

NATO: Cold War Relic or Meaningful Rebirth?

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"I know that many people here in Ukraine still think of the Cold War when they think of NATO. I spend a lot of time, wherever I go, asking people to take a fresh look at the Alliance. Because it is a very different organisation." –Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Speech. Kyiv, Ukraine: June 27, 2005.

Adaptation is a key element of Charles Darwin's revolutionary *Origin of the Species*; if an organism were to survive in a particular area, it had to adapt or else run the risk of extinction. Written more than 100 years ago, this same principle can be applied to international organizations. Under a realist view of international affairs, the world is in a constant state of chaos where political and military power can quickly shift between states. Because of this constant change, groups must continuously adapt in order to remain relevant. Failure to do so leads to ineffectiveness, obsolescence and dissolution.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a consensus based alliance of 26 countries founded with the primary purpose of collective defence, is one organization that has been adapting over the past two decades. Throughout much of the Alliance's history, the organization functioned as a deterrent to possible Soviet aggression against Western Europe. In the past quarter-century, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001 have forced NATO to evaluate its position in the modern dynamic global security environment. At the outset of the 21st century, the threat

of conventional conflict between NATO and other states was deeply diminishing while the threat of terrorism was on the rise. This change in threat, from conventional, symmetrical war to unconventional, asymmetrical terrorism, is the catalyst that forced NATO to institute fundamental changes to ensure its continued relevance.

To help evaluate the changes that NATO is undergoing, Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace is a useful document. In it, the former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, inter alia, gave clear definition to the terms 'peacemaking', 'peacekeeping', and 'peacebuilding'. As part of the Alliance's transformation, NATO has positioned itself as an influential actor in each of these categories. From stopping atrocities in the Balkans, to maintaining peace in Kabul, to training Iraqi security forces, the Alliance has already demonstrated its ability to be effective in different mission types and different geographies. Nonetheless, pundits and politicians continue the naïve and pessimistic view of NATO as little more than a Cold War relic. Without a doubt, the transformations experienced by NATO have allowed it to address the international security demands of the

21st century; NATO is proving its continued importance and relevancy at both the national and international level.

NATO and all of its members understand that it is irrational to extend Cold War thinking beyond that era. Knowing that nostalgia is seldom a solid foundation for current affairs policy, NATO has come to embrace change, which is a principal reason for its longevity. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer remarked,

“...the main reason for NATO’s enduring resilience is its adaptability – its ability to react to changing circumstances, and to deal with new challenges. Every time the strategic environment has changed over the past half century, the Alliance was able to respond to those changes, and to steer them in a positive direction.[1]”

Only through transformation is the Alliance able to remain relevant in the international system.

NATO is currently evolving away from a solely defensive alliance to one that is willing to project its power.

NATO underwent a massive transition when it decided to enter into the field of peacemaking (synonymous with peace enforcement), a recent term that has emerged in international security parlance. Ghali’s Agenda for Peace defines ‘peacemaking’ as “action to bring hostile parties to agreement” which is executed ideally using peaceful means, but does not exclude the use of force.[2] Peacemaking is often practiced when foreign parties intervene in domestic conflicts, on the belief that on occasion, foreign intervention is required to trigger an acceptable peace. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, if the international community had so desired, a military force could have intervened to

return peace and security to the state. The importance of ‘domestic’ conflict is evident; “studies of conflicts in the twentieth century show that more people have been killed from intrastate fighting than in interstate wars.”[3]

Because of this, NATO has entered into the realm of peacekeeping to remain relevant.

One of the most familiar peacemaking missions conducted by NATO was in the Balkans. In the spring of 1999, NATO fully embraced its new role in the world by intervening in Kosovo. The region was in a humanitarian crisis as ruling Serbs initiated collective punishment upon the Albanian civilian population. After continuing for more than a year and after all other avenues for a peaceful resolution had been exhausted, the international community was left with no other alternative than to use military force to prevent genocide in the region. With the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) deadlocked, repeated Serbian violations of UNSC resolutions, and the deterioration of the situation in Kosovo, the members of NATO decided to act.[4]

In January 1999, NATO warned all the parties in the Kosovo conflict that the Alliance was willing to exercise military force in order to return stability to the region unless the violence came to an end.[5] On March 24, 1999 then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana authorized Operation Allied Force, which occurred the following day.[6] The technologically sophisticated NATO forces engaged in a relentless air and missile strike campaign against “the military and paramilitary structures of the Yugoslav government responsible for the repression.”[7] After 78 consecutive days of targeted bombardment by the Alliance, on June 10 Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic accepted an

agreement put forth by the G8 nations that resulted in the cessation of hostilities.

