

NATO after Afghanistan: Rebalancing Alliance Commitments

*Sten Rynning**

For about a decade, 2004-2014, Afghanistan defined the center of gravity for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO had in 2003 taken command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which in the course of the years grew to a force of 140,000 troops. The bulk of the forces were American and the United States called most shots, but still it was remarkable that the Euro-centric Alliance thus had come to define itself by such a far-away expeditionary mission. The Afghan mission reached such a level of effort that it became clear that failure in Afghanistan could mean the end of NATO. The mission therefore required an adjustment of NATO's strategic policy, which took place in 2009-2010, and which brought policy in line with operational realities.

The world started to change, then, necessitating a further rebalancing of alliance commitments. The Obama surge in Afghanistan that began in 2010 was short lived and started to ebb in 2011-2012. At this point the main allies started to look to "transition" and, by and large, an exit from Afghanistan. In January 2015 ISAF was replaced by a much more modest training mission, Operation Resolute Support. In addition, and significantly, Russia's actions in Ukraine – including the unlawful annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its ongoing support for a civil war in Ukraine's

* Professor, Political Science at the University of Southern Denmark.

Donbas region – provoked fear among NATO’s East European allies and caused the Alliance to reinvest in its original territorial defense mission. The expeditionary Alliance, in short, was coming home.

The Alliance cannot find rest in its regional role, however. Globalization is a reality, and almost every conceivable NATO operation will require a network of friends and partners that go beyond the alliance membership. As globalization advances, this network becomes more important. NATO’s challenge is therefore to renew its commitment to regional defense while developing its global presence. It is a considerable challenge. NATO is likely to face it by focusing on its core competences: military affairs. It will develop its military muscle regionally and develop strategic-military partnerships across the world. Inversely, NATO likely will downgrade the crisis management dimension that was so prevalent in Afghanistan and which in 2009 defined strategic policy.

NATO STRATEGY

NATO’s purpose is laid out in the Washington Treaty of 1949, and this treaty is sacrosanct. No attempt has been made to revise it, and none is likely to be made. The treaty commits the allies to support peaceful international relations in general and to promote “stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area” in particular. This regional emphasis translates into a collective defense effort (article 3), a collective defense commitment (article 5 – the solidarity clause), and a geographical delimitation of the threat that can activate this commitment (article 6). The treaty’s stress of regional defense was of course suited to the Cold War. However, the treaty also contains flexible elements for a changing international reality, in particular its concern with “international peace and security and justice” writ large (article 1) and the provision for NATO consultations on any type of threat one or several allies feel are grave (article 4). Given this inherent treaty flexibility, it has been up to NATO leaders to translate treaty commitments into strategic policy, and this they have notably done via so-called Strategic Concepts.

In 2010 the Alliance adopted a new Strategic Concept that in a sense revolutionized NATO thinking. For the past two decades, thus in the post-Cold War era, NATO had prioritized regional and territorial defense and then added other but secondary priorities, such as crisis management and diplomatic partnership. In 2010 NATO refused to prioritize any one of these tasks: collective defense, crisis management, or partnership – they were all on par as “three essential core tasks.” Put differently, global partnerships were as important as collective defense.

The drivers of change were several. The nature of threats had changed, the Strategic Concept argued, to the effect that collective defense is more global than regional in character. Put bluntly, it is no longer mainly about Russia but weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, regional instability, failed states, cyber, and lines of communication. Globalization had thus left its distinct mark on NATO’s core missions. Moreover, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan was weighing heavily on Alliance diplomacy, and in 2010 NATO simply had to explain why crisis management at this massive level was strategically important. After all, at this point the Alliance had 140,000 troops in Afghanistan. Finally, the Obama administration wanted to “pivot” to Asia, and NATO needed to go along. The desire to rebalance U.S. foreign policy was an early priority of the Obama administration but one that required time to take root. Notably, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had to be concluded “responsibly” and the terrain for a dialogue with “emerging powers” in Asia – China but also Indonesia, Vietnam, and India – had to be prepared. It was nonetheless clear that the United States wanted to prioritize Asia, and the European NATO allies needed to explain how NATO and Asia were compatible.

