

Beyond Counterinsurgency: Why the Concept is Failing

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Introduction

The changing face of modern warfare is revealed nowhere more clearly than in asymmetric surroundings where traditional approaches do not succeed anymore. Military forces are encountering numerous opponents who no longer consist largely of identifiable combatants, but rather are irregular fighters who live among and within the population, making them extremely difficult to identify. Although uprisings and insurgencies are not new developments, the military's capacity to combat them was neglected in doctrinal thinking at the beginning of the twenty-first century. New trends and challenges and the rethinking of military combat operations, as well as the development of insights regarding a comprehensive approach, led to the re-creation of counterinsurgency doctrine. The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Field Manual 3-24, titled simply *Counterinsurgency* (hereafter, FM 3-24), was written during the most recent conflict in Iraq. This process was largely driven by General David Petraeus. But the United States' counterinsurgency strategy has shown disappointing results in Afghanistan, and critics are already calling for new approaches.¹ Six years after the publication of FM 3-24 frustration is widespread that the current counterinsurgency approach in Afghanistan is not proving to be the panacea that it was promised to be. From the U.S. perspective, the topic becomes even more important, as counterinsurgency is "the strategy through which the United States has expended the greatest level of military resources since September 11, 2001."²

Trends and Challenges in Contemporary Armed Conflict

The prospect of a full-scale conventional war with joint operations in a state-on-state scenario has become less probable in the past twenty years, although the possibility cannot be ruled out completely. While the fundamental principles of war remain unchanged, the character of military engagements has changed significantly. Not only has the num-

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¹ David Wood, "Counterinsurgency Strategy not Working in Afghanistan, Critics Say," *Politics Daily* (11 January 2011), 1; available at www.politicsdaily.com/2011/01/11/counterinsurgency-strategy-not-working-in-afghanistan-critics-s/.

² Baucum Fulk, "An Evaluation of Counterinsurgency as a Strategy for Fighting the Long War," Carlisle Paper (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2011), 1; available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1052>.

ber of armed conflicts been declining since the end of the Cold War (to a low of only twenty-three armed conflicts in 2010), but the ratio of casualties has changed as well.³ In the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 90 percent of killed and wounded persons were combatants, and only 10 percent were civilians; this ratio has reversed completely nowadays, to 90 percent civilian casualties and 10 percent combatants.⁴ The opponent, whether an irregular fighter or terrorist, is no longer a ‘combatant,’ strictly speaking; making the challenge for military forces even greater is the fact that the opponent is hard to identify within the normal population. Examples include the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the pirates operating off the coast of Somalia. Such opponents are challenging for conventional military forces, since they do not obey or act according to the Law of Armed Conflict. Constraints or rules of engagement for military operations are not applicable to opposing forces such as irregular fighters. As state-on-state scenarios have become less probable, multiple definitions for different types of conflict have arisen, such as guerilla wars, revolutions, low-intensity conflicts, three-block wars, small wars, or asymmetric wars – a proliferation of nomenclature that illustrates both the diversity of conflicts and the difficulty of defining modern wars.⁵ But although history shows us that “irregular warfare is by no means only a modern phenomenon,” it also bears out the general lesson that irregular warfare has most often been a secondary action to regular warfare.⁶ At present, irregular warfare is frequently the primary action of opposing elements, as they are normally not strong enough to oppose regular forces openly. In the past, in conflicts featuring state actors, either of the opposing sides could initiate a conflict, but in an insurgency only the insurgents may initiate a conflict, although the use of force might not be the first instrument at hand.⁷ This condemns regular military forces to simply playing a waiting game, because preemptive strikes against the population are not an option. Insurgencies may have multiple causes, most of which are primarily of a political (as opposed to military) nature. The main objective in current conflicts is to win the support of the population, which is a political challenge that is being ultimately pursued with military means. Therefore insurgencies are constantly engaged in a gradual transition from peace to war, and often an abrupt tipping point is not visible. With the challenges mentioned above, along with the effects of the privatization of military affairs and globalization in general, the whole military environment becomes more complex, and it is obvious that a pure military solution is actually no solution at all. Yet counterinsurgency is generally always regarded as an entirely military task, although the military aspect is only part of the overall picture.

³ Wolfgang Schreiber, “Kriege und bewaffnete Konflikte 2011,” *AKUF Analysen* No.10 (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsursachenforschung, Universität Hamburg, December 2011), 1.

⁴ Herfried Münkler, “Die neuen Kriege: Privatisierung und Kommerzialisierung kriegerischer Gewalt und Folgen,” manuscript of lecture given in Berlin, 26 March 2003, 2.

⁵ James K. Wither, “Trends in Warfare,” in *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*, Vol. 3, ed. Lester Kurtz (Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 2008), 24–26.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, 2006 [1964]), 3.

