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A SURVEY ON CURRENT MAJOR NATO ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

This study is based on a survey¹ conducted among the participants of Senior Course 96, which was held between February and July 2000 at the NATO Defence College. This course is organised every six months to provide strategic training for senior officials from the military and government branches of NATO and Partnership countries. Senior officials are selected from among those who are or will likely be working on NATO-related work either in their national services or at NATO headquarters.

As they are supposed to hold senior posts in NATO works, their views on leading NATO issues are of practical value in contributing to assessment studies on the future of the Alliance. Thus, a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions relating to major NATO issues was brought to the attention of 81 senior officials, of whom 10 were from Partnership countries.² They replied on the basis of anonymity.

Based on their replies,³ this study will analyse findings on major NATO issues, categorised as follows: the relevance of NATO; the process of enlargement; NATO-Russia relations; the USA's importance for NATO; and developments in European security and defence. The aim of this study is not to be exhaustive but rather to provide food for thought.

ANALYSIS OF THE REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

NATO's Relevance under Present Circumstances

Last year marked the fiftieth anniversary of NATO. Throughout the Cold War era NATO ensured the freedom of its members against the Soviet threat and prevented war. In this process, the Alliance, on the one hand, promoted co-operation with the Soviet Bloc, which later led to détente, while, on the other, remained fully committed to collective defence. In so doing, NATO played an indispensable role in ending the East-West confrontation.

The end of the Cold War unavoidably raised questions about the necessity of NATO as military alliances normally dissolve once their common enemy has been defeated. However, time attested to the contrary as NATO assumed perhaps a more demanding task in the face of the emergence of newly democratic countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in former USSR territories. In the aftermath of the demise of the ideological divide NATO took the necessary steps through its

Strategic Concept of 1991 to reconcile the West with the East.

This effort was further manifested with its Partnership policy, which aimed to expand security over a region redefined as the Euro-Atlantic area. This partnership policy brought NATO together with Central and Eastern European countries as well as with ex-Soviet countries, including the Russian Federation, under a co-operative framework, both political and military in nature. It is remarkable that this partnership policy also attracted the attention of all neutral states in Europe.

In this process, the Euro-Atlantic community has also begun to face new security risks ranging from ethnic conflicts to the mass movement of peoples. Today, in a world where things have become increasingly more transboundary and interdependent owing to the effects of globalisation, any incident in a country or a region, be it a natural disaster or ethnic conflict or act of terrorism, easily affects the security of the whole Euro-Atlantic area. Due to their magnitude and the impact they can generate, such problems would certainly require states to take joint action. This is what led to the new Strategic Concept in 1999, which expresses NATO's resolve to safeguard common security interests in an environment of unpredictable change while remaining committed to collective defence. According to the Strategic Concept, the security of the Alliance remains subject to a variety of military and non-military risks, which are multidirectional and often difficult to predict.⁴ Now it is understood that, besides collective defence, the Alliance should also be prepared, in the sense of non-Article 5 operations, to tackle such risks threatening its security.

Under these circumstances, what might NATO face in future? This was the first question in the questionnaire. 40 percent thought that the future of NATO would not be different from the present one. 30 percent were optimistic about the future of the Alliance and the remaining 30 percent were equally pessimistic. Partnership respondents were understandably more confident about the future of NATO (55 percent) as they hoped for a better NATO.

Respondents were also asked whether the present formation of NATO was satisfactory as a whole. However, only 52 percent of the replies of NATO respondents was affirmative. Almost two-thirds of those who found it unsatisfactory argued that NATO would better focus on tackling security risks in a way that it would be able to react to such threats with military means when necessary. On the other hand, only 10 percent supported the view that NATO should confine itself only to the defence of NATO territories against military threats.

Respondents were moreover asked a provocative question: is Article 5 of the North-Atlantic Treaty still vital for NATO members? This Article relates to the commitment of the Alliance and its members to collective defence in case of an armed attack against any ally. Almost all respondents (99 percent) replied in favour of the preservation of this article.

Furthermore, respondents were asked about security risks facing NATO and measures to tackle them. The respondents listed the security risks for NATO in the following order of importance:

- Terrorism derived from ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism,
- Ethnic conflicts,
- Organised crime,
- Mass movement of populations for military and political reasons or due to natural disasters,
- Religious fundamentalism,
- Bio-chemical warfare,

- Nuclear proliferation and easy access to nuclear ammunition due to a lack of control in ex-USSR territories, and
- Environmental disasters.

