

## **NATO: Adaptation and Relevance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century\***

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*NATO's demise has been much heralded, dismissed by many as a remnant of the Cold War era, with no role in today's complex security environment. Institutionally, the Alliance has endured beyond expected norms, evolving to remain relevant. This paper examines thematically how the Alliance has developed, through the prisms of its institutions, capabilities and political will. Analysing the areas of international relations and institutional theory, it establishes that NATO remains relevant. Whilst the Alliance is more flexible than it is perceived, enlargement has brought a divergence of views amongst members, which has led to particular tensions in burden-sharing and willingness to face risk, as highlighted in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Whilst this dissonance continues, there is little prospect of NATO challenging the UN in terms of legitimate intervention. The process of change must continue.*

**Keywords:** *NATO, Alliance, Adaptation, UN, Intervention*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will consider whether a watershed moment has been reached for the Alliance making it necessary to consider significant reform or to accept the consequences of continued inaction. Arising as it did to counteract the threat posed by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II, it was perhaps not unreasonable for many to predict that NATO, following the demise of the threat, would at the very least lose its relevance; after all, from a realist perspective 'alliances should not outlive the threats they were created to address.' (Wallander, 2000:705).

As the Alliance starts to look at its existence beyond the Afghanistan, it does so at a time when the US has announced its intention to turn its attention to the Pacific region, coinciding with a wave of stringent defence cuts, and in the shadow of the institutional shock brought about by the disagreement over Iraq in 2003 (Telegraph Online, 2003).

The Libyan campaign has served as a further catalyst to prompt introspection, albeit that those commentators were divided as to whether the operation would signal the end of the Alliance or provide a much needed fillip to reassure it of its continued relevance. Regardless of whether the operation was successful in the short term, the one certainty is that the endeavour brought to the surface the tensions that exist between member states such as the United Kingdom and France, who are willing to take the lead in military intervention in such instances, and others like Germany who is reticent to do so (Erlanger and Dempsey, 2011). Such a situation potentially undermines, quite fundamentally, the concept of solidarity upon which the Alliance was formed and which has continued to attract new members.

This paper will examine the relationship between purpose and threat, i.e. why the Alliance exists and what challenges threaten it. Whilst there are four research questions, the main body will be divided into three areas in order to address the issues they raise; I have

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chosen this approach on the basis that the historical context of the Alliance is a central theme throughout and it would be unhelpful to produce a separate section dealing with this issue. It is also the case that there is significant overlap between the core issues, each therefore lends something to answering the questions. I will look at the historical threat, seeking to explain what NATO is and what resistance there is to change. Consideration will be given to what has changed in the three areas, and how they relate to the current environment, by addressing the issues through historical contextualisation and consideration of relevant theory.

The specific research questions to be considered will be:

1. Is NATO fit for purpose in view of the current range of threats and the likely nature of future conflict?
2. In order to ensure prompt action is taken to address future threats, should the organisation review its voting method and its reliance on consensus?
3. Do recent operations represent the shape of future interventions or is such templating unhelpful?
4. Could NATO become the effective enforcement arm of the UN Security Council – would it ever be tempted again to act unilaterally?

As a result of this analysis a number of findings will be established. Firstly, despite repeated criticism, NATO is essentially a robust organisation that has continually evolved in order to remain relevant; this process has been assisted by the Alliance's inherent flexibility arising out of the ambiguity (Foster and Wallace, 2001:108) of its establishing treaty. Secondly, the process of continued enlargement will inevitably increase the amount of bureaucracy surrounding the workings of the alliance, which in turn must increase the likelihood of dissenting views. As well as an ability to suspend member states, the adoption of a voting system based upon the principle of variable geometry appears unnecessary. Arising from the above competing perspectives is a new conceptualisation of burden-sharing. NATO is providing an alternative path for international legitimacy, however, irrespective of a desire to act pragmatically, a failure to address the issue of burden-sharing coupled with the dissonance between member states, will reduce what NATO may achieve and make any threat to the role of the UN improbable.

## 2. INSTITUTIONS

The 4th April 1949 saw the signing of the Washington Treaty and the establishment of the North Atlantic Alliance, which according to the preamble was designed to '...safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security'. The purpose of the organisation was more succinctly captured by Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of NATO, who said 'the aim was to keep the Soviets out, the Germans down and the Americans in' (De Wijk, 1997:6).