Evolution of Counterinsurgency as a Response to Contemporary Challenges

With the unconventional challenges that coalition forces faced in Iraq and in Afghanistan in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a focus on low-intensity warfare was needed after the official war ended. The transition from traditional war fighting to the concept of counterinsurgency was a long and difficult path, as the U.S. Army found itself unprepared in Iraq in 2003 to engage in this unconventional type of campaign. Modern security challenges required ‘new’ answers, as conventional forms of military operations did not succeed anymore. David Galula underlined this complexity in his formulation that “a revolutionary war is 20 percent military action and 80 percent political,” and referred to the political leadership as operating in a counterinsurgency scenario.⁸ Western nations were not prepared to fight insurgencies with the necessary level of endurance, and lacked the appropriate structures to conduct such a fight effectively.⁹ Especially on the doctrinal level, none of the major Western powers—the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany—had anything updated in 2003 that could serve as a guide.¹⁰ Looking at historical lessons learned, British forces were regarded as being especially well prepared and experienced in fighting small wars, as their counterinsurgency doctrine had been rewritten in 1990.¹¹ In 2003, the problems facing coalition forces in Iraq and the Middle East fighting small wars had their roots in two distinct areas. First, there was a lack of experience in counterinsurgency operations in terms of experienced officers (the British had fought their last counterinsurgency operation in the Middle East in 1976, in Dhofar, and for the U.S. forces, Vietnam had been long forgotten in terms of counterinsurgency doctrine).¹² Second, there was a failure at the doctrinal level. Lessons learned from history were simply neglected in operational planning procedures during the Iraq campaign and in the initial phase of operations in Afghanistan. With the U.S. Army focusing on conventional warfare, it took them thirty years after losing the Vietnam War to rethink their concepts around irregular warfare. The challenges in Iraq made the U.S. request training from the British in irregular warfare, as the British had earned an excellent reputation for their success in the Malayan campaign.¹³ Following the experience in Iraq, with guidance from British officials and under the leadership of General David Petraeus, the revised U.S. Field Manual 3-24 *Counterin-*

⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁹ John Mackinlay and Alison Al-Baddawy, *Rethinking Counterinsurgency*, RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Vol. 5 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 2.

¹⁰ A German military counterinsurgency doctrine had been only available as a draft version in 2011, by that time not yet officially released.

¹¹ James K. Wither, “Basra’s not Belfast: The British Army, Small Wars and Iraq,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 20: 3–4 (September–December 2009): 617.

¹² Ibid., 616.

¹³ Ibid., 614.

surgency was published in 2006.¹⁴ The creation of FM 3-24 and the coalition's initial successes due to the 'surge' in Iraq led to hopes that counterinsurgency would be the concept of the future, as some supporters of the concept see the future as mostly dominated by irregular war fighting.¹⁵

Analysis of the Concept

The concept of counterinsurgency as stated in FM 3-24 in its broadest definition is understood as a way to think about irregular warfare while remaining aware of the fact that counterinsurgency, "in the American mode, is but one small reflection of the much older, even ancient, practice of countering insurgents, or irregular enemies."¹⁶ Gorka and Kilcullen continue to stress that the doctrinal principles of FM 3-24 were indeed not shaped by lessons learned, but derived from selected experiences during the past that have considered only a small subset of the many diverging forms of warfare.¹⁷ Evaluating the success of counterinsurgency operations is not easy, according to Lieutenant-Colonel Paganini, the Director of the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Center, who also refers to the importance of flexibility that is necessary in order to be constantly adaptive to modern challenges.¹⁸ Addressing the strengths of the concept and the weak spots that critics have identified as having led to the failure of counterinsurgency efforts in the current environment will eventually provide an answer to the question of whether the concept is failing or just needs adjusting. By focusing on the weaknesses, my intent here is to emphasize the need for alternatives without anticipating the final conclusion.

Strengths

The most important factor of the concept is its promotion of the fact that counterinsurgency is about popular support and governance, and that the military plays only one role out of many. Counterinsurgency is a complex and holistic system-of-systems approach that is deployed in order to ensure peace and stability within a region, preferably with an existing legitimate government. The "winning hearts and minds" approach is population-centric, and is rooted in the assumption that it is more important to gain popular support than to kill one or two more insurgents.

The goal is to create an acceptable level of legitimacy in the local government so that success can be longer-lasting. One principle is to focus on political aims and political

¹⁴ *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, issue 3-24 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army Headquarters, December 2006).

