

Rebuilding the Acropolis

Putting the Strategic Back into a Hollow NATO

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Introduction

An acropolis is a city or part of a city that is fortified, normally dominating a high point to afford furthest vision and maximum defense. Since 1949 NATO has been the acropolis of the West. However, a failure to properly invest in the Alliance could lead in time to obsolescence. Strategic shock, such as another 9/11 or a state conflict on Europe's periphery that demands a rapid Alliance response, could lead NATO to fail. It is precisely at such moments when the gap between strategic judgment, the willingness of states to invest in defense, and the capabilities available to armed forces is at its widest that alliances should serve as a force multiplier to narrow the gap. The opposite seems to be happening: states are losing faith in the Alliance, making the gap even wider.

If NATO is to survive as a credible military alliance it is therefore necessary to look beyond Afghanistan to consider strategy in the round as well as NATO's true role and purpose in meeting those challenges. To that end, this paper assesses NATO from three strategic perspectives: nuclear deterrence; the balance between security and defense; and the relationship between strategy and austerity.

For much of the world the Alliance remains the military grouping *par excellence*. NATO is constructed around the experience gained since 1949 of working together. The Alliance's so-called military interoperability standards are a 'product' and a world-beating one at that, enabling coalitions to embark on complex operations without having to reinvent the command and control wheel every time. Many partners benefited from those structures in Afghanistan and over Libya and, if used correctly, such structures could place NATO at the heart of a powerful, albeit informal, network of world stabilizing defense relationships. However, if left to wither, the impact will be disastrous, not only on Euro-Atlantic security but that of the wider world.

While NATO does a relatively good job coordinating on low-level issues (such as tactical co-operation on operations) and on the broad gamut of high-level politics, such as the drafting of strategic concepts, Alliance performance on what might be termed mid-level issues, such as pooling of equipment, specialization of national forces, common funding, and force development is lamentable. In the absence of these key components of a twenty-first century NATO defense posture, the Alliance will become progressively hollowed-out, forced to do ever more with ever less.

It is the nature of politics to cite any particular moment as pivotal. However, as the US withdraws from Iraq and prepares to leave Afghanistan, and with much of Europe mired deep in debt, the assumptions upon which the transatlantic relationship rests are being challenged. In the United States there is a widespread belief that Europeans are imposing the costs of their defense on the US taxpayer. In Europe there is a countervailing popular belief that the US sees Europeans as cannon fodder for America's global ambitions and wishes to instrumentalize NATO to just such an end.

Given the pressures on the two pillars of the Alliance—the US and Europe—is a sustainable and enduring transatlantic bargain still possible and what would it look like? Would any European government faced with the Eurozone crisis be willing to consider taking on a heavier defense

burden within NATO if it reduced American influence? With the possible exception of France, the answer would appear to be no. In fact, whilst most Europeans might grumble about US policy, they seem content to let the US carry much of the burden—Europe’s leading power Germany being a case in point, which will shortly announce a cut of up to 10% in its armed forces. Equally, the US will want and frankly need the support of its allies in its global mission as the price of a continuing American commitment, but it is hard now to see from where such support would come from within the Alliance and what meaningful role would NATO play.

NATO now faces a 1949 rather than a 1989 moment. As America considers its role in protecting the global commons on land, at sea, in the air and space, it must also consider to what extent it is willing to rely on its European allies for this global mission. The ‘mix’ that NATO must find, therefore, necessarily concerns a new balance to be struck between Alliance protection on the one hand and on the other, US-led projection on what will by its very nature be a much bigger strategic stage than the Eurocentric focus of much of NATO’s past. NATO’s purpose is not only to deter any and all threats via both conventional and nuclear means, but also to help shape the strategic environment in which the alliance must operate. To that end, NATO has no reason to exist other than to serve the strategic security and defense needs of its members. To meet that criterion the Alliance must remain relevant to today’s challenges which in this age of globalization and proliferation can no longer be confined to one neat geographical space. Specifically, in addition to ensuring the stability of Europe, Europeans need to help keep the US strong in Asia and the Middle East. NATO should be seen in that light.

