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The Future of Transatlantic Security Cooperation after 2014

Perspectives for the North Atlantic Alliance
beyond Afghanistan

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The year 2014 might well be another turning point for transatlantic security cooperation. The end of the combat operation in Afghanistan epitomizes a more general trend with potentially profound implications: crisis management and “out-of-area”-operations do not suffice anymore as a glue and *raison d’être* for the security and defense relationship across the Atlantic. At the same time, the contours of a new relationship are only emerging.

Authors of this paper¹ singled out what they identified as the three most relevant “drivers” shaping the context within which this cooperation will take place in the years to come: Financial and resource constraints, a turn towards a more inward-looking perspective in EU and NATO capitals, and shifting power relations in the international system. Based on these drivers authors identified four major issues and policy recommendations for each of them.

Driving Forces

Financial Constraints on Security and Defense Policy

Since 2008 the financial and debt crisis in the United States and the Eurozone has significantly affected the budgets available for security and defense policies on both sides of the Atlantic. According to an estimate by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (December 2012) EU member states will reduce their defense budgets by an average of 1.8 to 3.2 percent annually until the year 2020 at least.

These cuts do not only have implications for Europe’s collective defense capabilities. They will also intensify conflicts over burden sharing, both within Europe and across the Atlantic. Additionally, small EU states are cutting their defense expenditures—as a proportion of the size of their economies—much more than bigger ones. This means that some countries—such as the Czech Republic—are increasingly dependent on larger ones to contribute assets to joint military missions. At the same time, Germany, France and the UK are themselves having increasing difficulty filling the role of “framework-nation” in multinational engagements.

While defense has been hit hardest by financial constraints, long-term declining budgets are discernible in other areas as well, such as official development assistance (ODA).

A Turn toward Inward-Looking Perspectives

In most EU and NATO-countries a combination of the financial crisis and perceived failures in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to the erosion of public/domestic political support for crisis management and state-building in cases where they involve military force. This general discontent is most recently evident in polls showing majorities of the populations of the US, UK, France and Germany opposed to military intervention in Syria. There are good reasons to assume that on both sides of the Atlantic a more inward-looking perspective, in some cases bordering on isolationism, will prevail for the next decade or so. Even when EU and NATO governments actively push for limited military action—as was the case with the US, UK and France in

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Syria after the chemical attacks of August 21—they are increasingly unable to intervene due to deep misgivings, or even outright hostility, by their citizens. Reactions to the conflict in Syria have also shown an unprecedented assertiveness by parliaments whose majorities are skeptical towards intervention. Meanwhile, the political division between Republicans and Democrats in the United States will remain so deep that foreign policy is likely to take a backseat in the foreseeable future.

While there is a general trend toward a more inward-looking perspective, the division in Europe between more interventionist countries—notably the UK and France—and the non-interventionists—such as Germany—will prevail and has to some extent even deepened. It remains to be seen, however, if this trend will be limited to (military) crisis management or whether it will expand to affect foreign and security policy in a broader sense.

Shifting Power Relations and New Competition

It is widely understood that power relations are shifting in the international system. However, the picture is much more complex than simply a “Decline of the West, Rise of the Rest”. The upheavals in North Africa and the Arab World have for a long time been mainly (mis-) perceived in EU and NATO capitals as the inevitable rise of liberal democracy against authoritarianism. In fact the Arab Spring has turned out to be at least as much a new geopolitical “grand game” and power competition in the whole region along the well-established Sunni-Shia divide.

It now seems that the West might be the big loser of this competition: the US has lost its leadership role in the Middle East while President Obama’s “red lines” were crossed in Syria almost without consequences. It is also true that Europe’s focus is turning increasingly to “near-Europe”—North Africa and the Levant—while the US turns to Asia and attempts to extricate itself from the Middle East. The EU’s “normative power” has also turned out to be equally ineffective in shaping recent developments in the Arab World.