¹⁵ Sebastian L.v. Gorka and David Kilcullen, "An Actor-centric Theory of War: Understanding the Difference Between COIN and Counterinsurgency," *Joint Force Quarterly* 60 (1st Quarter 2011): 15; available at <http://www.ndu.edu/press/coin-and-counterinsurgency.html>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kristina Wong, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan: Is it Working?," *ABC News* (9 October 2011); available at <http://abcnews.go.com/US/counterinsurgency-afghanistan-working/story?id=14694736>.

processes, while maintaining realistic goals. This fact is in theory a strength of the concept, but it needs to be approached from two sides. In theory, maintaining the primacy of the political dimension is important in order to generate public and legal support, but on the other hand the presence of a large number of deployed non-military actors can show the weakness of political will, or more accurately the lack of capabilities of the political actors. The incorporation of intelligence and information is another strength of the counterinsurgency concept, as it recognizes the priority of intelligence gathering and sharing in an effort to know the enemy.¹⁹ In order to locate, target, and oppose the enemy, sufficient intelligence is necessary. The holistic approach of the concept is aimed at the root causes within the population that have given rise to the insurgency, in order to counter these factors. After having forgotten how to fight small wars—or, as in the case of the U.S. Army, not being willing to think about it—it is vital to once again think about counterinsurgency as a necessary tool for the preparation and education of forces in order to sustain them in combat. In summary, counterinsurgency is a more tactical approach for the military that is adaptable to a wide range of circumstances, but which requires education and training in advance. At the same time, counterinsurgency is useful for generating the same goals for multiple players in a crisis region, as it unites the different approaches to countering insurgents and enhances the unity of effort. The concept itself allows all actors at all times to adapt the operations plan according to the necessities on the ground.

Weaknesses

A high-ranking Taliban leader made clear in late 2010 that “one of the main reasons for our popularity is the failure of this government.”²⁰ This statement shows that the importance of supporting legitimate governance cannot be stressed enough before going on “capture-or-kill missions.” But the focus on the local, regional, or national government in a crisis region needs to come from more sources than just the military. Although the military will often initially have more assets available in a crisis region that it can deploy in support of the government, governance itself remains a civilian task. During the process of evaluating FM 3-24, it became obvious that by looking at only a limited number of examples from Western nations in the twentieth century, the discussion of counterinsurgency approaches seemed somehow limited. In addition, this fact also limits our thinking and understanding of current and future challenges in small-war scenarios.²¹ Gorka and Kilcullen emphasize that “modern Western [counterinsurgency] theory is built on a handful of books based upon practitioner experiences in a handful of twentieth-century conflicts....”²² Although counterinsurgency as presented in FM 3-24 is far

¹⁹ Crispin Burke, Michael Few, and Clarke Prine, “Evolving the COIN Field Manual: A Case for Reform,” *Small Wars Journal* (July 2011): 1; available at <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/evolving-the-coin-field-manual-a-case-for-reform>.

²⁰ Wood, “Counterinsurgency Strategy not Working in Afghanistan,” 3.

²¹ Gorka and Kilcullen, “An Actor-centric Theory of War,” 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 15–16.

more complex than had been previously thought, when viewed through a historical lens its presentation is limited to a narrow perspective: Iraq is not Malay or Ireland. It is important to consider that FM 3-24 as it is used currently offers the soldier a set of best practices and an easily referred to “check-list.” But without recognizing that every insurgency is different from those that have come before, it is impossible to remember that every counterinsurgency campaign must be different as well. The length of operational tours is affecting the success of counterinsurgency operations. Building trust with locals takes time, but if operational deployments are only from four to six months long,²³ it cannot be expected that an adequate level of knowledge and respect between the main players can develop. The short duration of deployments was one of the reasons behind the frequent strategy changes in Iraq, and undermined the relationship-building efforts of British military in the area of operations.²⁴ In order to work closely with the local population or local decision makers, it is evident that a certain level of trust is needed. In this regard, the “Winning Hearts and Minds” approach was totally misunderstood. In a counterinsurgency scenario, it means that winning the support of the population might serve as a center of gravity for the overall aims of the mission, but that popularity or likeability among the people is not the aim. It is indeed necessary to use robust force in kinetic operations during a counterinsurgency campaign, but targets should be chosen carefully, keeping in mind the ultimate goal of building a legitimate and functional government. Current expectations derived from military operations in Iraq were too high, and were not transferable to the situation in Afghanistan – indeed, it is even disputed that the success in Iraq has resulted in the United States changing its approach toward counterinsurgency operations.²⁵ The slow pace of process has a serious impact on the level of domestic public support.²⁶ Counterinsurgency efforts take time and are very expensive, which creates pressure on political stakeholders, who are often up for reelection before a counterinsurgency campaign has run its course. Counterinsurgency is no replacement for a strategy. It is aimed mainly at the tactical and operational levels, but absolutely requires an overall strategy that does not consist only of short-term expectations.²⁷ Knowing the weaknesses of the concept, Wood’s demand is blunt: “Drop the hearts n’ minds stuff. Go kill the enemy.”²⁸

²³ British forces are usually sent to the field for six months, whereas German troops normally only deploy for four months, although taking the fact into consideration that trust building needs time there are flexible adjustments for deployments up to one year possible in Germany.

²⁴ Wither, “Basra’s not Belfast,” 618.

²⁵ David H. Ucko, “Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan: A Concept in Crisis,” *Prism* 3:1 (National Defense University Press, Center for Complex Operations, December 2011): 4.

