

NATO: Chicago and Beyond

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Hearing on NATO: Chicago and Beyond

NATO has demonstrated impressive resilience and solidarity since the Cold War's end. Indeed, it has defied history; alliances usually disband when the collective threat that brought them into being disappears.

Instead, NATO has not only survived, but markedly expanded its membership and undertaken major missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya. As the Cold War came to a close, few observers could have predicted that NATO, twenty years later, would be in the midst of an extended operation in Afghanistan while simultaneously carrying out a successful air campaign to topple the Libyan government.

The durability of NATO stems from the reality that the United States and Europe remain one another's best partner. To be sure, differing perspectives and priorities regularly test transatlantic solidarity. But teamwork between the United States and Europe remains vital to addressing most international challenges.

As President Obama affirmed prior to the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, “our relationship with our European allies and partners is the cornerstone of our engagement with the world, and a catalyst for global cooperation. With no other region does the United States have such a close alignment of values, interests, capabilities, and goals.”

NATO’s endurance beyond the Cold War’s end makes clear that it is much more than a military alliance. *NATO is perhaps the primary institution responsible for preserving the coherence and effectiveness of the West as a community of shared values and interests.* That function, reinforced by transatlantic cooperation in a multiplicity of other forms, will only grow more important over time as the primacy long enjoyed by the Atlantic democracies gives way to a redistribution of global power.

Its impressive track record notwithstanding, the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago represents a moment that demands strategic ambition and vision, not complacency. As many parts of the developing world continue to experience economic and political awakenings, NATO must serve as an anchor of liberal values and democratic institution and as a key venue for managing a global landscape in transition. Most emerging security challenges lie well beyond alliance territory, making NATO’s ability to serve as a global security hub and to contribute to stability in other regions fundamental to its future relevance.

The missions in Afghanistan and Libya represent important steps in this direction, but they also reveal the profound political and operational difficulties confronting the prospect of a “global NATO.” Accordingly, even as the alliance invests in its capacities for military intervention, it should recognize that one of its key contributions to security “out of area” will be facilitating regional integration and building regional capacity. NATO’s ability to serve as a global security hub also depends on addressing the issue of burden-sharing; Europe must strengthen its own ability to project power if it is to remain an attractive partner for the United States. Finally, NATO members must be mindful of the reality that purpose and strength abroad require purpose and strength at home. Ultimately, the welfare and efficacy of the Western alliance depends upon restoring economic and political solvency on both sides of the Atlantic.

NATO in the Wider World

During the Cold War, the West (including Japan) collectively accounted for roughly 75 percent of global economic output. Today, it accounts for about 50 percent, and that share will decline steadily as emerging economies continue to enjoy impressive rates of growth. Goldman Sachs expects the collective GDP of the top four developing countries -- Brazil, China, India, and Russia -- to match that of the G-7 countries within about two decades. This ongoing shift in wealth is already affecting military expenditures. For the first time in the modern era, Asia now spends more on defense than Europe.

The international system is headed into uncharted waters; Western nations need a common strategy to address this tectonic shift in the global landscape. The 21st century will hardly be the first time that multiple centers of power embraced quite different models of governance and commerce: during the 17th century, for example, the Holy Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, Mughal Empire, Qing Dynasty, and Tokugawa Shogunate each ran its affairs according to its own distinct rules and culture. But these powers were largely self-contained; they rarely interacted with each other and thus had no need to agree on a set of common rules to guide their relations.

This century, in contrast, will mark the first time in history in which multiple versions of order and modernity coexist in an interconnected world; no longer will the West anchor globalization. Multiple power centers, and the competing political and economic systems they represent, will vie on a more level playing field. Effective global governance will require forging common ground amid an equalizing distribution of power and rising ideological diversity.

