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NATO Primacy and Euroatlantic relations

- a Polish view -

Executive summary of a report prepared by

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Introduction

Internal debates and disagreements are as old as NATO itself, and could in fact be considered a sign of its vitality; more dangerous are the inertia and the uncritical approach to NATO's changing role, which allow the Alliance to be steered by external circumstances rather than by its own members. With an attitude like that the organization is not going to become stronger; on the contrary, its actions will be contested by its own member states, while the idea of sacrifices made in the name of common security will become less popular.

The most important challenge the NATO allies are facing today is restoring the link between the Alliance's overall mission and particular interests of its members. Without a common threat affecting all the allies in a comparable degree, it is indeed a serious challenge – also in the intellectual sense.

Restoring the bond between the NATO mission and the interests of the member states requires a regulation of the Alliance's political and military activities, as well as clearing up the relation between goals, methods and results. It means reconsidering the way the current political context is affecting traditional functions of the Alliance, such as the NATO primacy in Euroatlantic security and its mission of collective defense. It also involves rethinking the limits of NATO activity in the operational sense (missions, army modernization and public opinion support), as well as strategic (enlargement and partnerships) and institutional (cooperation with the EU).

I. The NATO primacy

In the present political context the questions and doubts concerning the future of the Alliance are much more numerous than the answers, so the sense of maintaining NATO's dominant position in transatlantic relations is no longer obvious. That is why the easiest way of defending NATO primacy is by pointing out the consequences of its disappearance.

First, it would deepen the already visible process of gradual fragmentation and nationalization of defense policies in Europe. “Coalitions of the willing” formula may be effective in incidental military actions and crisis management missions, but they are not something Europe’s security and defense can rest on.

Second, the Alliance as a forum for occasional cooperation can be a political instrument for some of its members, but it cannot represent the transatlantic interests and values on the outside. Its actions will thus become less acceptable for the public opinion within member states.

Third, weakening the NATO primacy means weakening the inner foundation of the Alliance – including Article 5. The mission of collective defense does not necessarily involve a constant state of emergency in case an attack should come; however, giving up all activity within the sphere of real politics will bring an erosion of collective defense planning. The decomposition of the NATO will be a faster process than reconstructing it in a new security context which is now still difficult to forecast.

That is why discussing the restoration of NATO primacy should begin with the practical meaning of the Alliance’s collective defense function, i.e. what it means today, and how it may be affected by further expansion of membership and partnerships? We should therefore define the relation between the security interests of the member states and those of the third countries the Alliance cooperates with.

II. The Limits and Challenges to NATO missions

NATO’s main area of responsibility remains the Euroatlantic region. The new challenges it is facing must not hinder its involvement in North American and European security. There is still a serious number of frozen or unresolved conflicts in the eastern and southern parts of Europe (e.g. the Transdnistria and Abkhazia, or the Kosovo). One must take into account situations that might require NATO’s political involvement and/or military intervention. At present, however, the military capabilities of NATO’s member states are all but overstretched. If some unexpected conflict broke out all of a sudden in

the close vicinities of Europe, calling for NATO's military involvement, the allies would have to face the problem of finding and deploying extra troops.

II.1. The modernization of military forces

More than ever before in the history of the Alliance, it is the interoperability of the member states' armed forces – their mobility as well as communicability and command skills – that the NATO needs to maintain its operational capacity as a whole. Otherwise, the coalitions of the willing, based not on the members' political decisions but on particular states' military capacities, may become the dominant formula.

With all the stress on the reform of the allied armies and their ability to cooperate with each other, one must not forget that differences between military capacities of particular NATO members, especially between those of the US and all the others, have been part of the Alliance ever since its beginning. In other words, most of the allies have never had and probably never will have the potential to cooperate with the US forces as an equal partner. **The modernization of a NATO member's army must therefore be evaluated by its ability to fulfill its particular obligations vis-à-vis the Alliance rather than to cooperate with the most powerful partner. Any other approach calls into question the future of the Alliance as a consistent political and military organization.**

What the Alliance should consider is working out new information methods to evaluate every member's performance. The Secretary General should be entitled to announce in public what progress particular countries have made in fulfilling their obligations. This will not solve such problems as unsatisfactory troop numbers and military capabilities, but the possibility itself should be motivating for the member states, as well as have a rationalizing effect on their declarations of national goals in reforming armed forces.