²⁶ A successful fight against an insurgency usually requires anywhere from twelve to fifteen years, Gorka and Kilcullen, “An Actor-centric Theory of War,” 17.

²⁷ Mackinlay and Al-Baddawy, *Rethinking Counterinsurgency*, 62.

²⁸ Wood, “Counterinsurgency Strategy not Working in Afghanistan,” 1.

“Beyond COIN”: Is Counterinsurgency the Right Answer for Current Conflicts?

Lacking a coherent strategy, and considering the fact that every counterinsurgency campaign is different, it also may be that “General Petraeus’ counterinsurgency doctrine simply may not apply to Afghanistan.”²⁹ The rise and fall of the relevance of counterinsurgency was remarkably quick, but what are the alternatives? Currently the discussion supports an approach where the effort towards large-scale counterinsurgency operations is decreasing, while special forces are conducting a direct military engagement against remnants of Al Qaeda and Taliban forces that is defined as ‘counterterrorism,’ moving away from the costly civil-military approach of counterinsurgency.³⁰ In addition, the U.S. public has become more wary of the engagement in Afghanistan after nearly ten years of operations there (with few concrete signs of success), which adds to the pressure of a strategic change.³¹ The counterterrorism concept supports a narrower and more precise approach to eliminating opposing elements, which is less costly than the comprehensive approach that a counterinsurgency effort embraces. A mixture of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism elements—a so-called “Counterterrorism Plus” operation—where “capture-or-kill” operations are conducted along with the protection of a few key population centers, seem to be a promising alternative.³²

Generally, counterinsurgency is the right answer for most of the current conflicts in terms of planning and executing operations, as it offers a clear set of guidelines and best practices. But these efforts require time, money, dedication, and political support, and it is important to keep in mind that counterinsurgency is not the hoped-for panacea that was much praised when FM 3-24 was introduced. Currently, there seems to be a quiet transition from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism under way, a shift that is taking place already but is hardly noticed. The great benefit of this transition is that it offers political actors a way out of Afghanistan without being publicly embarrassed. Even with the transition to counterterrorism and the challenging security environment of the twenty-first century in mind, “beyond counterinsurgency” must always be simultaneously understood to mean “before counterinsurgency.”

Conclusion

The challenging and threatening security environment is emerging hand in hand with a series of even more alarming developments, as military service times are being reduced, defense budgets are rapidly decreasing, and perceptions of threat levels are rising, as is the complexity of future risks and conflicts. But with respect to insurgencies, whatever is currently being done is essentially preparing for the “last counterinsurgency operation.”

²⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰ Peter Rudolf, “War Weariness and Change in Strategy in U.S. Policy,” *SWP Comments* No. 34 (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, October 2011): 2.

³¹ Wood, “Counterinsurgency Strategy not Working in Afghanistan,” 1.

³² Rudolf, “War Weariness and Change in Strategy in U.S. Policy,” 6.

The limited scope of a few selected successful counterinsurgency operations has led to a false feeling of security in Iraq and Afghanistan.³³ The Western powers chose the hard way to relearn the lessons of irregular warfare and to readapt to the challenges of the changing counterinsurgency scenario. Gorka and Kilcullen point out that “a single unified counterinsurgency doctrine is not possible, that there can be no universal set of best practices....”³⁴ Therefore, the lessons learned and the best practices are being used well if they are being considered in planning future operations, but this effort always requires a local or regional perspective, as counterinsurgency in East Asia might not be the same as counterinsurgency in the jungles of Peru. Counterinsurgency as formulated in FM 3-24 offers a wide range of insights, best practices, and guidelines from former operations, but these rules need to be adapted with respect to specific, local challenges. They can be helpful in the planning and execution of campaign plans, but by themselves they do not constitute a strategy.³⁵ The lack of an overall strategy for either operations or for the political realm is evident, and cannot be masked by the application of good tactics. For modern fighting forces it is essential that they are capable of covering the whole spectrum of operations, from small wars or insurgencies to a full-scale conventional state-on-state war.

The concept of ‘counterinsurgency’ operations as set forth in FM 3-24 is the correct concept for small wars, but it needs a broader base of historical cases from which it can draw adaptations, recognizing that every counterinsurgency campaign is different, and the concept does not replace a comprehensive strategy with a realistic political aim. Etzioni correctly states “that if counterinsurgency is to work, it must be profoundly re-cast.”³⁶ Chances are currently low that any Western nation will dedicate such a large number of troops to any counterinsurgency scenario in the near future, as “counterinsurgency has not been a happy experience, and there will be no desire to prep for an encore.”³⁷ But the hard lessons learned in the past decade should not be buried again.

³³ Andrew P. Betson, “Slow Learners: How Iraq and Afghanistan Forced Britain to Rethink COIN,” *Armed Forces Journal* (November 2011): 41.

³⁴ Gorka and Kilcullen, “An Actor-centric Theory of War,” 16.

