Strategic Insight

In Search of Stability: NATO's Strategic Crossroads

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In August of 1914, the major European powers were saddled with large, modern armies, and were primed with hair-trigger mobilization plans that quickly mustered the entire effort of their populations for war. In a moment of crisis, a cascade of events sent their nations into a war so terrible that today it remains incomprehensible in its destructiveness. World War I saw the end of the empires that had dominated the Euoprean political scene for centuries and it cut short the lives of over ten million human beings. The effect of the war and the lessons taken from it remain with us today.

What then are the lessons of World War I that have been so resilient? First, excessive militarization of a country, both in terms of its military capabilities to wage war and in terms of the organization of its political and public life, is a prescription for disaster. Second, there is a need for crisis management institutions and procedures to prevent hazardous situations escaping the control of governments. As events in 1914 spun out of control, officials seemed unable to halt or even slow the rush toward war, a war most did not seem to want.[1] Finally, there is an understanding that sovereign nations need to be part of an interlocking network of international organizations to provide communication and transparency to defuse or prevent tensions that can lead to war.

This *Strategic Insight* suggests that although these lessons have merit, they often ease only the symptoms of a developing crisis, while doing little to address the underlying sources of international tension. It explores the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) recent efforts to foster stability, and suggests how these initiatives might be improved by deemphasizing crisis management in favor of long-term efforts to address more fundamental sources of international discord.

What's the Policy?

NATO is not the only organization to pursue a policy of stabilization based on dialogue, lowering levels of military expenditures, and managing crises, although it is perhaps the most well known. NATO's *Strategic Concept*, adopted in 1991, was revised in 1996 and 1999 to meet the security challenges of the post-Cold War environment.[2] NATO's security policy is designed to enable the Alliance to ensure security in the Euro-Atlantic area by:

- Maintaining the ability to deal with crises wherever they occur.
- Providing reduced but adequate and more flexible forces.
- Promoting dialogue, cooperation and arms control.

NATO's original mission of providing collective defense still gets top billing, but only as obligatory boiler plate that allows the Alliance to get on with the tasks at hand. According to its own recent depiction of its purpose:

The Alliance's core function consists in providing collective defense for member states in accordance with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. In today's transformed European environment, NATO also provides a wider forum for cooperation designed to contribute to the political stability, economic development and long term security of its members and its partner countries. It also stands ready to contribute to effective conflict prevention and to engage in crisis management and crisis response operations.[3]

Measures of Success

Since NATO's enlargement decision in 1995, three countries have joined the alliance. Seven others have been invited and could join as early as 2004, including the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program has expanded to 27 nations. In an unexpected twist, PfP has actually strengthened NATO, by providing political support and robust contributions to peacekeeping efforts in the Balkans. The policy of cooperation and dialogue has produced benefits. Speaking about the NATO interventions in Kosovo and Macedonia, a NATO official recently wrote:

In both cases, NATO, together with other international organizations, played a key role in creating the conditions for re-establishing peace and stability. Working closely with the governments in Belgrade and Skopje, the international community helped put in place a comprehensive set of reform and confidence-building measures to underpin broad political agreements that were worked out to end the two conflicts. And in both cases, ethnic Albanian extremists were persuaded to lay down their arms. After years of public debate and setbacks for the international community in the former Yugoslavia, both cases might go down as the first examples of effective crisis management and conflict prevention.[4]

The much-feared chaos of a disintegrating Soviet empire did not emerge. Nor did the world divide itself along new cold war lines as some predicted.[5]

Some Doubts

But is NATO intervention in the Balkans an unqualified success? The answer is both yes and no: "Yes," if the goal was to bring an emerging crisis back under manageable limits in the short term; "No," if the objective was to find a solution to the underlying problem. In Kosovo, for example, NATO intervention stopped the murder and expulsion of thousands of ethnic Albanian Kosovars. The presence of NATO troops helps limit the threat of retaliation against the Serb minority. But there is no real plan for the future of the province. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 dealing with Kosovo was intentionally vague about the future of Kosovo.[6]

Macedonia is another place where a strong crisis response lacked a long-term plan to solve underlying sources of tension. Up until 2001, Macedonia was the darling of the international community because it was the only former Yugoslav republic that did not participate in the wars following the breakup of the old regime. It was relatively stable with a constitutionally elected government in which the Albanian Ethnic minority was represented both in the ruling coalition and, to a lesser extent, the police and armed forces. The uprising in 2001 of ethnic Albanian rebels was not a surprise, but it was certainly a disappointment to many who held out Macedonia as a model for Balkan reform. The NATO response was predictable: diplomatic missions were sent to open dialogue, an agreement was brokered, concessions made, verification protocols drawn up, peacekeepers sent in, and aid offered. In its rush to impose stability, however, NATO may have overlooked or ignored other concerns that play an important role in any long-term solution to ethnic conflict in the region. By brokering an agreement that recognized the *de facto* legitimacy of the rebels and their claims, NATO undermined the duly elected, multi-ethnic government of Macedonia.