NATO is by no means the only available venue for coordinating Western efforts to manage this transition, but its political and military institutions and its time-tested mechanisms for building consensus among the Atlantic democracies are tremendous assets. The fact that almost 20 leaders of non-NATO countries plan to attend the Chicago Summit attests to the alliance's growing reach. As the European Union deepens its collective character and its new foreign policy institutions, teamwork between NATO and the EU can guide the West's engagement with the wider world. The top priority is forging a united front on countering

emerging threats and on making the adaptations to international institutions and rules needed to preserve cooperative stability amid global change.

Although it is impossible to predict where the next NATO mission might take place, the alliance will surely continue to play a direct role in addressing security challenges well beyond its borders. At the same time, the idea of a “global NATO” is a bridge too far. Trying to turn the alliance into an all-purpose vehicle of choice for military operations around the world would likely lead to its demise, not revitalization. In many parts of the world, a NATO-led mission might lack legitimacy among local parties, compromising its chances of success. Efforts to turn NATO into a global alliance would also saddle it with unsustainable burdens and insurmountable political divides.

The missions in Afghanistan and Libya amply demonstrated the readiness of NATO to take on missions well beyond alliance territory. NATO also maintains ongoing operations in Kosovo, off the Horn of Africa (Operation Ocean Shield), and in the Mediterranean (Operation Active Endeavour). But such missions may well prove to be more the exception than the rule. In Afghanistan, NATO members have demonstrated impressive solidarity. The mission, however, has not been an unqualified success and member governments now face strong domestic pressures to bring the operation to an end. It is doubtful that NATO would countenance a similar mission for a long time to come. In Libya, NATO was more successful in meeting its objectives, and Europeans demonstrated their ability to take the lead (although not without significant U.S. participation). But the Libya operation does not represent a model for the future. Many aspects of the intervention in Libya would be difficult to replicate, including strong support in the Arab world and approval by the UN Security Council. Due to Libya’s proximity to European air bases, European members of NATO were able to carry out missions that would be much more difficult in theaters farther afield. The impediments to military intervention in Syria are a case in point.

NATO should of course keep its integrated military structure in fine working order; unforeseen missions can emerge with little warning, often requiring urgent action. But some of NATO’s most important and effective contributions to global security are likely to come in the form of capacity-building rather than war-fighting. In this regard, NATO should aim to do for other regions what it has done for the Atlantic

community: advance the cause of security and peace through political/military integration and building regional capability. Put differently, NATO should help other regions help themselves through training, assistance, exercises, and exchanges. Some of most important security institutions of the 21st century are likely to be regional ones – such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asia States, and the Union of South American Nations. NATO should be investing in the efficacy of these regional bodies.

In pursuit of this objective, NATO should intensify and expand the numerous programs it already maintains to advance these goals, including:

- Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace: engages 22 European partner countries in multilateral and bilateral relations with NATO.
- Mediterranean Dialogue: engages Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia in NATO activities.
- Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: provides training and exchanges with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.
- NATO Partners: engages non-NATO members in NATO operations, including Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mongolia.
- Support for African Union: provides NATO assistance to the AU mission in Somalia and to AU peacekeeping capacity.
- Training Mission in Iraq (2004-2011): trained Iraq's armed forces.

As NATO deepens its engagement in areas beyond its territorial boundaries, it should address potential changes to its decision-making procedures to ensure its effectiveness. In the absence of the unifying threat posed by the Soviet Union, NATO solidarity is more difficult to sustain – as made clear by the inequitable division of labor in Afghanistan and the decisions by roughly half of NATO's members to abstain from participation in the Libya mission. To ensure that divergent perspectives do not become a source of paralysis, the alliance should consider moving away from a consensus-based approach to decision making. Options such as the formation of coalitions of the willing and the use of constructive abstentions – members opt out of rather than block joint action – could provide NATO the greater flexibility it needs. New

decision-making procedures would also provide the opportunity for more input from non-NATO members that participate in alliance operations.