NATO has demonstrated remarkable longevity for an Alliance, and has seen a gradual transformation of purpose during the course of its existence with an increasing emphasis on the political as opposed to the purely military dimension. Unsurprisingly its tenure has seen it attract criticism from all sides, ranging from a lack of democratic accountability, the

potential for weak states to undermine the strong, a potential for corruption, that it undermines national sovereignty, shows a lack of responsiveness in crises and that the global governance it perpetuates is that of an elite. The contemporary challenges it faces are to adapt its existing rules and processes to allow it to remain relevant, the continuing rise of non-state actors, the dynamics and complexity of globalisation and the potential conflicts of interests between its member states. It is clear from the varying ways in which countries have joined NATO that a host of political concerns as well as a changing direction for the organization have heavily influenced its adaptation.

Whilst the North Atlantic Treaty was signed by twelve countries in 1949, only the first seven of these had been involved in the drafting of the Treaty. Whilst Germany and Spain fell within the geographical criteria for membership, neither was offered such due to Germany being occupied and Spain being viewed as having an undemocratic regime. While NATO policy towards membership is stated to be 'open door' there are requirements that need to be met beyond an intention to further the Washington treaty. The need for democracy as well as economic constraints can represent the biggest hurdles to accession in so far as they require foundational changes to the sovereign states. These limitations have led to the slow expansion of NATO since its inception.

As a result of their strategic importance both Greece and Turkey were admitted in 1950 in line with the growing threat posed by the Soviet Union. Difficulties arose however over the issue of consensus, as this move caused concern among some member states who "opposed the plan on the grounds that admitting Greece and particularly Turkey...would change NATO from a closely knit community to a widespread anti-Soviet alliance and seriously weaken it" (Smith, 2000:77). The lack of agreement saw only associate status awarded to Greece and Turkey, a position that endured until 1952 when they were welcomed as full members. This episode highlights early concerns as to what direction the Alliance was moving in. With the heightened tensions of the Cold War, it was important that NATO was able to find a solution to prevent Soviet influence from ensnaring Greece and Turkey.

With NATO being formed so soon after the defeat of Nazi Germany, German membership of NATO would always have been a contested concept. Whilst there were clear security arguments to support German membership, a host of issues, led to prolonged political deliberations to ensure consensus was achieved; the Federal Republic of Germany became a member of NATO in 1955.

NATO's expansion eastward began in the 90s with the accession of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in March 1999. A key question for the future relevance of the organization now arises in how far east the organization should continue to expand. As will be discussed later, the stretching of the geographic boundaries of NATO has far-flung impacts on the organization. It is forced to allow for a greater range of ideologies and agendas that will address the crises at hand. At this time, NATO's involvement in South-eastern Europe - Yugoslavia, Kosovo - demonstrate a core regional importance for the organization, and its role as a regional peacekeeper exists not only in its capacity for military projection but through its open-doors policy to membership. The addition to the Alliance five years later of seven countries from Central and Eastern Europe saw its membership rise to twenty-six. Its most recent additions were Albania and Croatia.

From a theoretical perspective the formation, and continued expansion, of the Alliance aligns itself with one of two distinct hypotheses which describe the manner in which states respond when confronted by an external threat, namely balancing and bandwagoning. The first of these describes the situation when threatened states join together to confront the

threat, therefore seeking strength in numbers, whilst the latter represents a choice by the threatened state to join with the threatening party, thereby gaining strength by association. In terms of patterns of state behaviour, Britain's policy was described by Winston Churchill thus, 'For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating power on the Continent... It would have been easy ...and tempting to join with the stronger and share the fruits of the conquest. However, we always took the harder course, joined with the less strong powers, ...and thus defeated the Continental military tyrant whoever he was' (Kaplan, 2004). Whilst it was therefore a characteristic choice for Britain, it is worth noting that the previous stance of the United States in such matters had been affirmed by George Washington as 'It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world'. This exemplifies how an alliance such as NATO will ultimately consist of states with a range of motivations and beliefs regarding their membership.

When considering the continuing utility of NATO to the US, one hypothesis might be that almost too quickly for there to have been any outspoken desire for change, one existential threat (USSR) was replaced by what was perceived to be another (Global War on Terror), both of them being conceptually too great a threat for the US to contend with by themselves. The alternate view would be that the Alliance provided a convenient mechanism through which the hegemonic power (US) could exercise their control whilst ostensibly maintaining the demeanour of a beneficent liberal power. One other potential explanation for why there was little pressure either for structural change or less involvement by the US is that there was a generational comfort in being part of the organisation. This point was considered by Rajan Menon, who noted 'Because the Cold War lasted for nearly half a century, most Americans cannot remember a time when the Atlantic alliance was not an essential item in our strategic toolkit or a staple of our foreign policy lexicon' (Menon, 2007:90).