An Uncertain Strategic Future

The fundamental challenge that NATO faces is that, for all the eloquence of the 2010 Strategic Concept and the ‘success’ in Libya, the Alliance remains divided and uncertain.¹ For this reason, some believe the United States is losing interest in NATO. Put simply, as security and defense have become globalized, the Alliance has failed to evolve from being a regional defensive organization to the strategic tool for global influence that its members need if they are to collectively establish the shared strategic vision upon which defense expenditures can be justified.

To that end, NATO leaders should focus on making the Alliance a global interoperability hub, with NATO acting as an ideas exchange for the modernization and integration of the European forces that are able to reach out to partners in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific. It is NATO’s role as the incubator of military interoperability standards that is NATO’s unique selling point.

Consequently, the failure to establish a global context for critical NATO missions makes the 2010 Strategic Concept more of a wish list than a strategy. Indeed, collective defense, crisis management, and co-operative security as laid out in the Concept do not capture the nature and scope of the systemic change that has taken place since the 1999 Strategic Concept. Critically, the Strategic Concept remains Euro-regional in ambition. If a new balance between credible protection and force projection is not struck, an already outmoded, hollowed-out, and bureaucratic NATO will get in the way of security, not provide it.

¹ The NATO Strategic Concept was agreed at the Lisbon Summit on 20 November, 2010. Entitled “Active Engagement, Modern Defence” the Concept established NATO’s three core missions over the next decade; collective defence, crisis management and co-operative security.

The lack of a shared strategic planning concept prevents NATO from establishing a sound framework for future force development even though the Alliance claims to be examining the new security agenda, undertaking a deterrence and defense posture review, and seeking to reform the Alliance command structure. Therefore, if NATO is to remain credible in a hyper-competitive, hyper-connected world, Alliance leaders must confront the world as it is, not as short-term political calculations deem it to be. Too often Europeans have chosen to ignore such realities and have instead retreated ever deeper into isolationism, using fortress NATO and the empty bureaucratism of the European Union (EU) as political cover for irresolution. The 26 October 2011 Euro Summit Statement called for further economic integration and eventual fiscal union as a first step towards resolving the Eurozone debt crisis could well exacerbate rather than ease these trends.

The consequence of such strategic dissonance is seen at every level of Alliance strategy. Led by Germany, several NATO member nations are lessening their commitment to cooperative nuclear deterrence and collective nuclear defense while at the same time weakening their conventional forces. Yet beyond Europe's borders is a growing nuclear renaissance with a potential for more states to acquire nuclear weapons, with Iran posing the most notable and pressing challenge. Moreover, Russia's future political posture and defense orientation remains unclear. Moscow has committed to a 3% increase in its defense budget for 2011 and many of its actions, such as bomber sorties across Europe and the deployment of new short-range missile systems, when taken together with stated Russian concerns over the modernization of NATO's collective defense architecture, suggest a future relationship that could well be fractious.

A New Nuclear NATO?

Although many Europeans, after having lived for so long with the specter of nuclear destruction, now find it hard to face the contemporary nuclear reality, deterring new nuclear powers will be part of NATO's future strategy. NATO has always been a nuclear alliance, and with Europe's conventional forces in steep decline, NATO's nuclear arsenal is likely to become more important, not less so. The imbalance between conventional forces was exactly why the Alliance stuck firmly to its 'first use' nuclear policy during the Cold War when there was a profound imbalance between Soviet and Alliance conventional forces. For all the progress made in the February 2011 New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) between Russia and the United States, nuclear weapons remain a fact of strategic life, particularly short and intermediate range weapons. There is no reason to believe that will change any time soon. In early September 2011 the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) drew attention to Iran's renewed efforts to construct a nuclear weapon system at Qom.² More could well follow.