Almost 80 percent of the respondents considered terrorism, ethnic conflicts and organised crime the three most important security risks facing NATO. However, the Partnership respondents apparently were much more worried about nuclear weapons as a security risk as they placed this fourth in their replies.

When asked whether NATO is able to tackle these risks if they threaten the security of the Alliance and of the Euro-Atlantic region, only half of the NATO respondents said 'yes'. However, this percentage was higher (65 percent) among the Partnership respondents. Moreover, again only half of the affirmative replies supported the argument that NATO should counter all these risks. The remaining half thought that NATO could tackle properly only some of these risks.

On the other hand, when asked whether NATO should deploy military measures when necessary, as a last resort, to counter such risks, 70 percent of respondents said 'yes'.

Taking military measures against threats to the Alliance and to Euro-Atlantic security has always been a controversial issue. In this context, NATO's Kosovo air campaign was a significant development. This campaign was a NATO military operation without a UN mandate and it was against a sovereign country where gross human rights violations and the killing of innocent people were taking place. The then Secretary-General of NATO said after the launch of this air campaign that the use of force was the only way to prevent more human suffering and more repression and violence against civilians.⁵

This operation invoked a great deal of controversy as to the necessity of obtaining UN approval in such cases. In this context, it was noteworthy that the UN Secretary-General stated in the early days of the Kosovo operation that the UN charter should never be a source of comfort or justification for those guilty of gross and shocking violations of human rights.⁶

Notwithstanding the argument about whether military action without UN Security Council (UNSC) approval is legal according to international law, the Kosovo operation constitutes an example of an instance allowed under the UN Charter; namely of a regional organisation resorting to military action in the form of a peace support operation against a sovereign country without UNSC approval. However, it seems such an operation can only be invoked under the following conditions:

- Inaction of the UNSC due to the practice of veto power,
- Failure of all peaceful and diplomatic measures to stop these violations,
- Gross and massive human rights violations leading to the killing of non-combatants in the country in question that creates a situation endangering international peace and security.

Against this background, respondents were asked whether such operations are justified, regardless of the issue of legality. 70 percent of the NATO respondents said 'yes' and almost 90 percent of the affirmatives insisted that such operations should be repeated whenever necessary. This percentage dropped to 70 among the Partnership respondents, for the possible reason that they might have feared such an operation against their countries in future.

As mentioned earlier, NATO at present operates in a region called the Euro-Atlantic area, which

both borders on and includes several regions of potential security risks. Thus, respondents were duly asked to list the regions they considered geo-strategically important for NATO in terms of security. From the replies, the Balkans stood out as the first region and it was significantly ahead of others. The South Mediterranean and the Caucasus formed the second group. They were attached almost equal importance. The third group comprised the Baltic and the Middle East. They were close to the second but far from the last group, which consisted of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Far East and Central Asia.

NATO's Enlargement

NATO's recent enlargement process is in fact the direct and logical result of its current policy of reconciliation with the countries of the ex-Soviet Bloc and of the former USSR. With a view to ensuring the evolution of Euro-Atlantic security, NATO has extended the hand of co-operation to these countries and assured them of NATO's open door policy on membership.⁷

At present, the pending question is to what extent NATO should enlarge. Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty reads:

"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..."

However, whether the term 'European' implies any geographical limitation to NATO membership is open to further discussion.

At present, NATO conducts its enlargement policy through the Membership Action Plan, which sets certain criteria for aspirant countries on the basis of self-selection and self-differentiation.⁸ Despite the reaffirmation in Washington of the open door policy, there are circles opposed to further enlargement. However, replies to the questionnaire showed that three-quarters of the NATO respondents supported enlargement. Naturally, this percentage was higher among Partnership respondents. It is interesting that enlargement was supported as much by respondents who were optimistic about the future of NATO as by those who were not.

Most of those in favour of enlargement (80 percent) were eager to see the aspirant countries in NATO. Two-thirds of those supporting the membership of the aspirant countries were in favour of all aspirants while the rest were selective. Among the aspirant countries, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania gained the most support. Another interesting fact was that those opposed to the Baltic countries were twice as numerous as those in favour of these countries' membership.

Furthermore, of the remaining respondents who were in favour of enlargement for other countries, 85 percent supported the non-NATO EU members that were also Partnership countries. The rest (15 percent) were in favour of the Caucasian countries.