The Limits of Policy in a New Strategic Environment

Why does NATO's policy of stabilization through cooperation and dialogue, interlocking political institutions and arms reductions seem to work in the Baltics, but not in the Balkans? The answer to that question lies in differences in the sources of instability in each area. In the former republics of the Soviet Union, nations were emerging from many decades as subject peoples under the harsh rule of a communist dictatorship. Their basic need was security in what could have been an anarchic region of the world.

Thus where the problem is uncertainty, as in the tiny, vulnerable Baltic states, cooperation, dialogue and transparency in military affairs may well create stability. But uncertainty is not the sole or even most significant problem in the Balkans. There we find cultures in conflict, and long-suppressed tensions rising to the surface. In more concrete terms, we see ethnic minorities, long the victims of oppression and brutality, who now believe their only security can be found in separation and self-determination.

Samuel Huntington suggests that what we are seeing in the Balkans and in many areas around the world is an expression of deep divisions at the level of conflicting civilizations. If this is correct, he would cast doubt on the efficacy of NATO's current strategy of seeking security and stability. Huntington's central conclusion is that the most dangerous conflicts in the near future are likely to occur along the cultural fault lines separating what he describes as seven or eight distinct civilizations.[7] In support for this prediction, Huntington makes the following points:

- Differences among civilizations are real, basic, and long lasting. They go to core of how people identify themselves as compared to outsiders.
- The advent of near instantaneous world-wide communications and media allows the increase of interaction and awareness of different civilizations. This circumstance leads not to a convergence of culture but its opposite: an increased awareness of one's own civilization as contrasted with that of others.[8]
- The process of "civilization consciousness" is made more acute by the desire to resist the perceived strength of the West as a civilization. Thus we see a reactionary back-to-our-roots phenomenon in non-Western cultures.

Conflict between civilizations often arises from artificially created states where differing civilizations have been thrust together, often by an outside power without the consultation or consent of local populations. Yugoslavia and British colonial India are examples of this phenomenon. In many cases, diverse populations existed in relative peace within the same nation state *only* under the firm rule of a non-democratically selected government strong enough to maintain order. Following the logic of Huntington's theme, the withdrawal or collapse of the overarching power (e.g., the death of Tito in Yugoslavia or the British withdrawal from India) created a situation where conflict became likely. NATO's response in the Balkans has filled the void created by the collapse of a dominating central government with allied military forces. But without an effort to resolve the underlying concerns of the parties in the region, NATO's stabilization measures could result in the need for peacekeepers in the field indefinitely.

New Instabilities

Cooperation and dialogue, transparency and mutual support are most effective when nations desire security assurances and share a sincere desire to work for peace. These policies are likely to fail, however, where the parties involved are determined to achieve their objective *in spite* of efforts aimed at peaceful democratic solutions. Huntington argues that non-Western civilizations may resist the imposition of solutions based on the universalization of liberal Western values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of secular law.[10]

The adverse consequences of ignoring the causes of instability could become aggravated by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction among unstable states and the increase of religiously

motivated, non-state sponsored terrorism. Despite the shock of the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, and the subsequent NATO decision to invoke Article Five,[11] Europeans are not particularly alarmed by terrorism. Most Europeans believe that they had learned to cope, endure and survive terrorism. After September 11, 2001, the Americans, in the view of many Europeans, were getting their first major taste of terrorism on their own soil and were, predictably, over-reacting.

The world terrorist threat, however, has changed significantly since the height of Europe's experience with terrorists. The 1999 Rand study, *Countering the New Terrorism*, notes that "neither the Japanese Red Army nor the Red Army Faction ever numbered more than 20 to 30 hard-core members. The Red Brigades were hardly larger, with a total of fewer than 50 to 75 dedicated terrorists. Even the IRA and ETA could only call on the violent services of perhaps some 200-400 activists whereas the feared Abu Nidal Organization was limited to some 500 men-at-arms at any given time." By contrast, the number of religiously motivated terrorists is estimated in the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands. The rise of religiously motivated, non-state sponsored terrorism also has been accompanied by an increase in the lethality of terrorist attacks, and a general absence of terrorist aims and demands that could be addressed by legitimate social, economic or political means.

European cooperation in the war on terror, though substantial in the weeks and months after the September attacks, waned rapidly when the costs and risks of jumping on the U.S. anti-terrorist bandwagon became evident. This lack of enthusiasm was due in large part to a divergence of interests between the United States and many European members of NATO. According to most analysts, European countries had dealt with their terrorist problem, in part, through appeasement and sanctuary as a way of avoiding the wrath of terrorist organizations.[12] A Europe that failed to appease terrorist organizations was likely to find itself on the list of potential targets.