It was the flexibility of the consensus rule that allowed the Alliance to cope with a number of what may have become crises had a method not been found by which the Alliance could make a decision. When France, as a response to the Suez crisis, decided in 1966 to withdraw from the NATO Integrated Military Structure (Noetzel and Schreer, 2009:212), the decision not only damaged NATO defence capacity in the short-term (Kaplan, 2004:33) but could have threatened NATO's institutional cohesiveness had a pragmatic solution not been found. The subsequent adoption of the newly created Defence Planning Committee allowed the remainder of NATO to continue to deal with defence issues as and when they arose.

There are a number of peculiarities immediately apparent about NATO when compared to other similar International Organisations. Its founding treaty, comprising of fourteen relatively simple articles is unusually brief. Key within this is the consensus rule itself. Interestingly the word consensus is not mentioned once within the fourteen articles; Article 10 comes closest with its requirement that 'unanimous agreement' is required before a new country may be invited to join the Alliance. In the absence of any prescribed voting requirements if no country positively objects to a decision or statement there is deemed to be consensus. Should any country disagree, the proposed decision/statement will require re-drafting in an attempt to secure agreement. One other related custom that has developed in parallel is that the name of the objecting country is not usually made public. This could arguably be described as undemocratic, in the sense that the representatives cannot be held publicly accountable for their position on any given matter; this is in stark contrast to the voting patterns of the United Nations Security Council, where countries that block

resolutions from passing have their decision to do so scrutinised by the world media (Prince, 2012).

Conversely it could be argued that the absence of a requirement for a country to positively affirm a decision, allows member states to acquiesce to a decision, whilst perhaps not having definitively been in agreement with it. In so doing the operation of the rule allows states to protect their sovereignty to some extent; the dangers arising from this being that the nuance of some members' actions will often not be recognised, as NATO is seen as responding as a collective.

The issue of collective defence, benefits from what may be seen as intelligent drafting, in that the following provisions place no specific demands as to what type of assistance is to be provided to member states invoking its protection:

In addition, as a result of such brevity little is said about institutional structures, mention only being made of a Council and a Defence Committee. The first of these could be considered to be the political element at which each member state is represented and where the goal of NATO is decided. The second, represents the military capacity of the organization. With the need for a military structure and the ability to rapidly deploy assets as core to the organization, the Defence Committee acts to meet the needs of the council. A requirement of the treaty is that it is constituted in such a way as to be able to convene "promptly at any time". This onerous requirement led to the appointment of permanent representatives; when matters of fundamental importance are discussed often at summits where the heads of each member state will appear in person, the Council has overarching responsibility and authority.

The Defence Committee, being the other named body, was actually subsumed into the Council in 1951. Thereafter the Council, under the stewardship of the Secretary General, has used its general power under Article 9 to create committees as and when required. Institutionally, the flexibility provided by the treaty, has allowed for an evolution in structure with the capacity to match the evolving mission and purpose of the overall Alliance.

Whilst some contend that NATO is there already, and others argue that the moment is yet to come, consideration ought to be given to what a multi-speed or multi-tier system would mean for NATO; does it represent institutional salvation and therefore indicate the way forward, or does the fragmented nature of a multi-tier system mean that essentially the seeds of demise are already present and that the subsequent failure of NATO is inevitable; or should it simply be accepted as the next chapter in the changing nature of an ever more complex alliance, and that actually the challenge is about how the new systems are made to work?

In order to consider the efficacy of any such proposal it is necessary to analyse some of the more realistic alternatives that have been proposed and whether they would ever be politically acceptable.

Leo G. Michel has explored a number of realistic alternatives to the application of the consensus rule; he identifies four alternative rules, namely, the 'Threatened Ally', 'SACEUR's Discretion', 'Empowering "Coalitions within NATO"' and the 'Consensus Minus' rule (Michel, 2003:1-8). In short, underpinning the conclusions arrived at in this paper, he accepts that whilst a number of alternatives could be tried, each would come with a cost, one notable one he highlights is that qualified majority voting could produce a system where the US could be outvoted; there was also no guarantee that an amended voting system would produce a better outcome than the current practice. Constructive ambiguity in this respect may well be the least bad option available.

A number of problems exist with this line of thought both practically and conceptually. It is worth noting the irony that the situation produces, namely that in order to amend the consensus rule consensus would have to first be obtained; logic would dictate that it is highly unlikely to occur. It is more likely that due to the spread of differing perspectives and views, further friction will arise to the level and extent beyond which it could be considered to be useful to the Alliance.

It should also be appreciated that any amended system must be able to cater for the full range of decisions made by NATO, which go far beyond the area of military intervention. Institutionally it would seem that despite having undergone numerous crises almost from the outset, the freedom the Alliance's founding treaty provided, has been exploited to allow the continued resilience for which it is now known. However, its growth in both membership and infrastructure, whilst on the one hand providing strength could all too easily contribute to inertia.

