Yugoslavia and Albania.

One such area will be contributing to the peaceful resolution of disputes following the important signing of the inter-Tadjik peace agreement. The OSCE mission to Tadjikistan is prepared to work closely with the Commission on National Reconciliation and will join the Contact Group, which also includes the United Nations and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

We all know that the peace in Tadjikistan remains imperfect.

Armed attacks and hostage taking still occur. But this means not letting up on, but rather redoubling, the international effort to make the peace agreement work.

Another area concerns what may be progress in the work of the so-called Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh. Surely it cannot be beyond the ability of the parties to reach an understanding after so many years of conflict and tension, although fortunately a cease-fire has held since 1994. But should they require a multinational presence to oversee peace, the OSCE has been preparing since 1992 a possible peacekeeping mission, in addition to its involvement in the negotiations.

A possible role for OSCE could also be to replace or supplement Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. Whether or not a historic breakthrough may soon be reached on a settlement in the form of some kind of confederative arrangement remains to be seen. But an international presence may be required to oversee that settlement and, as in Bosnia, assist in the return of refugees. President Eduard Shevardnadze called for such an international presence to replace the all-Russian force. Again, just as with the operation in Bosnia, multinational forces can demonstrate not only international attention to a dispute but lend impartiality to the mission—not neutrality in the face of a

breach of the peace, but in the composition of the force.

Bringing a lasting peace, or at least predictable stability, to both regions—Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia—would serve as an important test of the NATO-Russia Act. We have affirmed again and again that security is indivisible. The operation in Bosnia has shown that we can work together, but Bosnia is not the only region that should demand our attention.

It is not a question as some Russian politicians suggest, of "squeezing Russia out" of the CIS. It is, rather the principle that no one should be left out. As the document of the 1996 Lisbon OSCE

Summit states: "no State, organization or grouping can have any superior responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the region, or regard any part of the OSCE region as its sphere of influence."

And through such multinational co-operation to bring stability in this region, we could check any yearnings for the so-called 'Great Game' of the nineteenth century among the Great Powers for influence in this region.

Another idea might be OSCE sponsoring talks to help settle the delimitation of the Caspian Sea. The prolonged dispute among governments and the oil companies is holding up fully opening the vast energy resources of the region. This delay carries inadmissible overtones of a new Great Game, not in terms of territorial acquisition but of zones of political, economic or military influence.

We should also consider what role OSCE might have in addressing the ecological disaster of the Aral Sea and management of waterways, again in line with our comprehensive concept of security.

Finally, we could deal more aggressively with the menace of international drug trafficking and organised crime, which is a threat to our security in the broad and immediate sense.

DEMOCRACY IS THE ONLY FORM OF GOVERNMENT

But beyond its operational role, OSCE is fundamentally about shared democratic values that, if respected, can help prevent conflict in the first place. Nations in the region should take full advantage of OSCE possibilities, because that Organisation exists not for some but for all of its 54 participating states. A wider sense of community must be encouraged even as we all recognise that the transition to democracy and the market economy is being carried out amidst difficulties and under varying regional conditions.

Central to the OSCE vision of democracy as the only form of government is the role of parliament and a loyal opposition. This cannot be built overnight, and even today there is a great variety in the competences of parliaments in the OSCE region on security issues.

Extracting information from government on security issues is hardly an easy task. The United Kingdom parliament does not even ratify treaties except for those relating to European Union issues. Indeed, no legislature in the OSCE region enjoys the prerogatives of and resources available to the United States Congress. There is no one model to emulate. Nevertheless, even though our practices may vary, without a well-functioning and informed parliament, democracy can prove no more than a formality.

Likewise, inter-parliamentary organizations can prove invaluable in advancing the tasks of the OSCE. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the North Atlantic Assembly, and the Western European Union Parliamentary Assembly all play a valuable role in bringing parliamentarians together to exchange experiences and advise governments. The parliamentary dimension too has a role in making us better aware of regional concerns and sharing experience.

Thus, there are many directions which the OSCE, NATO and other organizations, including regional arrangements such as Black Sea Economic Co-operation, can and should pursue. Above all, we must redouble our efforts to act upon the concept of indivisible security, and be clear that no area of the OSCE can be considered a special zone of responsibility for any single state or organization.

*This article is based on a presentation to the OSCE parliamentary seminar on 'Regional Security and Political, Economic, Social and Humanitarian Issues in Central Asia and the Caucasus', held in Tashkent, 23-25 September 1997.