NATO-Russia Relations

The Russian Federation as the successor of the USSR has inevitably become the focal point of NATO in the Alliance's new policy of bringing East-West tension to an enduring end under the Euro-Atlantic security structure. It was clear from the very beginning that such security architecture

could not be viable without the Russians onboard.

However, the regular partnership programmes such as the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC), replaced later on by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) did not attract any enthusiasm from the Russian side. Yet, as other former Soviet Bloc and ex-USSR countries joined the Partnership, Russia, too, albeit reluctantly, followed suit. However, the Russians were always keen to have a more privileged status with NATO, based on a full strategic partnership. Thus, it is argued that the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which set up a Permanent Joint Council, was the outcome of a compromise between NATO and Russia. This Council is a forum where NATO and Russia come together to consult each other on various issues regarding security and is a tool that helps keep Russia engaged in the Partnership. Yet, as Russia wanted formal joint decision-making powers on NATO policies regarding the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, this structure, which gives neither such status nor a veto right to Russia, was argued to be unsatisfactory. Moreover, NATO's military operation in Kosovo put Russia in a very delicate situation as NATO's use of force in circumventing the UN system left Russia with no influence in matters relating to Euro-Atlantic security and constituted a great blow to the international weight of Russia as a former superpower. All these led to the nadir of relations between NATO and Russia.

Today, after the strained relations caused by the Kosovo operation, normalisation in NATO-Russia relationship is underway since Russia has resumed its co-operation in the framework of the Founding Act. For NATO's part, consolidating and institutionalising its dialogue with Russia remains essential. However, as the NATO Secretary-General once stated, there is a suspicion in some circles that NATO cannot build a relationship with Russia on real trust and co-operation, as opposed to mutual suspicion.⁹ The search is on for a way to have better relations between NATO and Russia. 60 percent of NATO respondents regarded present co-operation between NATO and Russia as unsatisfactory. This percentage was even higher (85 percent) among Partnership respondents.

When asked what should be done in this regard, 80 percent were in favour of more engagement in political and security affairs. Three-quarters were, however, more willing for security co-operation rather than political engagement with Russia.

On the other hand, only 20 percent supported an adaptation to the present formation towards military engagement between Russia and NATO. However, Partnership respondents were more supportive in this regard. This difference is understandable because NATO members are not as willing as the Partnership countries to share the Alliance's military doctrine and formation with its former enemy, whereas Partnership countries think such an engagement would help control Russia's military ambitions.

Importance of the USA for NATO

It has long been accepted that the United States remains the cornerstone of collective defence for NATO members. In the Cold War era, when the nuclear threat and its deterrence prevailed, the US commitment to the defence of Europe was vital. Similarly, in the post-Cold War period, the relevance of the United States for Europe remains as high as it was previously. The United States is militarily superior to all European countries, individually and collectively. In this respect, it suffices to say that European NATO members' collective spending on defence is only around 60 percent of that for the US.

However, relations between the USA and the Europeans have been uneasy with both sides criticising each other for not doing enough for Alliance's security.

Additionally, over the years, the growing competition between the US and the EU countries in economic matters and the EU's international policies as a power capable of using its strength by any means available, seem to have aggravated feelings in this uneasy relationship. Yet, given its superiority in military technology and manpower, the United States will likely remain the cornerstone of the collective defence and security of all NATO members at least for the foreseeable future. It is commonly understood that European security and peace can be best maintained by active US participation therein. Similarly, the active participation of NATO allies in responses to emerging security challenges in and beyond Europe will be essential to the US's vital interests as well.

In view of the above, respondents were asked whether they considered the US commitment indispensable to the protection of security and defence for European NATO members. The answer was overwhelmingly affirmative (85 percent). Similarly, 95 percent valued as crucially important the United States' provision of nuclear deterrence in NATO for all NATO members under Article 5.

Developments in European Security and Defence

For a long time, the Alliance has witnessed the US and European's continuing criticisms of each other. The United States has criticised the Europeans for not being committed enough to their own security and defence in terms of money and manpower. On the other hand, the Europeans blamed the US administration for being dominant, if not hegemonic, in shaping the Alliance's priorities and for threatening them with de-coupling, whenever questioned by European members. Nevertheless, a common understanding has prevailed that the European allies should do more for their own security and defence in Europe, not only for their own sake but also for the sake of the whole Alliance. In other words, Europeans should together form the European pillar of the Alliance.