### 3. CAPABILITIES

Changes to its military strategy have been central to NATO's ability to remain relevant and effective. While other international organizations such as the UN and the EU have relied on diplomatic pressures to resolve issues where possible, it is usually the case that when military power becomes desirable, responsibility falls to NATO to intervene. While at its inception, the projection power of the organisation would deter grand conflicts such as those that took place at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the drawn out political conflict of the Cold War would see NATO questioning how it can deter an overwhelming global nuclear presence. Ultimately it is the organizational structure and combined military capacity of member states that defines NATO's military presence. While an ever ready taskforce remains central to NATO's effectiveness in rapid deployment it is the combined military potential of all member states which give it such military authority in the event of drawn out crises. Its military actions will also be bolstered by strong international diplomatic pressures, such as trade sanctions, through its relationship with the UN giving it a rounded approach that is difficult for any third party to oppose. While NATO retains autonomy, the political motivations behind its actions are made clear through its condemnations and diplomatic efforts which coincide with military interventions, efforts for clarity when they do not compromise security are a core part of the establishment of both organizations' authority. In fact, it is only within the framework of the UN Charter that NATO military presence can be legally justified. The fundamental defence purpose of NATO is set out in Article 5 of the Treaty and refers directly to Article 51 of the UN Charter describing the termination of interventions undertaken by NATO countries when the UN Security Council has 'taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.' With legitimacy established through relations with the UN and NATO's projection power unrivalled as a result of international cooperation the core military strategy can be said to deny any opportunity for third party opposition. An issue that arises as a result of a combined overwhelming presence is where the military capabilities should come from when the entire recourses of the organization are not required.

The debate over burden sharing is intimately intertwined with the essential purpose behind the Alliance's existence, and has continued through the Cold War to persist in recent conflicts. First, it is useful to consider what the phrase actually means:

Burden-sharing is the distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a common goal (Foster and Cimbala, 2005:1).

Whilst many of the challenges faced by NATO as it looks to move forward are new or novel, burden-sharing is both enduring and emotive, deriving as it does from the perception of inequities that inevitably arise from any group dynamic where (in simple terms) some form of sharing or distribution is required. The area is one which highlights the predominant fault line upon which the transatlantic nature of the Alliance rests, attracting ire and derision of both politicians and electorates on either side of the Atlantic. It is a fault line which becomes exacerbated whenever financial pressures are faced by individual member states (a pressure which is often experienced in close proximity with each other), who will find it more politically acceptable to reduce defence spending than spending in other areas, and whenever the Alliance is faced with providing a deployable military force. The resultant impact of either situation has continually been the (correct) impression that certain elements of the Alliance are contributing more than others, in terms of pure financial contribution as well as the correct instruments and spirit to conduct operations. Such perceptions lead to the (mainly) unspoken accusations that members of the Alliance, absent a credible commitment to either category discussed above, are seeking to obtain a 'free ride'. The natural consequence of this is for fissures to deepen and senses of ill-feeling to rise, which often then impact upon other aspects of Alliance cohesion, for example where those member states who are not viewed to be 'pulling their weight' are deemed to have less right to have a say in other areas (Clark, 2001:447). Should this include the strategy for future direction and intervention then the situation could to some degree become self-perpetuating.

It would be easy for the casual observer to conclude that the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, provide evidence that the issue of burden-sharing is yet another instance of an artificial crisis. However, as will be seen this issue is perhaps closer to a true crisis than any other.

As with enlargement, burden-sharing can be seen as a distinctly different concept during and after the Cold War. One fundamental issue which is both central and problematic is how the contribution of respective member states is measured. Whilst many would say that their contribution to the Alliance could be termed as on a somewhat ethereal plane, this is virtually impossible to quantify for critical legislatures, who will instead seek to rely on military expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product as a more demonstrable metric (Hartley and Sandler, 1999:665-680).

The statement of requirement for states' contribution arises out of Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, which requires members to 'maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack'. For once the constructive ambiguity of the original text may well be considered to be a hindrance, as in the absence of specified contributions, member states embarked historically on the process of burden-shifting, namely 'the art of manipulating alliance relationships for political gains' (Thies, 2003:8).

The ill-feeling that this predicament has, and continues to cause, was perhaps best enunciated by President Eisenhower, whose view of the behaviour of his European allies in the 1950s was 'I get weary of the European habit of taking our money, resenting any slight hint as to what they should do, and then assuming, in addition, full right to criticize us as bitterly as they may desire.