This set NATO up for the 2010 Strategic Concept, which can be seen as a transatlantic deal: in return for America’s continued commitment to Europe’s security, Europeans will invest more in global security in support of U.S. policy. Since then, Afghanistan has mostly gone off the radar; Russia has reignited concern with regional defense; a crisis of public finance has caused Western defense budgets to decline drastically; and the political compass is swirling. Next we take stock of where this leaves NATO

commitments in terms of the three “core tasks” – collective defense, crisis management, and partnership.

COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

For as long as collective defense mainly referred to Europe and relations between Eastern and Western states on the continent, NATO’s leitmotif was to improve its own collective defense by supporting liberal regime change to the east. This followed the prevalent idea that, if democracies do not wage war on one another, then the best defense is the enlargement of the communities of democracies. This led notably to NATO’s enlargement policy. When the Cold War ended there were 16 NATO allies; by 2015 there were 28 – with all new members states being from the former Communist bloc.

The United States was the key driver of this process. The rationale was transcendent: U.S. officials sought to overcome geopolitics and achieve the simultaneous enlargement of the Alliance and partnership with Russia.¹ It dovetailed with the vision of Europe “whole and free” that President Bush had articulated in 1989. President Bush never got around to addressing NATO enlargement because of his short presidency and urgent conflicts, among them the 1991 Gulf War. Moreover, the Bush administration was split on the big strategic issues, notably between the vision of superpower management (rooted in Secretary of Defense Cheney’s Pentagon) and a contrasting vision of transnational and globalized governance (rooted in Secretary of State Baker’s – and later Eagleburger’s – State Department). President Clinton’s administration was differently unified. Led notably by national security advisor Anthony Lake it discarded these visions of power and networking and made democracy – democratic enlargement and engagement – its central and guiding idea. In January 1994 President Clinton argued that NATO enlargement was not a question of “whether but when,” and by January 1996 NATO as “a guarantor of European democracy” had become integral to U.S. National Security Strategy.² The rest is history, as the saying goes: NATO enlarged with three countries in 1999, seven in 2004, and an

additional two in 2009.

The policy ran into some trouble, it should be noted. The 1995 NATO Enlargement Study established that enlargement can only happen when it offers “enhanced stability and security for all countries in the Euro-Atlantic area” including “broad, enhanced dialogue and cooperation” with Russia.³ Russia, obviously, could not be ignored. It created an opening for allies which wanted not to run with U.S. policy but instead explore a role as “honest brokers” between Washington and Moscow. It was a temptation that France – historically in favor of a European voice independent of Washington – found difficult to resist. Germany’s Chancellor Kohl resisted this French policy, though, and confirmed Germany’s close ties to the United States and thus his country’s strategic policy of *Westbindung* that dated back to the late 1940s.

Equally troublesome has been the issue of whether to extend NATO’s enlargement offer to Ukraine and Georgia – two former Soviet republics. The three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were also former Soviet republics and now NATO allies, but the mood in Moscow had soured under President Putin and Russia was in opposition to Ukraine and Georgia’s western alignment. The question was whether NATO should soothe Russian sensibilities or give voice to Ukraine and Georgia. President W. Bush opted for voice and pushed – quite hard – at NATO’s 2008 Bucharest summit to have invitations for membership extended to the two countries. However, this time Germany and France – among others – joined forces. The outcome was muddled. NATO on the one hand promised that Ukraine and Georgia “one day” would become NATO members but on the other offered no concrete invitation or even membership of NATO’s institutionalized enlargement plan (the so-called Membership Action Plan or MAP). To this day neither Ukraine nor Georgia has been offered NATO’s MAP but both countries have inversely been invaded by Russia: Georgia in 2008 shortly after the Bucharest summit; Ukraine in 2014.

Collective defense via enlargement has thus run its course. There will be new enlargements, for sure, but in the former Yugoslavia where countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo could

mobilize NATO consensus. After all, NATO has committed to stabilizing and pacifying the Balkans from the very outset in the 1990s, and this policy will continue, though NATO is unlikely to hurry this process. The issues of Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate that enlargement in a wider sense needs to reengage with the issue of geography and politics. NATO has an “open door” policy but even an open door has limits. The NATO treaty defines enlargement as being limited to “European countries” – but the question is whether a line should be drawn within Europe and out of concern with Russia.