Nuclear technology is now over seventy years old, and its associated missile technology of a similar vintage. Many emerging global and regional powers aspire to such technological expertise both for reasons of prestige and deterrence, as well as for its peaceful benefits. While the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has held up remarkably well, evidence of proliferation is clear; nine states now possess nuclear weapons in 2011, compared with five in 1968. Moreover, globalization makes it

² On 2 September, 2011 a leaked IAEA report suggested that Iran had not stopped its enrichment activities and had moved much of the programme to hardened bunkers near the city of Qom. The report also cited "new information related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile." See "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran: IAEA, Report by the Director General, 2 September, 2011. http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/IAEA_Iran.2Sept2011.pdf

easier for poorer countries to obtain advanced technology and manufacturing equipment, and to deal with more sophisticated illicit networks to develop nuclear capabilities.

The reality of proliferation, but the difficulty of quantifying it, suggests that transatlantic tensions could well become focused on the search for agreement on what constitutes minimum deterrence. Two points of view have developed between the three NATO nuclear powers on the one hand and Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Norway on the other.³ The latter five NATO members have been pressing since 2010 for the removal of up to 240 US warheads from Europe. Implicit in this position is the expectation of low-cost defense indirectly subsidized by the American taxpayer via the US defense budget—at a time when an already over-stretched US is being forced by shifts in global power to the East to move its security center of gravity away from Europe. This demand for subsidized defense from those demanding an end to nuclear forces in Europe will paradoxically shift a greater burden of nuclear responsibility onto the three NATO nuclear powers – Britain, France and the US—while they also implicitly benefit from deterrence benefits. It is precisely such strategic contradictions that are hollowing out NATO politically and militarily.

Unfortunately, President Obama's support for the Global Zero campaign has to some extent further complicated NATO's Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) which will be presented at the Alliance's May 2012 Chicago Summit. Allies are no longer sure of the future American commitment to NATO's nuclear posture, which has in turn galvanized political forces in Europe that have always seen such weapons as an evil in themselves.

In spite of the START treaties, NATO Europe's immediate neighborhood is not nuclear neutral. Therefore, defining a new minimal deterrence posture will prove both difficult and divisive. Many Eastern European states remain wary of Russia. Its unwillingness to countenance further cuts, particularly in short-range systems, partly reflects the perceived weaknesses of its conventional armed forces (NATO faces the same dilemma), although that is now being addressed, but also Moscow's traditional prickliness towards the West.

In reality the Russian-NATO relationship remains complicated. Hard though it is to explain to Eastern European allies (for very obvious reasons), Russia over the medium term is unlikely to be the real strategic threat unless a divergence of interest takes place over time. Under current thinking NATO's future deterrence and nuclear posture would ideally see the number of nuclear forces reduced, offset by a limited but capable missile defense system along with enhanced and deployable conventional military forces. Yet, the opposite is happening – several NATO Europeans are demanding the removal of American nuclear forces from their sovereign space, are cutting their conventional armed forces to the point of impotence and, in effect, offering Russia a veto on any future missile defense system. This position is defended even while the same countries expect the United States to pay for a missile defense system that will not actually defend the continental United States.⁴ In short, far from moving the Alliance forward, the Posture Review could well lock into

³ Following the December 2008 launch of the Global Zero initiative and President Obama's endorsement of it, NATO's Strasbourg Declaration of February 2010 and the April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit five NATO members; Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway moved to have all US nuclear forces removed from Europe.

⁴ In late February 2011 five NATO member nations - Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway – called for the removal of all the remaining US nuclear weapons in Europe. See "NATO and Nuclear Weapons", 29 November, 2011, The Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy. <http://www.acronym.org.uk/nato/index.htm>

future strategy the essential contradiction in the balance between strategic protection and projection from which NATO suffers.