³⁵ Ucko, “Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan,” 11.

³⁶ Amitai Etzioni, “Whose COIN?” *Joint Force Quarterly* 60 (1st Quarter 2011): 19.

³⁷ Ucko, “Counterinsurgency after Afghanistan,” 15.

How Smart is Smart Defense? A Review of NATO's Smart Defense Proposal

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Introduction

Since 2008, the world has experienced a severe economic crisis, one that has led to many austerity measures, including deep cuts in defense spending in many countries. As NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has argued, maintaining a capable and effective NATO Alliance in this era of financial crisis presents a real and pressing challenge for NATO.¹ In response to these challenges, at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011 Rasmussen launched a proposal for "Smart Defense." This proposal aims to examine how "NATO can help nations to build greater security with fewer resources." It emphasizes the need to "spend better" by prioritizing, specializing, and seeking multinational solutions.²

This article will examine and analyze the proposal for Smart Defense with a view to assessing its value in helping NATO surmount the fiscal challenges it faces. The first section will provide a brief overview of the current fiscal environment within NATO member states, including key member states' current and planned defense spending cuts and how these cuts will impact burden sharing within NATO. The next section will briefly describe the Secretary-General's Smart Defense proposal, and will explore each pillar of the concept. The third section will examine the key challenges and strengths of the proposal. Finally, conclusions will be drawn about the ability of the Smart Defense proposal to help NATO overcome the current fiscal challenges.

NATO Burden Sharing and the Fiscal Environment

Burden sharing within NATO occurs through a variety of direct and indirect contributions to the costs of the Alliance.³ The main way member states contribute to the Alliance is through the participation of their national armed forces in NATO, including in operations, and in efforts to ensure that national forces are interoperable with other

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¹ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO and Industry: Providing Security Together," Speech at the ACT Industry Day, London, 12 September 2011.

² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Building Security in an Era of Austerity," Keynote Speech at the Munich Security Conference, 4 February 2011.

³ NATO, "Summary of the meeting of the Economics and Security Committee," 8 October 2011; available from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly website, at <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=2658>.

NATO members.⁴ At the Prague Summit in 2002, NATO member states made a commitment to spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense in order to ensure that each member state was able to maintain a capable and effective defense force that was interoperable with other NATO forces.⁵

Constrained fiscal environments within member states have a significant impact on NATO, as this may lead member states to reduce their defense budgets and contributions to NATO. Presently, there are two key challenges for NATO stemming from the current fiscal environment: declining defense budgets in many states, which will likely lead to capability shortfalls; and the increasing gap between European and U.S. contributions to NATO resources. Each trend is discussed below and is followed by a review of the likely impacts on NATO.

Declining Defense Budgets

While declining defense budgets have been a trend for some time now in Europe, the financial crisis in 2008 accelerated this trend. In 2011, for example, eighteen NATO member states spent less on defense than in 2010.⁶ Indeed, in the last two years, Europe's defense spending has gone down by roughly USD 45 billion, which is around the size of Germany's entire annual defense budget.⁷ The United States also faces huge spending cuts with a USD 487 billion reduction to the US Defense budget over the next ten years.⁸ In addition, in 2011 only three of NATO's twenty-eight members met the target of dedicating 2 percent of GDP to defense spending.⁹ As former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates recognized, the "fiscal, political, and demographic realities make [achieving the 2 percent of GDP target] unlikely to happen anytime soon."¹⁰ Added to this are the concerns that these "cuts have been carried out with little or no coordination with other member states of the Alliance."¹¹

An Increasing Gap between U.S. and European Contributions

Since the beginning of NATO, there have been concerns about the equality of the Alliance's burden-sharing arrangements, particularly between contributions made by the

⁴ NATO, "Paying for NATO," 21 November 2011, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_67655.htm.

⁵ U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, "The Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO)," Speech delivered at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, 10 June 2011.

⁶ Frank Boland, "Transatlantic Burden Sharing in a Time of Budgetary Crisis," Presentation to the Annual Meeting of the Economics and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bucharest, 8 October 2011.

⁷ Rasmussen, "Building Security in an Era of Austerity."

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, "Defense Budget Priorities and Choices," January 2012, available at http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Budget_Priorities.pdf.

⁹ Boland, "Transatlantic Burden Sharing."

¹⁰ Gates, "The Security and Defense Agenda."

¹¹ NATO, "Summary of the meeting of the Economics and Security Committee."