II.2. New rules of financing operations

Nowadays, those operations which don't fall under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, are financed on a "cost lie where they fall" basis. With the present philosophy of military

operations, symbolized by the NATO Response Forces, this means huge financial burdens for a state that needed to use its NRF or other units during its six-month rotation period; meanwhile those states, whose rotation period did not involve using the NRF's, bear no additional costs. The operation financing system will not change overnight, but we do need to make an effort towards balancing the distribution of costs.

In this context, it seems useful to produce a list of activities to be financed by the common budget. Another solution worth considering would be a mechanism to cover some of the costs of common operations, modeled on the "Athena" program of the EU. We could also think of developing a common resource base that would be financed by the organization's budget (as is the case with the AWACS system), as well as introducing some of the flexible solutions that have been recently used by some allies to deal with the purchasing or renting of equipment (e.g. the SALIS system, or the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability program).

II.3. NATO and EU: complementary skills and resources

Due to their histories and founding ideas, the value of both organizations, the NATO and the EU, will always lie in their traditional characters; hence, there is no reason to worry that, because of the EU, the NATO might become redundant in the field of defense, or that the NATO might successfully replace the EU in its civilian responses to crisis situations.

The question of sharing duties by the US and Europe could then be addressed in a new way by concentrating on mutual complementarity rather than complexity of the two organizations' skills and resources. They could express their will to cooperate by signing a new agreement, modeled on the Berlin Plus, specifying when and to what extent the NATO may use the EU's civilian resources and capabilities in missions not included in Article 5, just like the present agreement entitles the EU to use the military resources and capabilities of the Alliance. Such an agreement should be binding only in regard to operations performed by the Alliance as whole. The idea of a police training mission run by the EU in Afghanistan may be a step in the right direction.

II.4. Public opinion

The new NATO missions outside the treaty area, as well as the incessant reform of the armed forces and the growth of defense spending, require public approval, which, for several reasons, is very hard to earn. As attitudes towards the NATO operation in Afghanistan have shown, the public easily becomes “tired” with a longtime military involvement, no longer understanding its purpose, nor willing to bear the costs. A way of reversing this trend would be by presenting a realistic outline of every such operation’s goals, thus allowing a better social recognition of the sense of our action, as well as of its final success. **The Alliance must also put extra stress on explaining its operations in terms of political progress. Concentrating on the military dimension, the way it is done in Afghanistan (the number of operations performed and enemy soldiers captured or killed) means deepening the gap between NATO’s activities and their public reception.**

III. Open door policy and NATO enlargement

The limits to NATO enlargement are defined by Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, which states that membership can be offered to any *European state* capable of furthering the principles of the Treaty and contributing to the security of the North Atlantic area. The NATO should therefore give maximum support to all those partners which, in the allies’ view, show an honest aspiration to membership, such as Georgia. This open door policy, however, cannot reduce the membership criteria or privilege the countries seeking membership. For the Alliance to remain coherent and strong, it is absolutely necessary that all candidate states demonstrate the following:

1. A genuine (not merely declared) dedication to the Atlantic values – democracy, human rights and effective free market economy – in their domestic and foreign policies;
2. The basic convergence of their security interests with those of the allies;
3. The fulfillment of basic military standards and ability to cooperate with the allies.

III.1. Ukraine

There is no question that the Ukrainian army has made substantial progress thanks to the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. Nowadays, the Ukrainian forces meet most of the military criteria of NATO membership. There is still no agreement, however, about its NATO integration, as the whole issue is being instrumentalized by the country's main political parties. That, together with the present parliamentary majority's negative attitude, certainly complicates Ukraine's perspectives of joining the NATO. One must also remember that a negative image of the NATO is strong in the Ukrainian society, and public support for the integration is lacking. These two factors are the greatest "structural" obstacle to inviting Ukraine. The country's non-military security structures, too, need more intensive reforming.