This rationale finally led to the announcement of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) in 1994. ESDI was in fact the result of efforts to enable the European allies to take greater responsibility for their common security and defence, thus strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance. In this process, the Western European Union (WEU) was entrusted with the task of ESDI, thereby forming the European pillar of the Alliance. However, at the EU's Helsinki Summit in 1999, the EU members took a decision to absorb the tasks of the WEU. Thus, as a corollary to this decision, it seems only natural that the EU should also continue to play the WEU's role as the European pillar of the Alliance in ESDI, alongside its own security and defence objectives which are handled within its Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP).

However, this amalgamation is bound with many uncertainties at present, putting coherence at risk within the Alliance. The first question lies in how, within the evolving EU's common security and defence posture, ESDI can be preserved and strengthened as the sole tool for a sound European pillar of NATO. Here, the established relations between NATO and the WEU and the WEU's acquis concerning the role of this organisation in ESDI, are of fundamental importance. Because the EU has assumed the WEU's role in respect of the European pillar of the Alliance, relations between the EU and NATO in this area should be built upon the WEU acquis and the mechanisms set up between the WEU and NATO. This also relates to the position of non-EU European allies of NATO vis-à-vis the EU's policies. Naturally, they expect that their vested rights in the WEU concerning ESDI, as well as

other European security and defence matters, be equally recognised by the EU.

Additionally, it is also crucial to determine how co-ordination between NATO and the EU can be best achieved through their respective European security and defence policies, as otherwise the lack of sound co-ordination could lead to duplication or competition in this regard. In other words, the famous three D's (de-coupling, discrimination and duplication) should be avoided in the evolving European security and defence posture. At present, necessary deliberations between the two organisations are underway with a view to formulating modalities for co-operation in respect of European security and defence affairs. However, the outcome is not yet possible to reckon. As the Secretary-General of NATO once stated, this issue is one of the real challenges facing NATO.¹⁰

In this complex and crucial issue, respondents were first asked about their opinion on the relevance of ESDI for the Alliance. Almost three-quarters of them (72 percent) considered ESDI useful for the future of NATO as it would help the European allies to shoulder responsibility better for their own security and defence.

Respondents were also asked whether, as ESDI in practice develops within the EU, it can be viable only if the EU gives all European members of NATO equal rights in matters relating to ESDI. 71 percent answered affirmatively. This percentage was higher (80 percent) among the Partnership respondents.

Then, the question on the CESDP issue was asked. Only 60 percent of respondents considered it realistic for the EU to develop an autonomous military capacity for its own security interests. Notwithstanding peculiarities, the EU's efforts in this field are, in brief, based on the development of a military posture with the creation of a joint military force that can be deployed, inter alia, in case of security threats facing the EU.

When asked whether this development would risk coherence within the Alliance and thus the future of NATO, the same 60 percent said 'no'. In other words, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that autonomous military capability was realistic and not dangerous for NATO.

Respondents were also asked whether the evolving military power of the EU should be confined to Petersberg tasks or whether they might be also used as a military tool in a search for the EU's global interests in future. Petersberg tasks are defined in general as crisis management and rescue type operations. However, they also include, inter alia, EU military operations for the restoration of law and order in any country at the request of that country's authorities. Opinions of the respondents on this question were divided equally.

Here, questions were also asked on how the attitudes of the US and non-EU European allies towards the EU's policies on security and defence might affect the whole process.

First, it was asked whether the EU might use the US's proposed National Missile Defence initiative as a justification to further develop its own autonomous military power as well as its own security and defence policy. However, the majority (60 percent) of the respondents did not agree with this argument.

Second, they were asked whether the EU might use the possibility of non-EU NATO members without equal decision-making rights blocking the use of NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led

operations as a justification for furthering its own military power and posturing. Eighty percent of respondents said 'yes' to such a possibility. In other words, the respondents were overwhelmingly of the opinion that such blocking would be counter-productive for the future of NATO, as the EU members of NATO might turn to the EU for their security and military policies.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall analysis of the data portrays a typology that can be called 'NATO-Man at present'. This typology reflects a common person who has not yet made up his mind¹¹ about the future of NATO as he thinks something better or worse or nothing can happen in future in respect to the Alliance. Similarly, this person is not yet sure whether the present structure of NATO is satisfactory or not.