Operation Allied Force was an important stepping-stone in the transformation of the organization in two respects. Foremost, it was NATO's first major 'out-of-area' operation. Never before had NATO responded to events occurring outside the borders of its members. In addition, because NATO had almost always been purely a defensive alliance, by entering into the conflict it took the unprecedented and sharply distinct step of acting in an offensive manner. As such, if the Alliance is to remain relevant, it must shoulder new burdens, such as the crisis in Kosovo, when other multilateral institutions fail.

NATO's interest in peacemaking operations is evidenced in the creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF). The force is deployable within five days and self-sustaining for thirty.^[8] Once fully realized, it will be composed of 25,000 troops, including "a brigade-size land component with forced entry capability, a naval task force composed of one carrier battle group, an amphibious task group and a surface action group, and an air component."^[9] Because of its size, the NRF is capable of conducting any number of missions including disaster assistance and military intervention. Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General James Jones was quite correct when he remarked that, "NATO will no longer have the large, massed units that were necessary for the Cold War, but will have agile and capable forces ... that will better prepare the Alliance to meet any threat that it is likely to face in this 21st century."^[10] With the ability to perform the entire 'spectrum of missions' including, humanitarian crises, counter terrorist operations, or disaster

management, the NRF is sure to be used widely in the future.^[11] While not a replacement for conventional force generation, it will allow for the Alliance to establish an effective force presence almost anywhere in the world in short notice. There is little doubt that the NRF will help guarantee the relevance of the Alliance in the 21st century.

But NATO should not limit itself to peacemaking operations; it is also one of the most effective multilateral institutions for peacekeeping. Ghali's landmark report, Agenda for Peace, defines peacekeeping as "work to preserve peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers."^[12] Once the involved parties in a conflict reach a resolution, the peacekeeping phase can be implemented. Rarely do the warring factions immediately trust their opponents at the end of conflict. As such, if peace is to succeed, a neutral intermediary force must ensure compliance to the negotiated agreements. If this force cannot be introduced to the region, the possibility of sustainable peace can be greatly reduced.

The first NATO peacekeeping mission was in Bosnia. In August and September 1995, NATO launched Operation Deliberate Force, which attacked Bosnian government forces. These attacks led directly to an acceptance by the Bosnian Serb leadership of the Dayton peace settlement.^[13] To oversee the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the UN authorized a NATO deployment of peacekeepers (UNSC resolution 1031) under the auspices of the 'Implementation Force' (IFOR) mission. The UN peacekeeping mission UNPROFOR II had been in the region

earlier but proved inadequate to restrain violence. NATO would not make the same mistakes as UNPROFOR II; NATO peacekeepers entered Bosnia ready for combat.

The 60,000 NATO IFOR troops deployed to the region brought a vast arsenal of conventional instruments for war including heavy artillery, battle tanks and attack helicopters. Though the IFOR mission accomplished its goals by September 1996, “the situation was still potentially unstable and much remained to be accomplished on the civilian side.” This reality led the IFOR mission to evolve into the broader Stabilization Force (SFOR).^[14] On December 2, 2004, NATO dissolved the SFOR mission to allow the European Union to take a meaningful role in the rebuilding of the region and fulfill the remaining SFOR objectives with limited continued NATO support.^[15] Through both IFOR and SFOR, the NATO peacekeeping effort succeeded in bringing peace, signifying that the Alliance had found a new role in the international security environment. This newly affirmed capability is essential in ensuring that NATO remains as a relevant international institution in the 21st century.