It is worth considering that the concept of 'free riding, it arises from a theoretical analysis of international burden-sharing; the most notable study in this field is that of Mancur Olson

and Richard Zeckhauser in an article published in 1966 entitled 'An Economic Theory of Alliances' (Olsen and Zeckhauser, 1966). This article draws an analogy between the provision of collective security by an international organisation with the requirement within sovereign states to provide safety and security for its citizens; by adopting the phraseology one would expect to see in a state, the authors then propose a 'public goods' theory in relation to burden-sharing. Member States make contributions towards this public good, but in a system absent of centralised authority, the model will see the larger states bearing a disproportionate amount of the burden.

Whilst the study is now almost fifty years old, the analysis contained within it has a remarkable resonance with the characteristics of NATO (Ringsmose, 2010:329); it also discerns a quite fundamental distinction between the ideologies of small and large states, when it notes that these countries' respective views on their role in the world may be influenced by the fact that '...small nations, who find that even large sacrifices on their part have little effect on the global balance, would often be attracted to neutral or passive foreign policies, and that large nations, who know that their efforts can decisively influence world events in their own interest, will continually need to emphasise the urgency of the struggle in which they are engaged' (Olsen and Zeckhauser, 1966:17-18). As a theoretical foundation this could be said to provide a model to explain the current array of divergent of views regarding the shape and future of NATO.

The issue of burden-sharing was not an issue that arose immediately upon the creation of NATO (Chalmers, 2000:21). This may in part provide an explanation as to why the wording of Article 3 was allowed to be quite as lax as it is. This situation changed in 1950 with the invasion of South Korea by North Korea, which led in turn to increased defence spending on both sides of the Atlantic, and a significant structural upheaval within NATO as it sought to transform from an ideological alliance to a functioning military coalition.

The following forty-year period saw the continuation of what was effectively a one-dimensional argument, namely that the pendulum of the transatlantic bargain (Sloan, 2005:13-27) had swung too far to the detriment of the United States. That the matter was never brought to a head undoubtedly had much to do with the fact that whilst the US spent more on defence than its alliance partners, it benefited strategically from the role and influence it enjoyed (Chalmers, 2001:573-574) and therefore the 'tensions were contained within the transatlantic community' (Hallams and Schreer, 2012:315).

Perhaps unsurprisingly the ramifications of the ending of the Soviet threat lead to an expectation among member states that there would be a widespread reduction in defence spending; this is empirically supported by the fact that between 1989 and 2000 the US reduced its defence spending (as a percentage of GDP) from 6.0% to 3.0%. By comparison the reduction, taken as an average, for the five largest European states (France, UK, Italy, Germany and Spain), over the same period was 3.1% to 2.0% (Chalmers, 2001:574). Whilst on the face of it, the burden-sharing gap of defence spending has narrowed, the ability to contribute in terms of military capability has widened. The debate has also broadened to the extent that the concept of burden-sharing is now deemed to include the burden of risk, both physical and political.

NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, identifies the inequitable trend in defence spending as an area of urgent concern, noting that by the end of the Cold War the European contribution to NATO amounted to 34% of the total, but that this has since fallen to 21% with the United States and Canada paying the remainder (Rasmussen, 2011:2-6). However, the actions of the US over Libya, designed doubtless to appease a domestic

audience with an election looming, have effectively condoned the *à la carte* approach which normally antagonises them so much.

A previous Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, when considering the complexities of burden-sharing and how it might be fairly measured, came to a rather pragmatic conclusion, namely, 'The sense of keeping one's obligations and commitments to other allies upon whom one's own security ultimately depends, is a powerful driver towards equitable burden-sharing. Totally fair burden-sharing may not be possible, but an organised security organisation like NATO undoubtedly allows us to come closer to it than could any other approach' (Michaels, 2011).

The painful truth pertaining to the above situation is that for perhaps the first time directly, the US has adopted this approach to involvement in a NATO mission. After years of public and private condemnations of their Allies for failures to contribute as required, as opposed to how it best suited, the actions of the US over Libya, designed doubtless to appease a domestic audience with an election looming, has effectively condoned the very same *à la carte* approach which normally antagonises them so much.

Due to the internal politicking and lack of consensus about the nature of NATO involvement in security crises, member states could now be said to fall into four categories when NATO goes to war: 'those which have the right troops, weapons and view the given mission as central to their security; those with the right means but which take part out of solidarity; those which have real military forces but choose not to take part because they disagree with the mission; and those which simply do not have many meaningful forces to contribute' (Valasek, 2011:4). This has been vividly illustrated by the campaigns in both Afghanistan and Libya; the latter campaign was particularly notable from a capability perspective 'only 14 out of 28 members contributed military assets and only six European nations (Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Norway and Denmark) contributed to the strike mission' (Hallams and Schreer, 2012:322). With national contributions at this level, prolonged and concerted military campaigns would be hard to sustain. Particularly so, when one notes that a number of those who did contribute were already committed in Afghanistan; there would appear to be little sharing of the burden in view.