United States and those from its European allies.¹² These concerns have only been exacerbated by the financial crisis, which has led to a widening of the gap between the U.S. and European Allies' contributions.¹³ While ten years ago the United States accounted for just under half of NATO members' total defense spending, it now contributes around 77 percent.¹⁴

Senior U.S. government officials have warned that the United States may not accept these arrangements forever. In June 2011, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates raised important questions about the willingness of the United States to continue to bear so much of the NATO burden: "The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress—and in the American body politic writ large—to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense."¹⁵ U.S. Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, also raised the prospect that, due to the United States' own budget cuts, it may not be able to bear this burden forever. He said, "As for the United States, many might assume that the United States defense budget is so large it can absorb and cover Alliance shortcomings. But make no mistake about it, we are facing dramatic cuts with real implications for alliance capability."¹⁶

Impact of Fiscal Trends

The impact of these fiscal trends on the Alliance is twofold: first, they have the potential to affect the capabilities of the Alliance; second, they may have an impact on Alliance cohesion and solidarity. As Pessin argues, these spending cuts "threaten to hurt the NATO alliance's efforts to upgrade its capabilities."¹⁷ Both Panetta and Gates also spoke of the risks to future investments in modernization, and Secretary-General Rasmussen expressed fears of a "weaker Europe ... without the hardware to back up its soft power."¹⁸ This has already been seen with a number of delays and cancellations in major equipment projects. Many have also argued that the NATO operation in Libya revealed

¹² Karl-Heinz Kamp, "NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda," *NATO Defense College Research Paper* 70 (Rome, 2011); available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=cab359a3-9328-19cc-a1d2-8023e646b22c&lng=en&id=134581>.

¹³ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Keynote Speech at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bucharest, 10 October 2011; available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-67DE56BB-B6463262/natolive/opinions_79064.htm?selectedLocale=en.

¹⁴ Rasmussen, "Building Security in an Era of Austerity"; Boland, "Transatlantic Burden Sharing."

¹⁵ Gates, "The Security and Defense Agenda."

¹⁶ U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Speech at Carnegie Europe, Brussels, 5 October 2011; available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4895>.

¹⁷ Al Pessin, "Financial Crisis Hits NATO Funding," *Voice of America* (15 November 2011); available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/financial-crisis-hits-nato-funding-133906423/148219.html>.

¹⁸ Rasmussen, "Building Security in an Era of Austerity."

a number of weaknesses in Europe's military capabilities as a result of their reduced spending on defense. The United States was required to fill in key capability gaps, including targeting specialists; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities; air-to-air refueling; and supply of munitions.¹⁹ Second, the increasing gap between the U.S. and its European Allies has the potential to "undermine the solidarity which has long held together this Alliance."²⁰ Rasmussen has warned of a "divided Europe" and "a Europe increasingly adrift from the United States."²¹

The Smart Defense Proposal

Many argue that this constrained fiscal environment, coupled with the increasingly complex security environment, makes working together an imperative. It is from this necessity that the concept of Smart Defense was born. Secretary-General Rasmussen first proposed the Smart Defense concept on 24 February 2011 at the Munich Security Conference. He explained, "The way forward lies not in spending more, but in spending better. We must prioritize the capabilities we need the most. Specialize in what we do best. And seek multinational solutions to common problems. This is Smart Defense."²² Since the initial proposal, Rasmussen has elaborated on the concept a number of times, and in September 2011 he appointed two special envoys—General Stephane Abrial, Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, and Claudio Bisogniero, then Deputy Secretary-General—to develop a package of multinational projects to be explored at the Chicago Summit in 2012. Each pillar of the Smart Defense proposal is explored below.

Prioritizing

Secretary-General Rasmussen argues that NATO member states need to "put our money where the real priorities are." At the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, several key priorities for NATO were identified, including operations, cyber security, terrorism, and counter piracy.²³ As such, Rasmussen has urged member states to spend their precious resources on these priorities, rather than on static defense structures left over from the Cold War. The Secretary-General has encouraged national efforts to reform defense forces to focus on such priorities. For example, he praised the undertakings of the German Bundeswehr, which has embarked upon a reform program to make its armed forces

¹⁹ Gates, "The Security and Defense Agenda"; Panetta, Speech at Carnegie Europe; Rasmussen, "NATO and Industry"; and William S. Cohen, Nicholas Burns, and George Robertson, "NATO on the Brink," *The Hill* (11 July 2011); available at <http://thehill.com/opinion/oped/170807-nato-on-the-brink>.

²⁰ NATO, "Lawmakers Warn NATO: Defense Cuts Risk Undermining Security," NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bucharest, 8 October 2011; available at <http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2615>.

²¹ Rasmussen, "NATO and Industry."

²² Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Principles and Power," Speech at the NATO Review Conference, Berlin, 27 October 2011; available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_79949.htm.

²³ Rasmussen, "Building Security in an Era of Austerity."