The contradiction between stated strategy and force posture is undermining the Strategic Concept, which is fast losing political momentum. Therefore, the role of nuclear forces in the Alliance is again fast becoming a metaphor for NATO's strategic seriousness. Sooner or later, in the absence of the highly unlikely global nuclear zero or investment in sufficient numbers of advanced expeditionary conventional forces, the place and role of nuclear forces as part of a balanced NATO defense will need to be reconsidered. If the burden falls even more disproportionately on the Americans or the extended deterrence capabilities of the other NATO nuclear powers (France and Britain), then over time the Alliance will be rendered impotent.

The debate over NATO's nuclear future is thus part of a wider discussion over burden sharing and in particular the price hard-pressed Americans will demand from Europeans for continuing to act as the last resort guarantor of Europe's defense. The role to be played by nuclear weapons and missile defense in offsetting European weaknesses in conventional deployable forces will be central.

Balancing Security and Defense

Just as NATO allies must adjust the balance between their nuclear and conventional forces, they will also have to adjust the balance between external defense and internal security, especially after the decade-long focus on counterterrorism. The death of Osama bin Laden would ideally ensure a return to a more classical concept of defense strategy after a decade of counter-terrorism. This is a difficult call to make so close to the tenth anniversary of 9/11. However, it is a mark of Al Qaeda's strategic influence that a relatively small and marginal organization should have had such an impact on the consciousness, policy, and strategy of the West and, by extension, NATO. Counterterrorism has dominated the thinking of policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic at the expense of what might be seen as a more balanced assessment of the security and defense implications of the shift in sovereign wealth from west to east. Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (COIN) will of course remain important, but NATO allies need to consider carefully the place of counterterrorism within broader grand strategy and whether cutting defense budgets to beef up security (counter-terrorism, intelligence and policing) budgets is the correct course of action.

The European penchant for peacekeeping these past twenty years has led to several European armed forces that are little more than glorified constabularies with the result that the fighting power of NATO has been much reduced. Superior fighting power over all-comers is the creed of US forces and should be the *sine qua non* of NATO. Incredibly, many NATO Europeans have been all too happy use the COIN role as a cover to de-invest in armed forces. Armed forces equipped and able to exert real strategic influence on the twenty-first global balance of power are by their very nature extremely expensive, demanding large numbers of long-reach enabling platforms, network architectures, and networked soldiers. NATO should have been at the forefront of this drive but under-investment, a lack of political will, and a bureaucracy designed to serve enlargement rather than engagement has frustrated many attempts, including the NATO Response Force (NRF).⁵

⁵ According to NATO insiders the Combined Joint Statement of Requirement (CJSOR) for the latest NRF rotation is around 27%.

The focus on stabilization and reconstruction, combined with operational tempo and the rapid force rotations caused by efforts to win the peace in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade, have further accelerated the retreat of European forces from effective fighting power.⁶ This in turn has led to a political determination never again to get involved in places like Afghanistan even if such operations are precisely what most European armed forces plan for. This now begs a fundamental question: just what are European armed forces for?

European military weakness is also generating an implicit shift in strategy from the engagement in expeditionary stability operations to a form of fortress Europe. This, in turn, witnesses the consumption of defense budgets by internal security concerns with investments being shifted from armed forces to policing and intelligence. The United Kingdom is a case in point. The 2010 Strategic Defense and Security Review and the 17 July 2011 announcement to Parliament envisaged a 10% cut in the size of the British armed forces by 2015.⁷ In contrast, over the past decade counterterrorism intelligence and policing has seen a four-fold increase in funding. In effect, the UK is shifting from a deployable engagement strategy alongside the US built on a force concept of limited mass and maneuver, to a strike-and-punish force concept built around very lean, but very potent strike forces.