For decades peacekeeping missions were almost exclusively conducted directly through the United Nations, but as evidenced in the Kosovo conflict, the UN’s structure sometimes limits its ability to act. When this occurs, it is important that other multilateral institutions are able to fill the void. In many ways, there is no better organization to fill international security voids than NATO – an alliance that represents a variety of views and whose prime instrument is the military. Because NATO has all the necessary resources to properly conduct peacemaking operations, it is logical for the Alliance to

broaden its original mandate of collective defence and branch out to undertake peacekeeping operations. Experience has already demonstrated that the Alliance can act as an efficient peacekeeper, and this ability coincides nicely with both NATO’s need for relevance and transformation, and the UN’s goals of international stability and security.

This engagement can also be seen in NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan. Once the ruling Taliban had been ousted by a coalition of nations, an enormous security vacuum emerged as no laws were being enforced. To help resolve this, an agreement was reached in December 2001 which stated that NATO was to assume “the leadership of ISAF [International Stabilization and Assistance Force] in August 2003...”^[16] Sanctioned by the Afghan government and the UNSC, the ISAF mission began as scheduled on August 11, 2003.^[17] A key objective of the ongoing mission is to “assist the Government in Afghanistan and the international community in maintaining security within the force’s area of operations.”^[18] When NATO first assumed responsibility for the mission, the area of operation was limited to the Afghan capital, Kabul. As the situation improved in the capital, NATO gradually expanded its area of operation so as to bring more of the country under Afghan government control. This process reached its apex on December 8, 2005 when the foreign ministers of all the NATO members “endorsed a plan that [paved] the way for an expanded NATO role in Afghanistan.”^[19] The plan expanded the NATO ISAF mission throughout the country including the dangerous regions like Kandahar.

In many respects the ISAF mission is still in its infancy as many agree that peace throughout Afghanistan

is still many years away. Despite this, the Alliance remains resolute in pursuing the mission and will not be deterred by setbacks or by the pace of security expansion.^[20] Although NATO has only been in the country a few years, there have already been some remarkable accomplishments. Wherever the ISAF has been active for a prolonged period, the force has created an environment that allows Afghans to live in a sense of security. Furthermore, the mission has decommissioned and removed tens of thousands of weapons and has also made significant contributions to the restoration of important infrastructure.^[21]

It has become apparent that the Alliance has not only grown firmly into a 'peacekeeper' but also that it is an excellent organization to fulfill that role. Moreover, NATO's participation in multiple peace-keeping operations since the 1990s, all of which deviate from the Alliance's central purpose of collective defence, is a clear indicator that it is no longer abnormal for NATO to undertake such endeavours as they are key elements of the organization's transformation.

In the peace process, too often the 'peace-building' phase is overlooked. Ghali defines peace-building as, "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formerly at war; And [sic] in the largest sense, to address the deepest causes of conflict: economic despair, social injustice and political oppression."^[22] While it may seem unlikely that a military oriented organization such as NATO could contribute to this component of the peace process trifecta, nothing could be further from the truth.

In many ways, the peace-building phase is the most important aspect of the peace process as it helps to ensure a sustainable peace emerges after a conflict or disaster. Since NATO is concerned primarily with international security, it has little choice but to engage in peace-building. Scheffer affirmed this when he remarked, "[w]e must reach out, to build stability, security, and prosperity where it is needed."^[23] Peace-building, often working in concert with a peacekeeping operation, helps to create an environment that will support a healthy civil society. As a result, NATO has a vested interest in the success of peace-building operations; without a comprehensive peace-building component, the Alliance would remain or return to a region that was thought to have been stabilized.

There are two vivid examples of NATO's full adoption of peace-building. The first example can be witnessed in Afghanistan. Utilizing past peace-building experiences in the Balkans, NATO has helped to reduce the number of weapons in Afghanistan and ease the transition for thousands of individuals from a military-oriented lifestyle to civilian life. NATO has initiated a number of programmes that facilitate the collection of weapons such as the Afghan New Beginnings Programme and the Disbanding Illegal Armed Groups, and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme.^[24] Through these initiatives, scores of tonnes of explosive and tens of thousands of landmines and arms have been turned over to ISAF and Afghan government security forces.^[25] Furthermore, NATO, with the assistance of the UN, has reintegrated "over 61,000 former combatants and is assisting the Government of Afghanistan in the disarmament of an estimated

120,000 persons belonging to illegally armed groups, who will eventually be returned to civilian life.”[26] NATO is also involved with the building of key infrastructure in the country. All this is a snapshot at the massive peace-building efforts that NATO has undertaken in Afghanistan.