Collective defense is more than enlargement, of course, and it might be reasonable to connect collective defense and the military operations that NATO increasingly engaged in the Balkans in the 1990s and later beyond Europe. However, NATO always drew a clear line between defense and such “out-of-area” operations. The latter concerned crisis management – and we shall discuss the issue in a moment – and was seen as a policy of choice, not necessity. There were other defense issues on the horizon – such as missile threats, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism; issues that the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress pushed quite hard in the late 1990s – but for NATO they remained on the horizon. Concretely, when NATO in 1999 agreed to an updated version of its Strategic Concept, it gave little emphasis to these new defense issues. Missiles, WMD, and terrorism were placed in the back of the document under the section of “strategic perspective.” What concerned NATO more was how to draw the line between collective defense and crisis management because the Strategic Concept had to be adopted at the very moment, in April 1999, when NATO was intervening in Kosovo.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing War on Terror fundamentally shook NATO’s approach to defense

The NATO treaty defines enlargement as being limited to “European countries” – but the question is whether a line should be drawn within Europe and out of concern with Russia.

priorities. For a while the Iraq War confused matters, but when the Iraqi dust settled there was allied agreement that NATO had to address a broad range of threats. These could no longer be limited to continental enlargement or put off under “strategic perspective.” The threats are outlined in the 2010 Strategic Concept’s section on defense and deterrence: it deals first with the classical issues of nuclear and conventional defense and deterrence and then moves to consider all the new issues – missile attacks, weapons of mass destruction, cyber-attacks, international terrorism, energy security, and finally emerging technologies.⁴

NATO thus acquired a vastly overhauled defense concept in the course of the post-Cold War years. Geography, once translated into a concern with “strategic balance,” by and large vanished: Europe “whole and free” nullified the concern with continental geography and placed the onus on democratization. New threats whose reality was brutally revealed on September 11, 2001 made it to the top of NATO’s agenda this time with reference to global geography. NATO’s renewed defense agenda thus aligned with reigning thinking on globalization as a process in need of enhanced transnational management.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Crisis management is as important to NATO as collective defense, if the 2010 Strategic Concept holds true. Crisis management concerns failed states and poorly governed areas outside NATO territory where conflicts could spill over and ultimately affect NATO allies negatively – in the shape of refugee flows and cut-off energy access and more broadly a crisis of confidence in the capacity of the liberal international order to provide for just that: liberal order. If crises occur, and if NATO decides to engage, then NATO forces can move in to regulate the local fighting and help set up governance. It is thus not a question of fighting real wars: that would be collective defense. It is a question of stabilizing conflict areas.

The need for engaging in crisis management emerged in the early 1990s, partly when Yugoslavia began disintegrating into

war and conflict, partly when the Kurdish area in northern Iraq called for “humanitarian protection” by military means. This type of policy had to be defined, which was difficult because it fell between the traditional categories of use of force (war) and development (peace). Moreover, it was difficult because numerous international organizations could move into this new domain of crisis management. This was a turf war, in other words. To give any organization a lead role would be politically loaded: it was a matter of primacy and political order. An Atlantic order would favor NATO; a new European order would favor either the EU or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – which included Russia. This turf war has gained an unfortunate permanent character. The turf war got entrenched through the 1990s, faded somewhat during the Afghan war, but has since reappeared.

The OSCE (formerly CSCE) was in theory an obvious tool for managing European crisis because it covers territory from Russia to North America and aims to reconcile conflicting interests. However, and even though the OSCE got reinvented to an extent in the early 1990s, it never became a strong contender for primacy on account of Soviet and later Russian policy. The Soviet Union and later Russia favored the OSCE, for sure, but its behavior early on in the Baltic States and elsewhere raised questions in regards to the depth of its commitment, as did its later effort to mobilize the CSCE/OSCE in opposition to the enlargement of especially NATO.⁵ The sense that support for OSCE implied a withdrawal of support for NATO – a zero-sum game – thus inhibited Western policy.

