

NATO'S "Transformation" and Asia

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NATO's first summit in Eastern Europe was held in the same city where the Warsaw Pact was buried. "Prague, once the victim of the Warsaw Pact, became the city where the Warsaw Pact met its end as an instrument of the cold war," Czech President Vaclav Havel proudly claimed in 1991.

"The international community is likely to face bad weather and it is necessary to build a certain security ark on the model of the Biblical Noah's ark," Secretary General Lord Robertson stated in October in Brussels. Allowing the entry of new species into NATO's ark was the easy bit at the Summit. Seven more nations were saved from the impending flood. But Prague could not give any clear direction or sense of purpose to the alliance.

Since the end of the cold war NATO has been a military alliance groping for a cause, an army in search of an enemy. When the Soviet Union collapsed NATO lost its *raison d'être*. When it met for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1999 it reinvented itself with a "new strategic concept," ascribing to itself the right to intervene militarily in any part of the world.

The alliance in search of an enemy appeared to find one on September 11, 2001. For the first time it invoked Article V of its Charter and enthusiastically supported America's War on Terror. But America, driving fast along a unilateralist path, had little use for NATO in its war against Afghanistan. Still the Secretary General claimed after the Prague summit, "A transformed and modernized NATO is at the very

heart of the free world's response to terrorists and their backers, the failed states in which they flourish, and proliferating weapons of mass destruction."

Historically, NATO has followed America's military policies and security doctrines. In the context of the War on Terror, the U.S. has adopted fundamentally new security and military doctrines. These doctrines now "transform and modernize" NATO.

The classified *Nuclear Posture Review* has redefined the role of nuclear weapons as fundamental to U.S. defense policy. It places new emphasis on the utility of nuclear weapons in U.S. military doctrine and strategy. It changes the very concept of deterrence. "First use" and "first strike" are writ large on the nuclear agenda of the USA. The Pentagon has already asked NATO to review its nuclear posture.

The perennial problem of NATO members' violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is compounded by the expansion of NATO. No matter whether NATO deploys nuclear assets in the new member states or not, the expansion will increase the number of states relying on nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. It will extend the NATO system of nuclear sharing arrangements to more nonnuclear weapon states. Full membership status includes the right to ask for the deployment of nuclear weapons as well as an obligation to accept that nuclear weapons can be deployed—at least during wartime. As the War on Terror is not limited in time, any time is wartime. The result of

NATO expansion is proliferation of nuclear weapons by the USA, which contemplates nuclear strikes in the face of “surprising developments” even against nonnuclear weapon states.

The *Quadrennial Defense Review 2001* shows that there is a reorientation of America’s military presence in Europe. Although U.S. forces will remain in Europe in large numbers, these will serve mainly a political function—substantiating U.S. leadership of NATO—while being made available for actual operational use outside Europe. One critical difference is that the new *QDR* puts a distinctive emphasis on war-fighting capabilities: “At the direction of the President, U.S. forces will be capable of decisively defeating an adversary in the theaters in which the U.S. forces are conducting major combat operations by imposing America’s will and removing any future threat it could pose. This capability will include the ability to occupy territory or set the conditions for a regime change” (emphasis added). The new U.S. doctrine of preemption—or rather hot preemption—will also be decisive in the transformation of NATO. The National Security Strategy of the USA says that while Washington will seek allies in the battle against terrorism, “we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively.”

These doctrines provide the script for the drama of U.S. war plans against Iraq. No wonder Iraq—though not officially on the agenda at Prague—was the main topic of discussion there.

If the new rationale for NATO is the War on Terror, and if its Rapid Response Force is directed to territories outside the region of its member

states, then NATO’s transformation has serious implications for Asia.

The War on Terror is a war in and on Asia. It was started with a high-tech war against Afghanistan in Central Asia. Two war fronts in West Asia were officially incorporated into the War on Terror. One was against the Palestinian nation by the Israeli Prime Minister Sharon anticipating and receiving full support from Washington. The other was against Iraq, marking a new stage in the continuing military and political campaign to topple Saddam Hussein. As the war against Afghanistan entered its third month, the Bush administration moved to open up what was officially called the “second front”—South East Asia. The “axis of evil” included another Asian state, North Korea. The U.S. made a major shift in geographic emphasis toward Asia generally, and within this a dramatic expansion of military presence and engagement in Central, South, and South East Asia.

It was only natural that at the summit after agreeing to expand their alliance deep into the former Soviet bloc, NATO leaders reached out to the Central Asian nations whose assistance was vital in the U.S.-led war against Afghanistan. One senior alliance diplomat called the countries of Central Asia and the Caucuses “NATO’s next frontier.”

Over a year ago China was at the center of diplomatic momentum to increase the clout of the Shanghai Five (now the Shanghai Cooperation organization)—a regional cooperation group comprised of its Central Asian neighbors. The massive presence of U.S. troops in Central Asia has caused a significant shift in the military and power equation in the region, prompting Beijing to approach NATO for a “strategic dia-

logue” on common threats and an understanding of its role in Central Asia.

Meanwhile Australia is again apparently pushing for an Asia-Pacific alliance, reviving speculation about a “mini-NATO,” first mentioned after the July 2001 ministerial meeting between the U.S. and Australia. The suggestion then was to bring the U.S., Australia, Japan, and South Korea together. The U.S. seems not to be averse to the idea, knows that the Philippines will be keen to join such an alliance and probably hopes Indonesia can also be pushed into it.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, defines the North Atlantic alliance as part of an integrated, comprehensive, and long-term strategy for all of Eurasia in which NATO would eventually reach Asia, where another military alliance would connect Pacific and South East Asia states. The prediction is coming true. It may be useful to recall here that “the forward-looking strategy” for the defense of Western Europe was decided upon by NATO ministers in September 1950 because of the international situation created by the Korean war. The militarization of the containment policy in Europe and the transformation of NATO strategy were the result of the cold war becoming a shooting war in Asia. It is again a war in Asia—the War on Terror—that is transforming NATO.

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