#### 4. POLITICAL WILL

From an institutionalist perspective, any given institution should only continue to exist if it remains relevant to its members and they continue to derive a quantifiable benefit from membership. The willingness to adapt flows from the political will to do so; therefore once the existential threat against which NATO as a collective security organisation was designed to respond had ceased to exist, there must have been the desire for the organisation to continue which led to the successful and persistent adaptations that followed.

NATO's strategic response to a changed and ever-changing environment has been marked by their development of new roles and missions, and through the process of enlargement, coupled with and through the Partnership for Peace process. The Alliance has had to look to counter both traditional and emerging threats, accepting that their role has now become unfettered by their original geographical limitations. The backdrop to this has seen a revolution in military affairs and the continued heightened level of inflation in the defence sector, juxtaposed with a political expectation of a peace dividend and widespread reductions in defence spending. The maintenance of a cohesive political will and spirit in these

circumstances would be difficult enough in any individual state, it should therefore come as no surprise that what has been described as ‘...that most tenuous of all assets, solidarity’ (Volker, 2011) has been rather elusive in an alliance of twenty-eight countries.

An inability to achieve consensus over strategic goals, rather like burden-sharing, is not a new challenge for the Alliance, which has seen numerous disagreements throughout the Cold War years, arising largely from the US nuclear position and dominance of the organisation; this latter issue contributing to France’s withdrawal from NATO’s integrated military command structure (Noetzel and Schreer, 2009:212).

The Harmel Report sought, in 1967, to ascertain ‘The Future tasks of the Alliance’. Regarding the central purposes of the alliance, it declares that they were ‘to assure the balance of forces, thereby creating a climate of stability, security and confidence.’ This essentially sums up the Alliance’s collective defence posture, which provides for the second role ‘to pursue the search for progress towards a more stable relationship in which the underlying political issues can be solved.’ The report also looked to the Alliance’s potential future role stating that ‘The ultimate political purpose of the Alliance is to achieve a just and lasting peaceful order in Europe accompanied by appropriate security guarantees’ (NATO The Harmel Report).

‘By early 1990 the Alliance had no choice but to fundamentally reconsider its future. In the first instance two crucial questions dominated: what is the Alliance’s future mission and what form must the transatlantic relation take?’ History now tells us that NATO, had already begun to consider how their strategy might need to develop in the event of a changed security situation. A paper entitled ‘Alliance Security beyond CFE, colloquially known as the ‘Wittmann’ paper, predicted a more political role for NATO in the future, a future in which the threat would be more unpredictable and “the emphasis would shift to smaller non-traditionalist threats” (De Wijk, 1997:9-14). Whilst somewhat ahead of its time, the report can be seen to have provided the momentum for the fundamental review of strategy that was to occur in London in 1990.

NATO’s reinvention began with a new strategic concept in 1991 that, with a subtlety borne of a desire not to excite either internal or external actors, signalled a gradual shift in Alliance’s direction, acknowledging that ‘The diversity of challenges now facing the Alliance thus requires a broad approach to security’. It also accepted that in seeking to promote the peace and security it would need when looking to resolve crises ‘a coherent approach determined by the Alliance’s political authorities choosing and co-ordinating appropriate crisis management measures as required from a range of political and other measures’ (NATO cps). Whilst indicating that a different military posture was now also appropriate, many of the fundamental principles of NATO remained the same, not least of which was the fact that it was still a collective defence organisation.

Somewhat conveniently, NATO was able to demonstrate its utility and relevance through operations in Bosnia (1995-6) and Kosovo (1999). From a strategic perspective it has though been said that ‘The Alliance’s multiple tasks created the kind of strategic ambiguity that prevented a consensus on thoroughgoing military reform’ (Farrell and Rynning, 2010:673). The obvious issue was that the European members of NATO were deemed as being reliant on the US to assist in the stabilisation of the security situation in Europe. Conversely, whilst the US had previously enjoyed a dominant position within NATO it now found itself, particularly in Kosovo, shackled in its actions through a process now colloquially referred to as ‘war by committee’.

The pressing need for determining a purpose at the outset, prior to restructuring or

enlargement, was well described by President Vaclav Havel in 1995. The then President of the Czech Republic, speaking at SHAPE Headquarters, thought that NATO needed firstly to establish what it was, and what it intended to do, before looking at enlarging, 'The expansion of NATO should be preceded by something even more important, that is a new formulation of its own meaning, mission and identity' (OMRI Daily Digest, 1995). Whether the ever-changing global context or the political flux within the Alliance will ever allow this is questionable.