Western policy instead turned to NATO and the EU. Both were handicapped: NATO because it was military and lacked in broad security competences; the EU because it was about economy and trade and had no security policy. Atlanticist allies led by the United States and Britain

NATO because it was military and lacked in broad security competences; the EU because it was about economy and trade and had no security policy.

avored investing in NATO's renewal; Europeanists led by France favored the EU. The compromise of seeking "complementarity" or "interlocking" institutions failed to address and much less resolve this underlying political tension.

Operations, first in Bosnia and then later in Kosovo, were too small to break the deadlock. In 1994 in the midst of Bosnia's crisis the Atlanticists sought a compromise by way of a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) and flexible Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) command options inside NATO, but Europeanists continued to look for non-NATO options. Tortuous institutional deals (a 1996 "Berlin agreement" and a 1999 "Berlin Plus" agreement) failed to resolve the matter. The Kosovo intervention of 1999 – heavily dominated by U.S. expeditionary capacities – then drove Britain to seek a greater European bang for the buck, which enabled its alignment with France and the creation of a new institutional option in the shape of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). At this point both NATO and the EU had moved, but the sum total was a standstill rooted in unresolved conflicting political ambitions.

The war in Afghanistan was big enough to become a game changer.⁶ In fact, the allies never considered Afghanistan a "war" effort in the sense of collective defense; rather, they saw it as a large crisis management operation designed to provide "security assistance" to the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai. This posed problems for Europeanists because the lead organization was NATO. They were concerned that NATO would come to dominate the EU in crisis management, and they had no way of countering NATO in Afghanistan because the EU played a very weak role in the country. Things only started to move when the Afghan security situation seriously deteriorated in 2004-2007. Troops were dying, and the allies needed to sort out NATO-EU and crisis management issues to turn the situation around. At NATO's Riga summit in 2006 they agreed to establish a "comprehensive approach" (CA) policy, though it would take them another two years to flesh out this ambition in the shape of both a generic CA policy and a targeted CA strategy for Afghanistan.

This moment of Western unity did matter. NATO's CA became

the framework through which the allies could channel widespread support to the U.S.-led counter-insurgency “surge” of 2009-2012. One could even argue that the “surge” institutionalized the CA inside NATO. The CA thus also paved the way for a compromise on crisis management in the Strategic Concept of 2010. The Concept – rather ambitiously – states that NATO must be ready to engage crises “before, during, and after” their peak. It foresees that NATO must “manage ongoing hostilities” and “contribute to stabilization and reconstruction,” and for this it must organize a “modest” civilian crisis management capability in the headquarters and more generally provide for enhanced planning, training, and intelligence sharing across civil-military divides.⁷ Significantly, France and Germany have signed off on this document, thus bending their traditional reservations – for France in regards to EU autonomy and for Germany in regards to the militarization of civilian crisis management efforts.

Yet there is reason to question the future of crisis management policy in NATO and also the EU. The CA compromise of 2008-2010 could well unravel now that the Afghan combat mission has closed. The operational necessity is no longer there to drive political compromise. Moreover, the lessons learned from CA are mixed, at best. One would be hard pressed to argue that Western crisis management brought democracy and stability to Afghanistan (not to mention Iraq or Libya). There is thus a natural push now to redefine crisis management. To some, it implies less “management” (i.e., overt political engagement) and more humanitarian effort in line with the “human security” doctrine rooted in the United Nations system. This view is taking root to an extent in the EU. To others, new policy must above all be flexible. It must enable lead nations – those who are most engaged in the issues – to drive policy, and the big institutions (NATO, the EU) must step in to support the mission that these lead nations establish. This view dovetails with French policy in Mali, for instance, or U.S. policy in Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile the NATO organization is building up the “modest” civilian crisis management capacity called for in the 2010 Strategic Concept. It is a work in slow progress and will remain so for as long as the underlying political questions remain in flux.