“leaner, more efficient and more capable.” He suggested that Germany can be a “motor for Smart Defense,” helping others to undertake similar reforms.²⁴ NATO is also undergoing its own transformation process to make the Alliance’s command and control function more agile, deployable, and affordable.²⁵

Specializing

Given that the very foundation of the Alliance is about helping one another, Secretary-General Rasmussen has proposed that not all countries need to possess all possible military capabilities (nor, at present, can they all afford them). Instead, specializing in particular capabilities can help reduce the heavy burden of trying to maintain a full-spectrum military force in each nation. Of critical importance to specializing is that each member state does not make these decisions on its own – rather, these decisions must be coordinated and transparent to ensure the Alliance as a whole remains capable and effective. The example of the Baltic States’ agreement with NATO on air policing is widely cited as a model. This agreement allowed Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to focus their resources on deployable forces in Afghanistan, rather than on expensive aircraft. Another example is the Czech Republic’s specialized multinational Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Defense Battalion. It is a NATO facility that all Allies can use, but is led by the Czech Republic. It is designed to “respond and defend” against WMD both inside and outside NATO.²⁶

Multinational Solutions

The final pillar of Smart Defense is multinational solutions, which involve pooling and sharing resources, engaging in common acquisition projects, and promoting common maintenance and logistics efforts. A key example is the effort to build strategic lift capability, where ten NATO allies, plus two partners, pooled their resources to purchase three C-17 transport aircraft. On their own, none of the countries would have been able to afford one C-17, but together they were able to build a strategic airlift capacity that is sufficient for all of the participating states’ needs. NATO’s missile defense program is also often cited as an example of a multinational solution. By pooling their assets, member states can create an effective missile defense capability to protect their populations.²⁷

²⁴ Rasmussen, Keynote Speech at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bucharest, 10 October 2011.

²⁵ Patrick Wouters, “Technical Background Briefing on NATO Command Structure,” interview by Oana Lungescu, *NATOChannel.tv* (9 June 2011); available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_75353.htm.

²⁶ NATO Press Release, “Launch of NATO Multinational CBRN Defense Battalion,” 1 December 2003; available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2003/p031126e.htm>.

²⁷ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Towards NATO’s Chicago Summit,” Speech at the European Policy Centre, Brussels, 30 September 2011; available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_78600.htm.

Chicago Summit

The continuing importance of Smart Defense was reflected in the major focus allies gave it at the Chicago summit in May 2012 where they agreed on a detailed declaration entitled “Summit Declaration on Defense Capabilities: Toward NATO Forces 2020.” This declaration highlighted the goal for 2020 of “modern, tightly connected forces, equipped, trained, exercised and commanded so that they to operate together and with partners in any environment.”²⁸ They noted that progress in Alliance cooperation included: agreement on interim ballistic missile defense capability as an initial step to establish NATO’s missile defense system; agreement to deploy a highly sophisticated Alliance Ground Surveillance system; extending the air police mission in the Baltic states; establishment of a new command structure. Steady progress was also achieved in developing other critical capabilities that were identified at the 2010 Lisbon Summit, including: cyber defense; extending NATO’s air command and control system; augmenting capabilities in Afghanistan for exchanging intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance data and countering improvised explosive devices.²⁹ At Chicago, allies also adopted a comprehensive Smart Defense package which included more than 20 multinational projects, including for a NATO universal armaments interface for aircraft, remotely controlled robots for clearing roadside bombs, pooling maritime patrol aircraft, multinational cooperation on munitions, a multinational aviation training centre, multinational medical treatment facilities and a multinational logistics partnership for fuel handling among many others.³⁰

Summary

At its core, the Smart Defense proposal is about working together to achieve more than individual states can achieve alone. As the U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, Ambassador Ivo Daalder, stated, “If you fund things in common, then ten cents can get you a dollar’s worth of capability, because the ninety cents get paid for by other allies. If you try to buy that same capability yourself, ten cents gets you ten cents worth of capability, so you’re multiplying the effect by going together with other countries.”³¹

²⁸ NATO, “Summit Declaration on Defence Capabilities: Toward NATO Forces 2020,” 21 May 2012, paragraph 5.

²⁹ NATO, “Summit Declaration on Defense Capabilities: Toward NATO Forces 2020,” 21 May 2012, paragraph 4.

³⁰ NATO, “Multinational Projects Fact Sheet,” Media Backgrounder, 16 May 2012, available at www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20120516_media_backgrounder_Multinational_Projects_en.pdf.

³¹ Ivo Daalder, “The Success of NATO Operations in Libya and the Vital Contributions of Partners Outside of NATO,” Media Roundtable, Washington Foreign Press Center, 7 November 2011; available at <http://fpc.state.gov/176760.htm>.

Challenges and Opportunities

Since the Secretary-General put forward his Smart Defense proposal, there have been a number of questions raised about its likely utility in helping address current fiscal issues. This section analyzes key critiques, and weighs them against the key strengths of the proposal.

