

To Save NATO we should merge it with Europe's CSDP



NATO isn't working, warns **Sarwar Kashmeri**, who advocates a U.S, Canadian and EU joint project that would "bridge" the Atlantic alliance with Europe's fledgling defence and security framework.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been the most successful military alliance in history. Few people on either side of the Atlantic, or anywhere else in the world would disagree. Regrettably, even fewer would disagree with the fact that NATO is increasingly dysfunctional and still searching for a new role two decades after the end of the Cold War. Left dangling, with its internal tensions continuing to damage the already frayed transatlantic ties, NATO will soon become irrelevant to the security needs of the Euro-Atlantic area.

Cohesion used to be NATO's hallmark, but there is little of that left. It's eastern and central European members want NATO to act more aggressively against Russia, while the United States, Canada, and the western Europeans no longer consider Russia a threat. Many of America's largest NATO allies are unable to fight in Afghanistan and at least four of those that can are set to abandon the war and go home. NATO refused to support America's invasion of Iraq even though some of its members chose to do so. The resulting schism

in the alliance was memorably branded by U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld into "old" and "new" Europe. Rumsfeld has gone, and President Barrack Obama certainly doesn't use them, but the terms remain as stark reminders of the reality of today's NATO.

The importance of NATO to the United States appears increasingly questionable. When in June President Obama fired General Stanley McChrystal as Commander of all NATO Forces in Afghanistan and announced his replacement at a Washington, DC press conference it was telling that neither NATO's Secretary General, nor anyone from the alliance's top echelons was present.

Part of NATO's downwards trajectory is due to demographics. The officials that surrounded President Obama at that June milestone were of an age that gives them an instinctive appreciation of NATO's value. But what about the younger group of defence and security officials now moving into senior ranks? What do they think of NATO?

On a recent visit to a United States Navy aircraft carrier I found myself seated at dinner between two senior naval officers whose ages differed by around 20 years. I asked the older, the second in command of the warship, what he thought about NATO. The answer was an emphatic endorsement of the alliance. "It is and will continue to be the most powerful force for safeguarding the world," he said. Later, asking the same question of the younger commander of the carrier's attack squadrons, the answer was very different. "I remain to be convinced that NATO serves a useful purpose anymore".

This confusion is even more pronounced among Americans outside the military. "You mean NATO is still around?" a New York investment banker recently asked me. And the Dean of a college in Boston assured me that she was certain NATO was not a military force any more. "Probably just humanitarian assistance" she said. A retired college professor from Arizona asked if I was sure NATO troops are serving in Afghanistan.

Back in the 1990's, under strong pressure from the U.S. NATO became involved in Bosnia and Kosovo, the alliance's first military missions outside the territory of NATO members. Although controversial, these missions restored stability in NATO's backyard, and its "out-of-area" role was formally adopted in 1999, and incorporated into NATO's then new strategic concept.

The out-of-area role is what led NATO to Afghanistan, where the alliance leads ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force set up by the United Nations to stabilise Afghanistan. It is the alliance's first attempt at fighting thousands of miles away from Europe, and in spite of the bravery and sacrifice shown by individual NATO soldiers, the performance of the alliance as a whole has been far from inspiring.

"Most European nations are spending less on defence than they promised, and are avoiding the main battles in Afghanistan," says Nicholas Burns, a former American ambassador to NATO who is now a professor at Harvard.

Afghanistan may yet be the end of NATO's global aspirations, and in view of that one would think that the Strategic Concept recommendations by a Group of Experts led by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would contain a dramatic course correction for NATO. But no. Here is how the Group of Experts' report begins: NATO enters the second decade of the 21st century as an essential source of stability in an uncertain and unpredictable world. Looking ahead, the alliance has ample grounds for confidence... NATO's role in maintaining the unity, security and freedom of the Euro-Atlantic region is ongoing. Its status as the globe's most successful political-military alliance is unchallenged.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen would like to see NATO become a hub for an anti-missile shield with Russia that protects everyone from Vladivostok to Vancouver. Yet it would seem absurd to think that an alliance that is unable to find a few hundred trainers for Afghanistan will muster the political will and the money to field an anti-missile shield that covers half the planet.

So is there a realistic scenario to keep NATO relevant for the 21st century? After speaking to some 40 military and government leaders in the U.S and Europe, I see the salvation for NATO's woes as bridging the alliance with the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy. In its 10 years of existence, the CSDP has already been used to deploy 27 missions from Africa to Asia. Most of these were small civilian missions,

but there were also military mission of some consequence. In 2008, 11,000 troops were mobilised for the EU's mission to land-locked Chad in Africa and 27 countries and Russia deployed under integrated CSDP command to protect 400,000 refugees in Darfur, Chad, and the Central African Republic. The military action ranged over an area more than twice the size of France.

I asked General Pat Nash, the force commander, whether his troops were constrained with national caveats that prevent many European NATO members from participating fully in Afghanistan. His answer was an unequivocal, no. "The EU approved all the military rules of engagement I wanted in Chad," he said. The mission was successful and turned over command to the UN in March 2009. A far different outcome than appears likely for NATO in Afghanistan.

There are three main reasons for the success of CSDP missions. As a governmental entity the EU it is able to use civilian, police, legal, and military components to tailor missions that are better geared to winning hearts and minds than NATO, which is strictly a military organisation. EU missions also overcome the objections that some countries have to American-led NATO forces on their territory. Finally, CSDP is European owned and operated-Europeans making decisions in European countries' interests.

These discussions convinced me that with CSDP, the EU is capable of handling future conflicts in its backyard, such as another Bosnia or Kosovo. But as CSDP grows it will need a more robust integrated military planning and command infrastructure, instead of the ad hoc commands it is now forced to set up for each mission. NATO, on the other hand, has an outstanding and proven military

command structure that has been perfected over its 60-year lifetime. But it is a command structure that is now in need of a mission. And NATO is at present trying to develop a civilian capability in the face of a sceptical public and shrinking budgets.

NATO and CSDP are two organisations with increasingly overlapping objectives, and they also share growing financial constraints. The military organisation of NATO and the far-sighted design of CSDP offer a window of opportunity for leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to again synchronise the strategic visions of Europe and America and to revitalise the transatlantic security relationship. A revitalized security relationship would recharge the wider transatlantic alliance, which is, in the end, the real prize.

It is time for the United States, Canada and the European Union to begin a project, perhaps at the level of the U.S. Secretary of State, the Canadian Foreign Minister and the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to determine how to bridge NATO and CSDP. It is the objective that should be at the top of the agenda at the Heads of State NATO meeting in Lisbon this coming November.

It would, when all is said and done, be a great pity to let NATO fade away because we might then have to re-invent it someday. And that will not be easy. □

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