Despite the much publicized division in NATO regarding the Iraq war, the Alliance is engaged in peace-building operations in this beleaguered state. At the outset of the conflict, some pundits wrongly announced that the Alliance had been forever damaged after NATO announced that it would not support the US invasion of the country.[27] But this is not the case, as all members of the Alliance understand the importance of rebuilding the country and stabilizing the region.

One commonality amongst all NATO militaries is their professional nature. A professional military is one that, inter alia, abides by internationally accepted rules that govern warfare, is subordinate to civilian authority, and is trained in accepted fighting techniques. Because of its professionalism and extensive means, NATO elected to engage in peace-building in Iraq by assisting in the creation of a professional domestic military.

At the request of the Iraqi interim President, on June 28, 2004 the Alliance established the NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I).[28] The aim of the mission is “to help Iraq build the capability of its Government to address the security needs of the Iraqi people.”[29] This capability will be achieved by “training and mentoring middle and senior level personnel from the Iraqi security forces in Iraq and outside of Iraq, at NATO schools and training centres.”[30] By the end of 2005, NATO was able to train 1,500 Iraqi

officers, a feat which the Alliance hopes to repeat in 2006.[31] An effective officer corps is critical in maintaining a professional military; few organizations or individual countries can provide the same level of officer training as NATO.

In addition to the development of a professional military, the NTM-I has become a prime facilitator in the Iraqi government’s acquisition of military hardware. All of NATO’s efforts to equip the new Iraqi military go through the NATO Training and Equipment Coordination Group. The greatest achievement of this group came when the Iraqi army received 77 T-72 battle tanks donated by a NATO member.[32] While this was the most visible result of the group’s efforts, it also helped facilitate other less publicized, yet equally important, deliveries, such as “some 26,000 light weapons, 200 rockets, 10,000 helmets and 9,3 million rounds of ammunition....”[33] A professional army cannot be created without access to this equipment. As such, it is abundantly clear from these donations that NATO has had a very important function in assisting in the outfitting of the new Iraqi army.

The military is an important institution to any sovereign state. NATO’s activities in Iraq comprise peace-building as Iraq can never become fully independent and live in a sustained peace without a military and auxiliary security forces to maintain order. The military assistance given to the Iraqi army through NTM-I is just another way the Alliance is remaining engaged in the world and is transforming itself by engaging in peace-building, an idea far removed from its original purpose. Current NATO Secretary General Scheffer noted in a speech that NATO has long ceased to be a static, Eurocentric organization, geared exclusively towards

deterrence and defence. Since the end of the Cold War, the Alliance has become a very flexible, political and military instrument, which we can use wherever our security interests demand it.[34]

Indeed, at the beginning of the 21st century, NATO has emerged as one of the most important and relevant multinational organizations in the world. It has overwhelmingly demonstrated its necessity and ability to meet the international security demands of the 21st century. With the demise of the Soviet Union, NATO is longer orientated toward a Cold War battle against the Soviet Union. To adapt, the organization embraced transformation and shifted from a static alliance focused solely on 'deterrence and defence' to one that was willing to go outside its traditional borders. Breaking the taboo and intervening in the domestic affairs of other states, NATO demonstrated that it was able to avert humanitarian catastrophe in the Balkans. It committed itself to similar operations in the future by establishing the NATO Response Force. NATO has shown an ability to engage in peacekeeping operations as demonstrated in both Bosnia and Afghanistan, and a willingness to engage in peace-building, shown in its considerable efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Each of the three concepts – peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace-building – are helping to transform the organization. By embracing change, NATO has ensured its preservation and has become a premier multilateral organization even when skeptics remark that the Alliance is on its deathbed.

Darwin believed that an organism's inability to adapt to would make it more likely to die than strains of the same organism that could adapt. It is clear that NATO has undertaken significant measures to adapt to the

unpredictable security environment of the 21st century and is well situated to thrive in the international system of the post-Cold War era. Because NATO has embraced its new role while maintaining its core principles, it is not a Cold War relic like the Warsaw Pact but is rather an invaluable player in the field of international security and will be for the foreseeable future.

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