Critiques

The most common critique of the Smart Defense proposal is that it is just another buzzword or bumper sticker slogan. Karl-Heinz Kamp has argued that it is nothing new, that similar buzzwords have been used in the past, and that Rasmussen's proposal is unlikely to achieve anything different this time. As Andrew Michta put it, "buzzwords alone can't provide the fundamentals NATO is missing."³² Others have furthered these comments by saying that such a concept cannot be a substitute for member states taking responsibility for their fair share of defense.³³

Of the three pillars, perhaps the most challenging will be multinational solutions. Such solutions often sound good in theory, but in practice it is much harder to achieve tangible results. According to Tomas Valasek, the EU has some experience with pooling and sharing resources. However, due to the sensitivities of individual nations and differences in their strategic outlooks, threat perceptions, and military cultures, these efforts have met with limited success.³⁴ He notes that "governments are reluctant to build joint units because this may require them to share decisions on how and when to use them," and that governments fear such activities will "undermine national sovereignty by creating interdependencies with other militaries."³⁵ Rasmussen has recognized these barriers: "I know allies don't always find multinational cooperation the most attractive option. There are lingering concerns about delayed delivery schedules, inflated overhead costs, and slow decision making. And of course, defense is tightly bound with national sovereignty, industry and jobs." The complications of joint crewing of assets recently came to bear during Operation Unified Protector, the NATO operation in Libya during the collapse of the Qadhafi regime. Complications arose because NATO Airborne Warning and

³² Kamp, "NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda"; Andrew A. Michta, "NATO's Last Chance," *The American Interest* (May/June 2011): 56–60; available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=959>.

³³ Gates, "The Security and Defense Agenda."

³⁴ Tomas Valasek, "EU Ministers Tackle Defence Austerity," Centre for European Reform blog (1 June 2011), available at <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2011/06/eu-ministers-tackle-defence-austerity.html>; and Valasek, "Governments Need Incentives to Pool and Share Militaries," Centre for European Reform (1 November 2011), available at <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.com/2011/11/governments-need-incentives-to-pool-and.html>.

³⁵ Valasek, *Surviving Austerity: The Case for a New Approach to EU Military Collaboration* (London: Centre for European Reform, April 2011), available at <http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/report/2011/surviving-austerity-case-new-approach-eu-military-collaboration>; and Valasek, "Governments Need Incentives."

Control System (AWACS) assets—some of which had German crews—were needed in Libya, but Germany had opted to not be involved in the operation. While the issue was resolved, with the German Parliament approving German-crewed AWACS planes to deploy into Afghanistan in seventy-two hours, which freed up non-German crews for Libya – it does raise concerns about how deployable common assets truly are.³⁶

Strengths

Despite these critiques, the Smart Defense proposal also has a number of strengths and advantages that may overcome the challenges that have been identified. In this era of austerity coupled with complex security challenges, an innovative framework to deal with these problems is needed. The Smart Defense proposal is one such creative solution, and provides a useful conceptual tool to promote further thinking on this critical issue. The concept itself provides a mechanism for identifying opportunities and exploring areas of cooperation. Moreover, the Smart Defense proposal has been formulated in a way that attempts to provide substance beyond just being another buzzword. The appointment of the two high-level Special Envoys and tight timeframes given for delivering a package of proposals (Chicago 2012) demonstrated NATO's institutional commitment to the approach.³⁷

Karl-Heinz Kamp has described the current situation as an “almost unique environment with an international financial crisis putting more pressure on national budgets than ever before.”³⁸ He argues that NATO member states may be more willing and more open to explore proposals for meeting their security interests without putting further strain on their national budgets. The concrete package of multinational projects delivered at the Chicago Summit is a clear illustration of member states' commitment to pursue multinational solutions and support the Smart Defense initiative. In addition, Smart Defense's prospects for success are strengthened by NATO's unique position, as it has visibility across the Alliance. It has insights into all member states' current capabilities and capability requirements, and can therefore play a valuable role in coordinating and overseeing these efforts.³⁹ In order to overcome the issues of differing perceptions and outlooks, Valasek suggests promoting “‘islands of cooperation' along regional lines.”⁴⁰ Models such as the Baltic States' approach to air policing or the recent France–U.K. Treaty may prove to be useful in the short term as deeper and more extensive cooperation models are developed for the longer term.

Conclusions

Given the pressure on defense budgets across the NATO Alliance and the increasingly complex security terrain, action is needed to ensure that the economic crisis does not

³⁶ Daalder, “The Success of NATO Operations in Libya.”

³⁷ Kamp, “NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda.”

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Rasmussen, “Building Security in an Era of Austerity.”

⁴⁰ Valasek, *Surviving Austerity*.

morph into a security crisis as well. The Smart Defense proposal from NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen provides a valuable conceptual framework for member states to identify further opportunities to prioritize their defense needs, specialize in particular areas of capability, and work multinationally. While challenges and hindrances to working together abound, the unique global environment may provide the necessary impetus to overcome these barriers to cooperation.

Political will is a key ingredient in surmounting these challenges. NATO can use its unique position to encourage member states to work together in these efforts. In sum, if member states are fully committed to making difficult decisions and are serious about working together to develop solutions, it is likely that the concept of Smart Defense will make a significant contribution to helping NATO remain a credible security actor in this era of austerity.