At the same time, the “old” power competition in Europe—between the West and Russia—continues, and the construction of a new Euro-Atlantic architecture “whole and free” remains unfinished business. All this means that the long-term trend towards multi-polarity will be characterized to a significant degree by conflict and competition.

Major Issues for Transatlantic Security Policy

Based on these driving forces, the working group identified four major issues for transatlantic security and defense cooperation in the years to come: the balance between realpolitik and democracy promotion, the future of crisis management and Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the role of nuclear weapons, and cyber security.

Recalibrating the Balance between Realpolitik and Democracy Promotion

Foreign and security policies in the United States and Europe have always been shaped by the contradictory prescriptions of realpolitik and democracy promotion. However, how to balance these sometimes contradictory concepts in the transatlantic context is an open question. Foreign policymakers in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin absorbed a few lessons from the morass of post-Saddam Iraq and recognized that sometimes stability under a dictator is less dangerous and lethal than an

ouster that throws an entire region into disarray and chaos. While there is consensus in EU and NATO capitals that Baschar al-Assad should not be allowed to remain in power in Syria, who or what would come after him is highly uncertain.

Egypt is one telling example. Overblown Western fears of the institutionalization of Muslim fundamentalism followed the democratic election of a Muslim Brother to the presidency. Immediately thereafter, a muted reaction in the West to the military coup that ousted Mohammed Morsi, a president elected in free and fair polls, called into question the West's true support of democratic government. As the largely Shiite populations of Qatar and Bahrain become increasingly restive, at what point does Western, and especially US, support for friendly royal autocracies become more of a liability than an asset?

The Uncertain Future of Crisis Management and R2P

The driving forces and trends—especially declining defense budgets and a more inward-looking focus of governments—are likely to change the nature of crisis management that both the EU and NATO are willing and able to perform in the future. Crisis management in future is likely to be less comprehensive and with a lighter (military) footprint than it has been recently—more like Libya or Mali than Iraq or Afghanistan.

Given the previously mentioned driving trends in combination with the end of the ISAF-mission in Afghanistan by December 2014 there exists a real risk that operational crisis management might lose its previous function as a *raison d'être* for transatlantic and intra-European security cooperation altogether. The simple need for coalition members to conduct wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been the most powerful motivator for expending the resources and energy necessary to ensure true interoperability across the Atlantic. Without those wars to provide motivation and facing declining budgets, it will be much more difficult for politicians to make the case that precious resources should be devoted to building interoperability and defense cooperation among EU and NATO countries.

These developments also touch upon the future of R2P. It is striking that NATO members invoked R2P to legitimize military action in Libya, while they have not done so in the case of Syria. UN investigations and Western intelligence agencies have established that it is very likely the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own population. However, despite this evidence, this latest example demonstrates that even though R2P is a more-or-less accepted concept throughout NATO member governments, reaching agreement on the type of joint action to be taken is by no means guaranteed—even in the face of ongoing atrocities.

Given the lack of appetite for military interventions on humanitarian grounds, and the desirability of prevention rather than cure, the most promising opportunities for cooperation appear to be in the risk reduction and crisis prevention dimensions of R2P. At the same time, the institutional apparatus in individual countries, and at the EU level, is much better geared toward reactive approaches and crisis management than they are to the prevention of atrocities.

The Role of Nuclear Weapons

The drive, mentioned above, towards multi-polarity and great power competition, indicates that nuclear weapons will not become wholly irrelevant. In recent years, NATO has been de-emphasizing nuclear weapons in its deterrence and defense pos-

ture and U.S. President Barack Obama set out a vision for a world without nuclear weapons. At the same time non-Western powers are moving in the other direction. Russia's military doctrine emphasizes nuclear weapons. Iran is only months away from having enough material for its first nuclear weapon and the Pentagon estimates that it could have a ballistic missile capable of reaching Western Europe by 2015.