This weakening of NATO's relative military power has been further exacerbated by the failure to create a European defense industry able to produce hi-tech military equipment within a reasonable time and cost frame, the US refusal to properly share with allies key technologies, and on occasion the attempts by US defense manufacturers to offset costs by imposing exorbitant partnership costs on allies.⁸

Thus far, the US Congress has not become too impatient over defense free riding. However, with Bin Laden dead and Western forces scheduled to leave Afghanistan by 2015, twenty-first century grand strategy will tend to shift back towards considerations of state power and with it the place of the Alliance in America's Asia-centric global role. Moreover, so long as the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts were in progress, an implicit contract existed between the US and its European allies whereby some American presence in Europe would be maintained in return for European support for US-led operations. That contract will soon be over. Thus, in spite of Europe's economic travails, the allies are unwilling to help the US square its own strategy-austerity circle. Better use of the Alliance could help to create the synergies vital at a moment of economic stress. Failure to use NATO to such an end could well lead to profound transatlantic political tensions sooner rather than later. Europeans need at least to be aware of this, even if they are insensitive to it.

⁶ For an in-depth study of this phenomenon using the Netherlands as a case study see Lindley-French J & Tjepkema A. (2010) "Between the Polder and a Hard Place? The Netherlands and Defence Planning Challenges for Smaller European Countries" Whitehall Report 2-10 (London: Royal United Services Institute)

⁷ General Sir David Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff, said: "If we get it right, this will result in a modern, hard-hitting joint force still capable of operating at the divisional level across the full spectrum of conflict. It will deliver armed forces of which we can all be proud". The cuts will result in the smallest British army for over a century, when Britain had by far the world's largest navy. See "Liam Fox announces army cuts, but promises extra funds in future". <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/jul/18/liam-fox-army-cuts>.

⁸ And not just on partners. According to Global Security.org the unit cost of JSF, averaged over variants, had almost doubled since the programme began (from \$50 million in FY02 dollars to \$92 million). See "F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Lightning II Program"@ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/f-35-program.htm>

NATO is and always has been built on burden sharing, which concerns as much the sharing of risk as cost. The US (and the UK) gets very little of either from its continental European allies. The recent imbalance of effort may be tolerable for a time, but only for a time. However, there is no sign in Europe of any political will to resolve the imbalance by investing in defense proportionate to national economies. Given the world into which the Alliance is entering, the hollowness of NATO will at some point be cruelly exposed.

Crafting Strategy from Austerity

European reluctance to accept a greater share of NATO's burden is compounded by budget cuts forced by the recent recession and continuing economic uncertainty. Such austerity confronts Europeans with a hard reality: Europe is too rich to hide, but too weak to influence the world around it. The facts speak for themselves.⁹ NATO Europe nations have a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$18 trillion compared with the US GDP of \$14 trillion, or some 124% of the US total. The combined 2009 defense budgets of NATO Europe totaled \$267 billion compared with the 2009 US defense budget of \$715 billion. NATO Europe thus spends some 37% of the US expenditure on defense, while enjoying a 14% higher GDP.

Air operations over Libya have also revealed two lessons: a) no European force has the capacity for sustained, autonomous action to any meaningful extent; and b) the transatlantic defense-technological gap has been reinforced by an intra-European gap with profound implications for military interoperability between Europeans, not just between Americans and Europeans. Indeed, of the \$267 billion Europeans spent on defense in 2009, France and the UK together represented \$114 billion (43%), while France, Germany, and the UK represented \$162 billion (61%). The so-called 'big three' also spent 88% of all defense research and development in NATO Europe. Critically, sixteen of the twenty-six NATO Europe members spent less than \$6 billion per year—and much of it inefficiently—with the ratios between personnel costs (salaries, pensions) and equipment budgets (armaments) particularly perverse, with too much spent on personnel costs and insufficient amount invested in equipment. Set in a global context the picture is stark. Between 2001 and 2008 NATO Europe spending on defense fell from \$320 billion to \$317 billion (not adjusted for defense cost inflation). Over roughly the same period the US has increased its defense expenditure by 109%, China by 247%, Russia by 67%, and Australia by 56%.