In light of its success in the Balkans, its strategic concept in 1999 would highlight the organization's continued relevance; it would outline unpredictable changes in the regions security climate, stating the need for adaptability as conventional warfare in the region becomes less of a threat. The core part of its message in 1999 is in its calling for greater regional integration, this is key to the continued expansionism of NATO as its role as a regional stabilizer is not restricted to its military capability. In its 2010 strategic concept, NATO outlined the increasing threat of long distance attacks, of weapons of mass destruction including nuclear proliferation and of international terrorism as well as cyber-attacks all of which cannot be addressed by a conventional military force. Despite stating a continued need for the expansion of military assets, the 2010 concept outlines a need for international cooperation including partnerships with nations outside of NATO to address the new concerns.

Undoubtedly the belief underpinning the original Atlantic bargain was that if a European Alliance member was ever subjected to an armed attack, it was the US who would be relied upon to remedy the situation. In that sense the attacks of 9/11 could not have been forecast; neither perhaps could the fact that when the Alliance strove to exercise its Article 5 responsibility for the first time, the offer of support would be spurned. It could be said from an Alliance perspective that the attacks spawned a range of mixed emotions; a sense of fear that the refusal of the collective defence offer had proved the myriad critics correct, by showing that the Alliance when called upon was a paper tiger.

Rajan Menon is pessimistic in this regard, in part due to the markedly differing demographics spanning the Atlantic, the effect of which he sees as '...if NATO joins or aids American military operations in the Islamic world, Europe's own Muslim population could be radicalised, creating the spectre of homegrown terrorism, which will prove even harder to suppress than its foreign counterpart' (Menon, 2007:75-83).

Whilst the issues of burden-sharing are symptomatic of the underlying dissonance between what member states want from NATO membership and what they are willing to give, they are arguably merely a manifestation of the essential structural weakness which flows from political will. Whilst enlargement has brought with it many positive aspects, undoubtedly one area it has weakened is that of cohesiveness.

In Rajan Menon's view 'Political constraints will limit European NATO's inclination to wage war and keep peace far from home' (Menon, 2007: 90) and that any talk or strategy of a more expansionist role is subject to the following consideration 'The question for the future is this: will NATO's European members agree to re-engineer NATO from an alliance conceived to defend Europe into one that assumes self-anointed responsibilities of military intervention, peacekeeping, and peacemaking beyond the Continent, even as the rest of the world registers its disapproval of an American-led Western posse?' It could be suggested that the philosophical question has been overtaken by events (Schwarz, 2010: 339-362).

Regarding interventions without a UN mandate, clearly the precedent has to some degree been set, and there has on occasion been speculation that the UN has become marginalised in

relation both to NATO and the US, particularly when concerned with humanitarian intervention. In view of the continued reluctance of both China and Russia to allow the Security Council to authorise the use of force on this premise (RUSI, 2011) there is an enhanced probability that situations may occur again when, with proceedings before the Security Council stalled, a coalition of the willing under a NATO command structure may decide to act.

Whilst this paper does not aim to compare NATO with the UN, a legitimate comparison can be made, and even a cursory appreciation of the respective institutional structures reveals a number of common weaknesses, identified by the arch-realist academic Colin Gray in the following terms:

...such inventions as the United Nations and NATO were created on the basis of political assumptions that are almost wholly irrelevant today and in the near-term future, at least. Both organisations perform some useful functions, although it is debatable whether or not their potential for harm renders them a net liability for international *strategic* security. The problem is that the political context has changed, but those organizations have not, indeed, in most respects, cannot (Gray, 2006:73).

The imperative, militarily, looking towards future threats and interventions is for the Alliance to be able to act decisively and promptly, and be able to demonstrate both their intent and resolve by deploying credible balanced force as required.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Despite repeated protestations to the contrary, NATO institutionally remains alive; perhaps more so than many give it credit for, but certainly not to the extent imagined by its greatest, somewhat subjective, supporters; it would however seem unlikely to disappear for purely practical reasons:

An explanation for NATO's continued existence after the end of the Cold War is that the Alliance has evolved from a traditional alliance for collective defence into a political-military organisation for security co-operation, supported by an extensive and complex bureaucracy. Extensive bureaucracies do not generally disappear, instead they undergo a functional transformation when forced to by circumstances (De Wijk, 1997:150).

Historically, it could be said that even when a clear, singular, existential threat existed, NATO had flaws; undeniably, as the singular threat faded, to be replaced by a more complex array of challenges, the opacity of its mission brought the flaws into clearer relief. Whilst there is a temptation to praise the institution for its resilience and adaptability, it must be accepted that in merely surviving there is an inherent issue.

An ability to adapt in the face of changing circumstances can thus indicate a diminished potential for effectiveness, which in turn could affect the long-term sustainability of the organisation. In other words, survival and longevity are not necessarily indicative of success in fulfilling mandates. Remaining relevant can be a double-edged sword (Menon and Walsh, 2011:85).