This feeling of uncertainty is also evident on NATO's relations with Russia. Although NATO-Man considers it essential to keep Russia in the evolving security architecture shaped by the Alliance, he, however, seems unwilling to extend that to include his old rival in military issues.

NATO-Man is not confident enough about the evolving European security and defence initiative. Most regard ESDI as useful for the future of NATO, provided it ensures equal status for all European members of NATO. However, NATO-Man is not certain that the EU can adequately fulfil the task of ESDI for the benefit of the Alliance, alongside its own CESDP. In the main, this is because he is unsure whether the development of an EU autonomous military capability would be productive or counterproductive to the common efforts of the Alliance for Euro-Atlantic security. Similarly, he is not in a position to see how the EU's military power can be used in future. He thinks it can be used either for only Petersberg tasks or as a military tool in pursuit of the EU's global interests.

Beside these ambiguities, NATO-Man¹² seems quite confident about the following points:

First, he thinks NATO should resort to military action, albeit as a last resort, in the form of peace support operations whenever necessary in the face of risks threatening the security of the Alliance. Similarly, in this pursuit, Kosovo type operations should be repeated even without a UN mandate.

Second, enlargement should continue despite the fact that it is not clear whether further enlargement would require modifications to NATO structures.

Third, the engagement of the United States should continue in European security and defence for the sake of the whole Alliance. Similarly, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty should remain intact, as it is the indispensable component of the Alliance.

Last, but not least, NATO-Man is almost convinced that if the EU is to carry out the task of ESDI along with its CESDP, it should provide equal status, in its work on ESDI to all European allies of NATO regardless of whether or not they are also EU members. He is also certain that the attempts of non-EU NATO members that do not have equal rights in EU decision-making of its operations, to block the use of NATO assets and capabilities by the EU would be counterproductive for the Alliance's future. This is because such an obstacle might encourage some EU members of NATO to turn their face to the EU on security and defence matters and give them further justification to develop their own military power within the EU.

In view of this, one can see that NATO-Man is a person in ambivalence. However, this seems normal as ambiguities and uncertainties surround many important NATO issues at present. Hence,

NATO-Man corresponds to the present NATO, both being uncertain about future possibilities and in adjustment to the evolving security climate in the Euro-Atlantic area.

No doubt, NATO has entered the new millennium as an Alliance in transition. It remains a voluntary association of sovereign states committed to collective defence, should any member be attacked. Furthermore, the Alliance is assuming additional roles at the epicentre of an emerging Euro-Atlantic security structure. How much and in which direction NATO should engage itself in this structure are the key issues confronting the Alliance at present. In this process, beside the sine qua non of the Alliance, such as Article 5, the US's engagement, a strong European pillar, etc., other adaptations are necessary to come into line with the evolving Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The whole edifice of hopes for a better security environment lies before the Alliance and its members as well as its partners. In this process, approaching matters with common sense and vigilance will be highly instrumental. It is obvious that NATO cannot afford to indulge in the comforting, but also deceptive illusion of the present era.

References

- 1 For this survey the author feels obliged to express his sincere thanks for the understanding shown by the College administration and for the close co-operation of his course fellows who kindly replied to the questionnaire.
 - 2 Course members of Partnership countries were from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Finland, Georgia, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine.
 - 3 The data, which is the focus of this study, are based on the replies of the course members from NATO countries. However, replies of Partnership course members are also mentioned if they differ significantly from those NATO course members.
 - 4 The Alliance's Strategic Concept, approved by the Heads of State and Government at the Washington Summit of 1999, para. 20.
 - 5 Press Statement by Secretary-General of NATO, 23 March 1999, NATO Press Release (1999) 040.
 - 6 Bring, Owe, 'Should NATO take the Lead in Formulating a Doctrine on Humanitarian Intervention?', NATO Review, Vol. 47, No. 3, Autumn 1999, p. 25.
 - 7 'NATO's Open Door Policy', Readers' Guide to the NATO Summit at Washington, NATO Office of Information and Press, 1999, p. 26.
 - 8 Ibid., p. 84.
 - 9 Secretary-General's speech at the 10th International Antalya Conference on Security and Co-operation, Antalya, 10 March 2000, www.nato.int/docu/speech/2000.
 - 10 See Secretary-General's speech at the 10th International Antalya Conference.
 - 11 Judged by the issues that no more than 60 percent of respondents supported.
 - 12 These are issues that 70 percent of more of respondents supported.
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