The Franco-British relationship will be critical for generating political momentum in Europe towards a more balanced assessment of Europe's defense needs. On the one hand the signs are encouraging. Since the Suez Crisis of 1956 Britain and France have been on opposing sides of the debate over European defense, with the UK by and large seeking US-centric solutions and France a European solution. Neither London nor Paris—nor even the two together—are of themselves sufficient, but both are still essential to Europe's defense posture. The chance now exists to re-energize the Franco-British defense relationship to the betterment of NATO, thanks mainly to French pragmatism and a British government that has finally had the courage to recognize that Washington, though important, is only one amongst several strategic partners. On the other hand, the Eurozone crisis and German-led moves to create an inner-core for the EU from which Britain is excluded could, over time, weaken the ability of even London and Paris to cooperate over defense.

⁹ All the figures used herein are from the author's own research using IISS Military Balance 2010 and 2011.

Without British and French leadership, much needed practical steps towards defense cooperation could falter. Pooling, specialization and common funding ideas have been around for many years, but under Franco-British leadership with American political backing, it is not unreasonable to believe that Europe's defense rehabilitation could develop some momentum. This being Europe, most such efforts will see a *mélange* of projects, some state-led, some NATO-led, some led by the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Small clusters of like-minded states coming together to share and/or develop capabilities would be vital to re-establish affordable armed forces on firm strategic principles, leading to defense policies and strategies that will, in time, make NATO once again relevant to the age. Sadly, such leadership is unlikely to come from the Alliance in its entirety because NATO is no longer capable of acting as a whole beyond the low-level operational or the high-level rhetorical, primarily due to a lack of political cohesion but increasingly due to an inability of NATO forces to operate safely and effectively together. If the big states do not lead, NATO's steady retreat into irrelevance will sooner or later lead to failure.

Putting Strategic Partnership at the Heart of NATO

Critical to the future transatlantic relationship will be preserving and developing the strategic partnership at the heart of the Alliance. This will require the usual measures of greater defense spending by European allies, new technological solutions, and better strategic coordination to balance resources and capabilities. However, NATO must also recognize the growing role that coalitions are playing in international security and move to reconcile such coalitions with the well-being of the Alliance.

Now is the time when the nature of the strategic partnership must be reshaped. NATO is rapidly moving towards a post-Afghanistan age in which defense strategy, like that of the British, will tend to emphasize punish-and-strike rather than stay-and-stabilize. This would be a mistake, since strategic common sense would suggest that a balance needs to be struck between the two roles. It is an age that will likely witness the emergence of new nuclear powers, either for purposes of deterrence, prestige, or both. Effective conventional reach will also be critical, with dangerous crises all too likely in Africa, Arabia and Asia, with much of it focused on the littorals. After all, 75% of the world's population lives less than 100 kilometers (62 miles) from the sea.

Today, NATO Europe can only begin to perform what might be termed a strategic role by developing its defense capacity in and around Europe. Given that reality, the most that Washington can hope for from most of its NATO allies is a commitment to European defense to relieve the pressure on America's security commitments in other regions. This will by no means prove an easy task, with North Africa, the Middle East (including Iran), Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia as Europe's neighboring regions. That engagement will, of course, be mainly political and economic, but European armed forces must also be far better configured to play a meaningful influence role beyond international counter-piracy and aerial patrol, important though they are. Such roles will be no mean challenge. However, will the US accept its European allies playing such a significant role in Middle East security? Asia-Pacific is for the longer-term. Europeans clearly have interests therein but realistically only Britain and France may wield some influence there—and then only alongside the US and only very modestly.

Sound and shared strategic judgment will be vital to strike a credible balance between a reasoned assessment of the strategic environment, the level of national resources that can be invested, and the capabilities needed to provide a minimum level of credible deterrence. One key will be to make virtue out of necessity because NATO will need both small, hi-tech deployable forces and larger lower-tech forces that can offer presence far from Alliance shores—be it sea or space control or defense diplomacy.

NATO's ageing populations will also demand and require a defense strategy ever more reliant upon technological solutions. The very existence of high-tech deterrence in all its forms will act as strategic reassurance in its own right. Moreover, a far higher degree of protection of NATO's populations will need to be realized before the Alliance as a whole can project force to resolve crises. Indeed, after the Afghanistan experience and the Libyan 'success,' those forces will be permitted to stay only for short periods and will need enhanced force protection.