Should Kiev apply for a Membership Action Plan, the Alliance's response ought to be positive, while making it clear that this does not mean automatic admission.

IV. Future relations with partner states

The partner states as well as their cooperation goals are so diverse, the NATO has no single principle concerning its partnerships. As a result, the partnerships have begun to grow mutually autonomous, thus rendering the Alliance's own political goals unclear or self-contradictory. The growing involvement in Asia, for instance, requires operational collaboration with partners that are either insufficiently democratic or unwilling to reform their defense sectors.

Right now the Alliance is incapable of effective partnership management. The number of instruments meant for their development – such as Partnership for Peace, Planning and Review Process, Partnership Action Plan Against Terrorism, Training and Education Enhancement Programme, the Trust Fund or the Virtual Silk Highway – is not reflected by their quality. There is no single criterion by which to evaluate the progress of cooperation; because of this, its goals are unclear and the allies are losing interest in partnerships. Meanwhile, the partnerships budget does not allow many of the goals to be effectively pursued. In 2006, 12 million euros have been granted for the financing of

about two thousand projects. **The instruments of cooperation between partners must be rationalized. The Alliance should use partnerships in a way that will serve both its own interests and those of the partners; at the same time, some cooperation priorities ought to be determined for the financing to concentrate on.** Otherwise, NATO's partnership policy may become dysfunctional: it will only serve those partners for whom collaboration with the Alliance is a matter of prestige rather than a genuine need. On the other hand, partners really seeking to cooperate should be rewarded by closer collaboration – either through a more extensive use of the existing mechanisms within the Individual Partnership Action Plan, or by intensified dialogue.

V.1. NATO's relations with Russia

The NATO should pursue the constructive politics of engaging Russia in the Euroatlantic security system.

NATO's present relations with Russia are complex. On the one hand there is a growing number of enterprises performed together, including military cooperation; on the other, most of these enterprises amount to little more than meetings, discussions, simulations and producing documents, which are not directly linked to the military.

There can be no effective partnership nor close cooperation between NATO and Russia unless their standards regarding democratic transformation are brought closer to each other. The aim of NATO's Russian policy is the balancing of Moscow's rights and obligations. Cooperating with Russia, one must not expect a quick propaganda success nor be distracted into numerous enterprises neither party can really profit from. What one should do is concentrate on the few chosen projects of special importance, which are likely to be successful and beneficial to both sides – such as the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI), cooperation in emergencies, as well as defense reform and military collaboration to reach basic interoperationality.

Apart from continuing the present forms of cooperation, the NATO should analyze the conditions, rules and practical possibilities of performing joint stabilization operations in chosen regions of conflict within the CIS area, such as Transdnistria, Upper Karabakh or

Abkhazia. Such joint action would increase the chances of containing the conflicts and stabilizing the regions, as well as engage Russia in constructive cooperation and strengthen its privileged status as NATO's partner; it would also be a practical exercise in interoperationality. The same should apply to another important cooperation project, namely the Theater Missile Defence (TMD). This potentially interesting enterprise may turn out very beneficial to the NATO states' security, as long as it can be adapted to their particular needs. It makes no sense to produce an abstract model of cooperation.

V.2. Global partnerships

NATO's increasing military activity in the more distant parts of the world requires closer cooperation with the so called contact states, such as Australia, New Zealand or Japan. In the view of some allies, this cooperation should eventually result in global partnerships. Such partnerships would certainly bring the benefit of increasing the Alliance's operational capabilities on a global scale. They cannot, however, lead to "global memberships", for that would not only change the whole political concept of the Alliance, but also call into question the function of collective defense as such. **That's why such partnerships must be formed case by case rather than according to some institutionalized formula, and strictly limited to operational issues while performing joint missions. The partners should not participate in the Alliance's decision making processes on an equal basis with the full members.**

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translated by Łukasz Sommer