



NATO at 50

By Tomáš Valásek, Center for Defense Information

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—a military alliance of 17 European nations, the U.S., and Canada—will celebrate its 50th anniversary in April 1999 by convening a summit in Washington, DC. The alliance was created under U.S. leadership in 1949 to defend the West against the Soviet military threat. Historically, the U.S. provided the largest share of funds, troops, and weapons to NATO's activities and dominated the alliance's decisionmaking.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact invalidated NATO's original mandate and prompted a search for a new approach to European security. Several new roles were proposed for NATO, including serving as a forum for arms reduction and elimination, and becoming a political force for consolidating democratic, capitalist systems throughout Europe, including Russia. Another option was the complete abolition of NATO. On a continent devoid of superpower rivalries, the new type of challenges—peacekeeping and conflict prevention—could be handled by the 55-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE), the designated European collective security organization. The OSCE, which includes all European countries, the U.S., Canada, and the former Soviet republics, specializes in conflict monitoring and prevention, arms reduction, and post-conflict reconciliation.

Before completion of a comprehensive review of the need for NATO, the alliance was thrust into a peacekeeping role in the Balkan wars. When the activities of the UN and the European Union failed to prevent escalation of the violence

in Bosnia, NATO was called on to deliver punitive strikes against the Bosnian Serb aggressor forces. NATO troops entered the country in December 1995 to safeguard implementation of the Dayton peace agreement. In June 1998 NATO countries extended the mandate of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia indefinitely.

In July 1997, primarily at U.S. urging, NATO decided to invite three former Warsaw Pact countries to join. This watershed event in NATO's post-cold war history marked the end of the search for an alternative security arrangement. Despite the absence of a clearly articulated purpose, the U.S. and the European countries established NATO as the dominant security organization in

Europe. The expansion itself, coupled with peacekeeping duties in the Balkans, became the alliance's *raison d'être*. But the decision carried a political price: the expansion to former Warsaw Pact countries, NATO's continued emphasis on territorial defense, and the persisting dominant role of the U.S. in NATO damaged America's relations with Russia and contributed to the radicalization of the Russian political scene. NATO's attempts at damage control—such as the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, a largely unimplemented document on cooperation—failed to weaken Moscow's opposition. The Yeltsin government accepted the first round of expansion as a *fait accompli* while opposing the expansion in principle and protesting the plans to include former Soviet republics in particular.

The financial costs of expansion—the costs of upgrading weapons in the new member countries and buying communications systems compatible with NATO—will be borne by new and longtime members. All three new NATO members have increased their defense spending to cover the costs associated with membership. But U.S. taxpayers will also pay their share. U.S. assistance has already been required to help bring the invitees to NATO standards. For example, the U.S. paid for installations of an air surveillance system in Poland and will cover the costs of leasing surplus F-16 or F/A-18 fighter aircraft to the Polish air force.

NATO continues to evolve, with the U.S. advocating new missions and a more assertive approach to military operations. The new U.S. proposals raised in early 1999 would authorize operations outside the territory of alliance members. U.S. officials also argue that NATO should no longer be obligated to secure UN Security Council approval for its military operations. Washington hopes to formalize these and other proposals for NATO's future missions in a number of documents slated for adoption at the alliance's 50th anniversary summit. Far from settling the question of NATO's roles and responsibilities, the proposals raise a number of questions regarding the stability of European security.

As NATO's scope widens, the alliance's expansion to Central and Eastern Europe appears to be slowing. At a July 1997 summit in Madrid, the alliance voted to invite the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland to join NATO and decided to continue expanding to include all countries willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership. Even though the three new members joined NATO in March 1999, the original expansion plans are being revised and delayed. Both the German chancellor and the Canadian foreign minister have suggested that further expansion be delayed by a number of years.

Key Points

- The end of the cold war invalidated NATO's original mandate and raised questions about the need for a military alliance focusing on territorial defense.
- The alliance responded by embarking on peacekeeping missions in the Balkans and enlarging to include former Warsaw Pact countries.
- New U.S. proposals would expand the scope of NATO's operations, even while relations with Russia founder.

At a December 1998 meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NATO's governing body), Secretary of State Madeleine Albright laid out U.S. proposals for new missions for the alliance. NATO must maintain the ability to defend the member states, Albright said, but it should also expand its scope to counter the threat of weapons of mass destruction and to halt the spread of ethnic and regional violence both inside and beyond the alliance's borders. Secretary Albright's vision is one of NATO retaining its traditional duty to protect its members' territory while adopting collective security tasks such as conflict prevention and peacekeeping.