Cooperation, dialogue, transparency and mutual support can do little to respond to ethnic, cultural or religious separatists or terrorists who take up weapons of mass destruction to commit terrorist acts.

A New Paradigm, a New Toolbox

The emergence of a foe who might use weapons of mass destruction, and who cannot be deterred by the threat of any reprisal, changes the strategic environment facing NATO. Cooperation, dialogue, interlocking institutions, transparency in defense matters—NATO's current toolbox—are only part of what is needed to meet the new threat. NATO and the International Community will have to reevaluate their approach to promoting stability. In areas where differing ethnic, religious, and cultural groups exist in conflict, NATO should support policies that promote autonomy, self-rule and partition for distinct populations where the people express the desire to live alone. However much this may go against the desire to respect established borders of sovereign nations, it must be acknowledged that every border in Europe was created and has been altered by conflict and war; establishing new borders to accommodate the reality of evolving national or ethnic consciousness may be the best and perhaps only long-term solution to regional conflict.

In the short term, NATO will have to move rapidly to reorient itself to meet the immediate threats posed by WMD proliferation, rogue states and terrorist organizations. The existence of dictatorships with access to weapons of mass destruction, and with ties to terrorist organizations, is itself destabilizing and must be addressed by NATO security policy.[13] NATO also will have to develop the tools to meet the new threat. The recent proposal for a NATO rapid response force[14] is a step in the right direction, as are ongoing efforts to create deployable forces and headquarters, and enhanced expeditionary capabilities.[15]

References

1. John Keegan in his classic book on the subject paints a picture of confusion in the European capitals: "Information arrived fitfully, sometimes much, sometimes little, but always incomplete. There was no way of correlating and displaying it, as there is in modern crisis management centres." John Keegan, *The First World War*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1999, p. 59.

2. NATO Handbook, 2002

3. NATO Office of Information and Press, *NATO Topics*, November 2002

4. Mihai Carp; Back from the Brink, Nato Review, Winter 2002

5. A number of authors put forth the idea that NATO enlargement, because it must be exclusive rather than inclusive, would draw new and artificial lines in Eastern Europe. These lines would cause tensions and result in instability. See Hugh De Santis' *NATO's manifest destiny: The risks of expansion*. In Ted Galen Carpenter & Barbara Conroy (eds.), *NATO enlargement: Illusions and Reality* (pp. 159-176). Washington, DC: Cato Institute.

6. The wording of UNSCR 1244 is a wonder of modern obfuscation. While reaffirming the sovereignty of Yugoslavia, it states that the political resolution will be accomplished in accordance with principles to be found in the annexes of the resolution. Unfortunately for the Kosovars, no such wording is to be found.

7. These civilizations are Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African. Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993.

8. As this is being written, western media organizations are covering the scenes in Baghdad of cheering crowds spontaneously pulling down statues of former dictator Saddam Hussein. None of the Arab news outlets aired this scene. Instead the lead story was the supposed intentional murder of an Al Jazeera journalist by American forces during the fighting in Baghdad. Just one example of how mass media facilitates the awareness of ones' own civilization and its interests contrasted with that of outsiders.

9. When a culturally homogenous nation is artificially divided (e.g., Vietnam, Korea and Germany) instability also results.

10. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations

11. Per the Washington Treaty, Article 5 states that an attack on one member state will be considered an attack against all of them. On the 12th of September, the day following the attacks, the North Atlantic Council, NATO's governing body, declared article five, subject to proof that the attack had originated from abroad. NATO provided the US specified assistance in several areas but did not participate in combat operations in Afghanistan or Iraq.

12. The French in particular have followed a policy of providing sanctuary to terrorist organizations in return for an unspoken assurance that terrorism will not be directed at France or its citizens. See Michel Wieviorka, *French Politics and Strategy on Terrorism*, in Barry Rubin (ed.). *The Politics of Counter-Terrorism: The Ordeal of Democratic States*, School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, 1990, p. 68.

13. Conceptually, the burden of demonstrating one's benign intentions now shifts to the state consorting with terrorists. Failure of such states to demonstrate that they *do not* have weapons of mass destruction may in the future be viewed as acts of aggression that could merit a so-called preemptive response. A

rogue state with deadly weapons is like a man with a gun held to the head of a child, one need not ask if his intent is hostile; it is self-evident. And one dare not wait to see if he will pull the trigger.

14. See NATO Response Force: Political Deftness, Economic Utility, Military Power; by Stephen Mariano and Brendan Wilson; *Strategic Insight*, Center for Contemporary Conflict, April 2003.

15. Despite significant efforts in the direction of deployable headquarters and Forces, NATO continues to adhere to its cumbersome, Cold War era, multiyear force planning process that threatens to stifle innovation.