To ascertain an answer to the question of whether NATO is fit for purpose, requires an understanding first of what is it that NATO exists to achieve; this is not necessarily based upon the premise that one clear vision is necessary institutionally in order to continue to function, however without such a vision it is harder to establish a metric by which success or failure could be judged. In terms of institutional expectations, whilst the collective element of NATO's *raison d'être* has maintained, the belief is created that there will be a unifying narrative stating a core belief and purpose.

Continued enlargement can be seen in many respects as a purely political endeavour which has weakened the essential structure of NATO, upon which it relies for the purposes of projecting credible military force. Mention has been made of the theory of balancing upon which threatened states are drawn to seek NATO membership. NATO's structural imbalance is in part caused by the fact that the accession criteria are based on the possession of liberal democratic values and ideology, rather than the possession of military capability, wealth, or even, a desire and willingness to fight if required. Realistically though, whilst future enlargement can be subjected to further debate, that which has taken place ought not to be.

An alternative perspective by which to consider whether NATO is fit for purpose is to consider whether there is a credible alternative to replace it. Institutional redundancy could arise as a result of irrelevance due to the absence of a clear threat or mission, or by being replaced by another better suited more capable organisation. History tells us that the essential weaknesses of the United Nations are a lack of centralised authority (the same applies to NATO) and the absence of a standing military force. With a view to the current strained financial times, countries with dual NATO and EU membership will most likely be unable to spend on two fronts, and will be required to pick either one structure to support, or to develop multi-faceted forces that are flexible enough to maintain readiness for eventuality; this latter course of action is far from straightforward. Politically, the development of any European forces would be subject to the views of the very nations that occasionally prevent solidarity within NATO.

Ultimately therefore, through a combination of seemingly irresistible theoretical factors and international political reality, the Alliance retains a credible ability both to provide collective defence and project security in a number of guises. It does however face the challenge of ensuring it is appropriately poised to confront new threats as and when they arise.

Regarding the centrality of consensus within NATO's institutional framework, it would appear *prima facie* that the need to obtain agreement between twenty-eight countries with often divergent views is a requirement that would potentially disadvantage the Alliance when it needs to act quickly. However, the way that the concept has evolved so as to require mere acquiescence could arguably be said to impose a lower threshold than the process of qualified majority voting which would appear to be a logical alternative and one that is practiced in other similar institutions. There are however a number of caveats to this conclusion, namely that once a decision has been made for military action to be taken, the conduct of that action, should not then be bogged down by the same level of bureaucracy as was seen in Kosovo. Secondly, an apparent weakness of the system is that it is vulnerable to the unreasonable objections of a member state that may arise from a number of eventualities. That being the case it would be beneficial to develop a system by which in those circumstances the objecting country, could be suspended from membership, thus denying them the opportunity to prevent otherwise legitimate action. There must however be an acceptance, that in seeking to retain both objectivity and legitimacy, there will from time to

time be an honestly held opposing view from within the member states; to create a system where such views were sidelined could in itself be seen, or at the very least portrayed, as undermining the essence of collective action and solidarity.

The answer to the questions about the shape of future operations and unilateral action are inextricably linked. They both relate to the dissonance that lies at the heart of the Alliance and produce, one would suggest, a relatively straightforward answer. Firstly, whether or not it has fashioned itself in that way, and one suspects that the level of consistent consensus does not exist, NATO by virtue of its existing structures, ability to mount forces and dearth of a competing provider, has undoubtedly become the de facto force provider of first choice that the UN turns towards. That being said, NATO has now developed a history of not maintaining a completely coherent approach when it goes to war, and therefore that should not perhaps be a legitimate expectation. Whilst there have been some imaginative attempts to reconcile these positions (Farrell and Rynning, 2010:691-692), which in itself shows a degree of institutional loyalty and determination, the current predicament cannot be so easily resolved.

Although the burden-sharing debate is central to the problem, for once it is not simply all about the money. Whilst however there is such clear divergence between Alliance members as to the way global security issues should be resolved, there will be no serious inclination to resolve either the funding or wider contributory shortcomings within the Alliance. Accordingly, whilst history suggests that NATO will continue to do more than simply survive enjoying some successes and failures along the way, the inherent institutional tensions that exist will limit the potential it has to provide a permanent challenge to the UN. Overall, such a symbiosis may prove the best outcome for international security.

Logically, these matters should form the basis of a comprehensive review. Should member states lose confidence in the Alliance's ability to take coherent action, particularly in relation to Article 5, this will encourage the completion of bilateral and trilateral defence arrangements and may encourage renewed interest in the European Defence initiative, both of which would undermine the essential stability of the organisation.

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