Crisis management's prominent place in the 2010 Strategic Concept thus to a great extent reflects the Afghan mission. It is not a fixed answer rooted in a solid political ambition. Moreover, now that collective defense is back in prominence because of Russia's actions in Ukraine, NATO is having to once again address the relationship between real "threats" and "crises." This was always tortuous for the allies because almost any crisis could lead to NATO security consultations (following from Article 4 in the NATO treaty), but only by opening a Pandora's box of questions in regards to the point at which a crisis becomes grave enough to merit consideration under Article 5 and thus collective defense. Allies with wide global engagements and geographic distance to Russia tend to dismiss this concern; inversely, allies close to Russia tend to be very preoccupied by it. To the latter, crisis management is secondary, and Article 4 consultations should be reserved for consultations on threats tied to prospective "attacks" – and thus Article 5.

There is reason to believe, therefore, that NATO will informally downgrade crisis management. It is tough and may yield limited results, as seen in Afghanistan, and it is controversial in regards to the sacrosanct Article 5. NATO will instead develop the dimension it knows best – the military dimension – and tailor its military policy to hybrid wars in its neighborhood. NATO is not likely to actually rewrite the Strategic Concept to thus downgrade crisis management, but this will be the underlying trend. The question is, then, what role diplomacy and partnership will play for the allies.

COOPERATIVE SECURITY

Cooperative security is the final of NATO's three "core tasks." Like in the case of crisis management, it has had to be detached from the Cold War-priority of collective defense and given independent shape. It is suited to a globalized security environment where networks and partnering are key capacities. Lone power is not sufficient; it must be connected and partnered. This emphasis has become all the more important in NATO as the Alliance has been able to shift its attention from the European theater

to broader issues, which is roughly the distinction between the 1990s and the 2000s. Cooperative security is in many ways the closest thing NATO has to a traditional foreign policy. As with any foreign policy, it is most effective when political priorities are set straight and allowed to develop in consistent ways. It would be surprising if a complex multilateral alliance could be always focused and consistent, but even so, NATO's track record of nourishing shifting and rivaled priorities is remarkable and inevitably detracts from policy impact.

We should first of all take note of the diverse nature of NATO partnerships. The first type is the set of multilateral forums that began to the East (the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, EAPC), then moved south (the Mediterranean Dialogue, MD), and finally, with the War on Terror, south-east to the Persian Gulf (the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, ICI). These forums are big, collective, and tedious to manage. The second type consists of inter-organizational relations notably to the EU and UN. NATO summits always emphasize the EU and the UN as key partners but the organization of partner relations has been difficult, even if only at the level of staff liaisons and information exchange. The third type, finally, is a wider set of bilateral relations to individual global partner countries.⁸ These countries are a diverse lot: rival Russia is one of them, as is distant Mongolia and also close friends such as Sweden, Japan, and Australia. Some partners are major contributors to NATO missions, serving on par with NATO allies; some share the liberal-democratic values of NATO; some see partnership as a way station to membership; some simply hope to direct NATO's attention to their particular national security interests.

If there is one dominant trend in this complexity of relations it is the trend away from big multilateral formats (EAPC, MD, and ICI) to bilateral relationships and flexible agendas. As mentioned, the big forums are difficult to manage and – according to the background information conveyed to this author – often exceedingly unproductive. Of course, the mere fact that groups

Cooperative security is in many ways the closest thing NATO has to a traditional foreign policy.

of countries meet can be of diplomatic importance, which also explains why some allies continue to value EAPC, MD, and ICI, but the view that they tend to be formalistic has nonetheless taken hold. The collective formats have in particular compared poorly with the necessity of fighting in Afghanistan and cooperating with partners willing to invest political commitments and military resources in a theater of high risk. Such partnership – the flexibility they require and which NATO seeks – was carried into the 2010 Strategic Concept in a defining way. Now the strategic emphasis was “flexible formats ... across and beyond existing frameworks ... with any nations and relevant organisations across the globe sharing our interest in peaceful international relations.”⁹ Given this turn of events, NATO has put all its partnership tools into a single partnership toolbox, which NATO then can use in a flexible “28+n” format (i.e., NATO and one or several partners).¹⁰

The organization of flexibility has accentuated the challenge of managing diversity, however. One could even argue that NATO’s flexible framework invites diversity and therefore policy tension. One such tension is the balance between values and operations: should NATO privilege partners who can deliver operational impact or those who are fully committed to liberal-democratic rule? Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan were close partners in NATO’s 2011 Operation Unified Protector in Libya, and also in the 2014 coalition assembled by the United States to battle Islamic State. They add both punch and international legitimacy to operations, but they are not liberal-democracies and would not take kindly to a formal partnership challenging their domestic legitimacy. To them, security is about regional terrorism, Iran’s political ambitions, and oil production and infrastructure. It is decidedly not about democratization, civil control of military policy, and budget transparency.