This raises important questions which could have high conflict potential within the transatlantic Alliance. What is the future salience of nuclear weapons in international politics? Is it responsible for NATO to continue to cut its nuclear forces faced with potentially growing threats? While some member states such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries will push for new disarmament initiatives, others are likely to opt for modernization and renewed emphasis on nuclear weapons—even in the face of budgetary pressures.

Cyber Security

Cyberspace is an increasingly pervasive and powerful domain of modern life. According to the U.S. Department of Defense 2011 Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace, from 2000 to 2010, global internet usage increased from 360 million to over 2 billion people. At the same time, the development of international norms and regulations in cyberspace has fallen far behind that of more traditional domains such as the sea, air and space, and the openness and security of this new global commons is very much in question.

Against this background, Western security institutions are just now beginning to deal with this issue. In June of this year, NATO defense ministers met in Brussels for the first time ever to focus on cyber issues. Very recently, the EU published its own comprehensive cyber security strategy.

Still, there are many unresolved questions that also have a high conflict potential for transatlantic relations. The revelations of activities by the National Security Agency (NSA) and other national intelligence organizations are casting a new light on the old question of how to balance security concerns with liberty and self-determination.

As NATO remains the world's pre-eminent military alliance it specifically faces the issue of how to relate its current major functions—not least of all collective defense under Article 5—with the cyber issue. If a member state fell victim to a cyber attack that caused fatalities, could (or more importantly, should) the Alliance respond with conventional military force? One of the distinct features of “cyber-attacks” is their non-attribution: it is frequently difficult or even impossible to attribute responsibility for an attack to a particular state-actor. This fact further complicates the formulation of guidelines for response by members of the Alliance.

Policy Recommendations

Based on our previous analysis we offer the following policy recommendations:

- Foreign and security policy will always be shaped by the often contradictory forces of realpolitik and the idealism of democracy promotion. To find a better balance between the two than exists today, transatlantic partners have to seek a deep and nuanced understanding of the changes taking place on the streets of

Cairo, Riyadh, Amman, Doha, and other world capitals. They have to identify key leaders and movements who could be potential partners for the next decade. This will require an approach to intelligence gathering that is broader than the traditional military-political context with its narrow and one-sided focus on the fight against terrorism. To the contrary intelligence gathering needs to be much more embedded into a larger political and cultural narrative.

- Crisis management as practiced over the last decade from Kosovo to Afghanistan is functioning less and less as glue for transatlantic security and defense cooperation. Domestic support for such engagements is eroding even over the long-term. One future *raison d'être* for NATO and transatlantic cooperation should be a return to the core of security policy, i.e. an insurance policy against, and preparation for major future crises. In that context, NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen's dictum that the Alliance must develop "from a deployed NATO to a prepared NATO" has to be filled with substance and supported by all members both rhetorically and financially.
- Another *raison d'être* of transatlantic security cooperation should increasingly be a focus on the preventive dimension of R2P. The challenge, therefore, on both sides of the Atlantic, is to seek to adopt a comprehensive "mass atrocity prevention lens" across multiple areas and levels of policy-making. Information/intelligence gathering and early warning contain great untapped potential, as established transatlantic channels of communication already exist but are not utilized to their full potential.
- On the future of nuclear weapons, for the foreseeable future the status quo (e.g., six European nations host NATO nuclear weapons) is politically and strategically more palatable than the alternative, which means that those states should maintain dual-capable aircraft. Additional disarmament measures will not be possible without Russian cooperation and Moscow has not been receptive to recent overtures for further cuts. In addition, missile defense provides an opportunity for cooperation. In particular, certain European states, such as Norway, could pledge to make sophisticated national radar capabilities available for NATO missile defense missions.
- In the area of cyber-security NATO must continue to encourage and facilitate the sharing of information, technology, and best-practices among member states to ensure that the strength of networks throughout the Alliance are not undermined by singular vulnerabilities. A time may come, though, when a member state experiences cyber-attacks of such severity that it seeks to invoke Article 5. The Alliance thus has to deal with the crucial questions related to attribution, proportionality and historical precedent in its response to potentially massive cyber attacks.

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