The European Pillar

Inequitable burden sharing has strained transatlantic relations even in good economic times. Europe's military shortfalls have become even more problematic amid the global downturn. The United States is scaling back its own defense spending, making Washington more sensitive to the readiness of its partners to shoulder defense responsibilities. Nonetheless, America's European allies are slashing, not augmenting, their own defense expenditures; they now spend about 1.5 percent of their GDPs on defense, compared with over 4 percent in the United States. In addition, NATO's new missions depend heavily upon types of capability – lift, targeting, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance – that highlight Europe's military shortcomings. It is this reality that prompted former secretary of defense Robert Gates to worry that NATO's future could be “dim if not dismal.” Put simply, Europe will be of declining strategic relevance to the United States if its ability to shoulder international responsibilities continues to decline.

In light of the economic problems plaguing Europe, increases in defense spending are not likely for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the only realistic course for strengthening the European pillar of NATO is for European nations to do a much better job of aggregating their political will and resources. America's European allies need to allocate defense resources more effectively and take advantage of the institutional changes effected by the Lisbon Treaty to forge a more common and collective security policy. Europe would be not only investing in its own security, but also strengthening the integrity of the Atlantic link.

The integration of Europe has admittedly arrived at a fragile moment. The eurozone crisis has led to a renationalization of political life that is fragmenting Europe's landscape. But there are also developments on the positive side of the ledger. France's reintegration into NATO's military structure advances the prospect for better cooperation between the EU and NATO. It is conceivable, if not likely, that a “core” Europe – an inner grouping that provides for more centralized and purposeful governance – could emerge from the ongoing fiscal crisis. The deeper integration and oversight reflected in the fiscal pact could be replicated in the security realm. In addition, precisely because austerity is cutting into resource availability, it

is leading to new collective synergies – such as conventional and nuclear cooperation between Britain and France. Finally, the drawdown of U.S. troop levels in Europe and the prospect of a “pivot” to Asia should help convince Europeans that “free-riding in perpetuity” is not an option.

Building a more capable European pillar is primarily up to Europeans: they must increase their deployable military and civilian assets and ensure that the more capable institutions launched by the Lisbon Treaty are not offset by the renationalization of European politics. But the United States can help by making clear its unequivocal support for a strong Europe and engaging the EU at the collective level as its institutions mature.

Strength Starts at Home

Many analysts have fretted over the past two decades about the prospects for NATO’s survival in the post-Cold War era. Their anxiety has so far proved unnecessary; the alliance is alive and well. However, most analysts failed to foresee what today may well be the greatest threat to NATO’s future – the economic and political malaise plaguing both sides of the Atlantic. The West has entered a prolonged period of sluggish economic growth, political polarization, and self-doubt, producing a crisis of democratic governance. It cannot be accidental that the United States and Europe (as well as Japan) are simultaneously passing through a period of unprecedented economic duress and political discontent. Globalization, by reallocating wealth and making less effective the policy levers that democratic states have at their disposal, is producing a widening gap between what electorates are asking of their governments and what those governments are able to deliver.

At issue is not merely the availability of resources for defense, but the political vitality of the West. The West’s strength abroad has always depended upon its economic health and political purpose at home. The political awakening in the Middle East and the continuing rise of illiberal powers make all the more urgent the task of revitalizing the Western model of free commerce and democratic governance. Backstopped by NATO and the broader network of ties that bind North America and Europe to each other, the West needs

to ensure that it has the economic and political wherewithal to anchor the ongoing shift in the international system.

The NATO Summit in Chicago is not the place for discussion of how to stabilize the eurozone or breathe new life into the European project. Nor is it the appropriate venue for debate about restoring Western economies to full health and rebuilding popular confidence in democratic institutions.

Nonetheless, NATO is in the midst of charting its new course for the 21st century. Any serious consideration of the future of the alliance must urgently address how to restore the West's economic and political vitality. Strength starts at home; in the end, NATO can only be as strong and resilient as its individual members.