The proposals raise a number of problems. In explaining the proposal to expand NATO's responsibilities beyond territorial defense, Secretary Albright argued that "it makes sense to use the unified military structure and the habits of cooperation we have built up over the past 50 years." But NATO's operational procedures, devised and rehearsed during the cold war, do not guarantee successful accomplishment of its new tasks. For example, as the reconstruction process in Bosnia continues, the need for civilian policing bodies has supplanted the reliance on armed soldiers for deterrence. NATO simply does not have the police or paramilitary units required for such tasks.

Similarly, conflict prevention, mediation, and monitoring require very different kinds of expertise than what NATO offers. Unless NATO develops its own civilian intervention units or delegates more responsibilities to the OSCE, which is tasked with carrying out conflict prevention duties, the international community may be unable to implement successful stabilization measures.

Another thorny issue is NATO's authority to act without UN Security Council approval. The question of UN authorizations for NATO missions arose from the dichotomy in NATO's original duties and newly proposed responsibilities. NATO has signaled its intention to carry out collective security duties, such as peacekeeping operations, even outside of its members' territory. Washington maintains that NATO will continue to act "in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter." However, U.S. officials argue that the alliance should be allowed to operate even when formal authorization from the UN Security Council cannot be obtained.

Collective security organizations such as the OSCE are traditionally all-inclusive. Membership in the organization implies the right of collective intervention in the affairs of the member states to prevent destabilization or conflicts. The collective security group's mandate to act is derived jointly from the contract that each country forms with the organization upon joining and from the decision of the member states. Unlike NATO, which requires unanimous approval of all members for its missions, the OSCE reserves the right to act over the objections of the member responsible for gross

violations of the OSCE's principles. NATO insists on limited membership and unanimous decisions in order to preserve its effectiveness as a defensive military alliance. Its intervention in the affairs of nonmembers without either UN or OSCE authorization lacks the legal foundation of a collective security organization.

NATO's subordination to the UN is also anchored in the alliance's documents. Its founding text, the Washington Treaty of 1949, clearly obligates the allied nations to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations." Article 42, Chapter VII of the UN Charter allows military intervention only "should the Security Council consider that [less forceful measures] would be inadequate or have been proven inadequate." Finally, NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept states that NATO's purpose is to "safeguard the freedom and security of all its members...in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter."

Part of the problem stems from the Security Council's inability to act swiftly and effectively, such as during the Bosnia and Kosovo crises. The trouble lies mainly with the UN's decisionmaking mechanisms—the Security Council is often paralyzed and unable to act for reasons that have little to do with the conflicts at hand.

In the case of Kosovo, the NATO nations did not even try to obtain an explicit authorization from the Security Council, fearing that the deepening rift between NATO and Russia rendered any agreement all but impossible. But the Kosovo crisis signaled a compromise solution that NATO may use in the future. The alliance sought and obtained an indirect endorsement of its plans from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan during his visit to NATO in January 1999. In the future, NATO may also seek authorization from the OSCE rather than the UN.

Finally, NATO enlargement and the proposals for the alliance's new missions presuppose the strengthening of a U.S. leadership role in Europe. As Secretary Albright states, "...NATO expansion involves a solemn expansion of American responsibilities in Europe." The vast majority of proposals put before NATO in preparation for the Washington summit have come from the U.S. delegation. By implication, if the proposals are adopted they would require U.S. leadership in order to be implemented. These U.S. initiatives would thus stifle the trend in NATO toward a greater role for its European members; a trend that would allow Washington to reduce the costly presence of almost 120,000 U.S. troops in Europe.

Key Problems

- Peacekeeping duties require expertise that NATO does not possess.
 - Expansion of NATO's responsibilities to peacekeeping intervention lacks a solid foundation in international law.
 - NATO enlargement and new U.S. initiatives perpetuate the dominant role of the United States in Europe.
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NATO will remain the dominant security organization in Europe. What is needed is to clarify the alliance's relations with other European security bodies and to divide responsibilities between these institutions. The OSCE's mediation and security building measures need to be strengthened in order to prevent existing tensions in Europe from turning into open conflicts. If all other

Key Recommendations

- U.S. and European countries should delegate conflict prevention and reconstruction duties to the OSCE and should build on its expertise.
- NATO should seek mandates from either the UN or the OSCE for all missions other than defense of its territory.
- Washington should support French and British attempts to create a viable European defense organization.

efforts failed and ensuing violence actually threatened European security, the UN or the OSCE would request NATO military assistance to stop the conflict.