New forms of deterrence, such as cyber-deterrence will also be needed to reinforce renewed nuclear deterrence. In that context, NATO should be encouraged to look far into the future with confidence and not be constrained, as is currently the case, by short-term political strictures. Recognizing only as much future threat as can be afforded today is a sure-fire guarantee of Alliance failure in the face of future shock. Indeed, such a notion makes future shock likely.

However, to realize NATO's full potential in the twenty-first century, political reality must be grasped. The old mantra that security is indivisible is as empty as many of NATO members' arsenals. Free-riding is here to stay, especially for the smaller NATO nations. Therefore, even though coalitions represent a threat to alliances, if NATO is to play its role in the legitimate security and defense of the West, then ultimately coalitions must be reconciled with the Alliance. That is the minimum price to be paid if future strategic concepts are to provide the planning guidance that will make them worth reading. In short, if nothing else survives of NATO into the twenty-first century, at least preserve the all-important force planning and interoperability standards vital to the efficient force generation of coalitions.

The true test will be the extent or otherwise of the European allies to credibly support the United States in its global mission. Such a test will need to be passed—and seen by the US Congress to have been passed—if the US is to reaffirm its role as the guarantor of Europe's security and defense.

Rebuilding the Acropolis

NATO is hollowed out. Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, it is now no longer possible to hide the gap between what NATO can do and what it should be aspiring to do, however deft the politics. Operation Unified Protector over Libya represented a moderate success, but it was a very limited effort. Such 'success' should not be confused with the pressing need to re-establish strategic credibility, which after ten years of incompetence in Afghanistan is hanging by a thread. The trinity of strategy, defense, and deterrence rests inevitably on three essential political foundations: shared political vision and strategic ambition, a secure home base, and the means and determination to act with credible solidarity at the point of contact with danger. Unless the Alliance member-states patiently and with determination rebuild the strategic credibility of NATO, all that will be left is a bureaucracy, and Europe in particular already has too many of them.

The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept rightly emphasizes the modernization of Article 5 through a mix of missile defense, cyber-defense, and deployable conventional forces, and by extension, strategic re-

assurance. That, in turn, will require a new approach to collective defense in order for a new balance to be struck between affordable protection and projection while remaining relevant to today's challenges as well as those that might emerge over the next decade and beyond. 'Armed' attack in a virtual age underscores the need for the home base to be secure from catastrophic cyber-attack, terrorism and missile attack.

Effective defense will also require a new approach to collective security. It may seem strange to say, given the instability to NATO's immediate south—Tripoli is, after all, only 294 kilometers (182 miles) from NATO's southernmost point. However, Asia is likely to be the epicenter of proliferation and instability and many of the tensions and frictions that arise, particularly so given the fractious relationships between China, India, Japan, North Korea, Pakistan and South Korea. NATO will have to plan for the role it will play in such situations, decide how the Alliance should best be organized, and move forward with the necessary reforms.

Re-establishing NATO's strategic credibility will thus require much more than vague adherence to the generalities of the Strategic Concept. Rather, it will require America to re-affirm a political commitment to the stability and defense of Europe, and for a Europe led by Britain and France to re-commit to a strategic partnership with the United States based on a genuine strategic vision.

The West collectively has done much to make the world a safer place in the twentieth century and must continue to have the will and means to do so in the twenty-first century. Put simply, the world is a safer place when the West is strong. However, the cornerstone of that legitimate, collective strength is dangerously close to losing its essential position in that effort: NATO. At the very least a new contract must be struck between the allies because the twenty-first century will likely be as dangerous as the twentieth. If NATO fails, cowering Europeans will retreat into a fortress Europe, hoping against hope that in the end the US Cavalry will come riding over the horizon, but never certain they will and offering Americans little in return.

About the Author

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