The monitoring and implementation of peace agreements, such as the ones in Bosnia and Kosovo, call for civilian intervention units trained in observing and analyzing military activities, mediating, and diffusing potentially dangerous situations. Currently, the OSCE's expertise in this realm

is confined to its skeleton permanent staff, while the actual implementation is carried out by multinational forces recruited on an ad-hoc basis, such as during the Kosovo Verification Mission. NATO countries have the manpower, but the allied troops are not trained in prevention and monitoring duties. One proposed solution is to develop the expertise within NATO. This approach, however, fails to build on the expertise developed over the years by the OSCE, and it raises questions about military interference in civilian affairs. Another option is to strengthen the role of the OSCE, expand its ranks of personnel trained and experienced in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction, and establish clear links between this organization and NATO. The alliance could provide security for OSCE personnel, as was the case with the Kosovo Verification Mission, and could serve as a deterrent against escalation or continuation of conflicts in Europe.

Any new arrangement needs to give European nations an opportunity to assume responsibility over security on their continent. The need for a rigid U.S.-European front to defeat a Soviet invasion no longer exists. A stronger European defense identity would relieve U.S. taxpayers of the costs of maintaining over 100,000 troops on bases and in peacekeeping operations in Europe. Also, notably, French and British officials have

signaled their willingness to invest in a European military force. And greater European defense autonomy would reduce the tensions between European nations and the United States, which surfaced during the debate over NATO's future.

Even Tony Blair, Clinton's closest ally in Europe, dropped Britain's longstanding opposition to a defense role for the European Union (EU). At a French-British summit, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook proclaimed, "we want to be able to see the European Union take sensible foreign and security policy decisions and we need to match that up with the ability to call up a military capacity where it is needed, for instance, perhaps, in the former Yugoslavia." The December 1998 summit proclamation calls for the European Union to acquire "the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military force...in order to respond to international crises."

Previous attempts at creating a purely European defense identity, such as the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty signed by EU member states, remain largely paper exercises. The latest initiative only involves France and Great Britain, and it may also fall victim to European disagreements over payments to the EU budget or agricultural subsidy issues, which tend to dominate the organization's agenda. America has historically opposed a European defense organization without U.S. participation. Washington's first reaction to the new European defense initiatives was lukewarm, stressing that it must "contribute to NATO's vitality and to preserving the Alliance's prerogatives."

A stronger European role in Europe's military affairs would enable the U.S. both to reduce its military presence and to decrease U.S. expenditures on military operations in Europe. For example, the NATO mission to Bosnia, alone, costs the U.S. taxpayers around \$2 billion annually. Contrast this with Macedonia, where the European nations took the lead in organizing the NATO Extraction Force. The force is responsible for evacuating OSCE observers from Kosovo, should it become necessary. Its combat units are drawn entirely from European NATO members: France, Netherlands, Italy, and Great Britain. In the future, European-led operations promise to relieve the pressure on U.S. military personnel—and U.S. taxpayers—and would likely relieve, as well, some of Russia's concerns with the dominant role of the U.S. in an expanded NATO.

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Editors
Tom Barry (IRC)
Martha Honey (IPS)

Production
Grant Moser (IRC)

Communications Director
Erik Leaver (IRC)

Orders and subscription information:

Mail: PO Box 4506
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87196-4506
Voice: (505) 842-8288
Fax: (505) 246-1601
Email: resourcectr@igc.apc.org

Editorial inquiries and information:

IRC Editor
Voice: (505) 388-0208
Fax: (505) 388-0619
Email: resourcectr@igc.apc.org

IPS Editor
Voice: (202) 234-9382/3 ext. 232
Fax: (202) 387-7915
Email: ipsps@igc.apc.org

Website: <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org>

Sources for More Information

Organizations

British American Security Information Council (BASIC)

1900 L Street NW, Suite 401-2
 Washington, DC 20036
 Voice: (202) 785-1266
 Fax: (202) 387-6298
 Email: basic@int.org
 Website: <http://www.basicint.org>

Center for Defense Information (CDI)

1779 Massachusetts Av. NW, Ste. 615
 Washington DC 20036
 Voice: (202) 332-0600, ext. 104
 Fax: (202) 462-4559
 Email: tvalasek@cdi.org
 Website: <http://www.cdi.org>
 Contact: Tomas Valasek

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http://europa.eu.int/pol/cfsp/index_en.htm

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<http://www.nato50.gov/>

Center for Defense Information, NATO page

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New Atlantic Initiative

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