Another tension is the balance between like-minded nations and nations of different composure. NATO could emphasize one or the other but hardly both at once. Were NATO to primarily reach out to like-minded nations, it would strengthen democratic and liberal ties and in a way strengthen NATO vis-à-vis non-democratic powers of this world. Following this option, NATO could become

the hub of a League of Democracies.¹¹ The alternative is to give priority to relations to non-democratic powerful countries – and here both Russia and China come to mind. NATO is not a country but a collective alliance, and these other major powers would rather speak to Washington directly rather than through Brussels where NATO is headquartered. However, all major powers maintain alliance systems, and NATO could become the predominantly U.S. tool for creating a dialogue between its alliance system and those of Russia and China.¹² Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 have damaged the prospect of such dialogue, for sure, but this option is after all rooted in one of the essential characteristics of diplomacy, namely, the search for dialogue across political systems.

NATO has not prioritized in these regards – values versus operations; friends versus rivals. Its menu of cooperative security “strategic objectives” is broad and, in its own words, “without any indication of priority ranking.” Cooperative security, one is led to conclude, is a policy area in need of further reform and above all a real sense of priorities.¹³ There is no question that partnership and cooperative security will survive the Afghan withdrawal as a key priority of the Alliance, and in this sense it is better off than the policy area of crisis management, but its focus and meaning are unclear. Globalization will continue to drive NATO to seek partners for the tasks at hand – be it anti-piracy off the Somali coast or security training in Afghanistan – but partners are likely to experience a degree of confusion if and when they query the Alliance on the nature and purpose of the broader political dialogue they might wish to entertain.

IN CONCLUSION: CAN NATO MANAGE CHANGE?

NATO is a remarkable alliance of 28 nations that will soon have existed for seventy years. Its endurance is unique in international history, and there is no potentially similar multilateral security alliance emerging anywhere in the world. NATO owes its durability to multiple factors – from liberal values to open economies; from shared geography to common threats – that combine in changing ways. It is impossible to ascribe NATO success to any one factor,

therefore.

Still it is a fair question whether globalization is changing NATO's game. Afghanistan was a distant war, and other distant engagements are bound to follow. Can NATO cope? The allied heads of state and government have promised to make sure NATO can succeed. As they write in the 2010 Strategic Concept, "We are firmly committed to preserve [NATO's] effectiveness as the globe's most successful political-military Alliance." In practical terms it means the development of NATO policy along the three tracks examined in this article: defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Some general concluding remarks should be made in respect to this ambition of renewal.

NATO's strategic framework is quite broad and flexible and therefore lacks in priority. The Strategic Concept is a consensus document. It is not as focused as a national security doctrine would be, and it is best considered a framework within which the big allies and especially the United States can provide leadership. In the post-Afghanistan period these allies seem to agree on a number of things: large crisis management missions as in Afghanistan or Iraq will not be repeated; Russia has a revisionist streak and must be contained; and global partnerships remain critically important. As stated in the introduction, the sum total will be a NATO that reinvests in its regional military strategy and in parallel with its global diplomatic presence.

One might ask why global partners should care about NATO if its military focus is regional. They should for several reasons. First, Russia is a power not only in Europe but also in Central and East Asia. If NATO affects Russia's long-term strategy, other countries should pay attention. Secondly, NATO is the hub for the international coalition intervening in the wars in Iraq and Syria; the main allies are driving nuclear diplomacy with Iran; and they will decisively shape a likely international response to the turmoil in Libya. Asia is now the largest importer of oil from the region and should be paying attention. Finally, NATO is setting the standard for effective military cooperation among nations. If U.S. allies in Asia believe there is something to be gained from enhancing their practical cooperation, NATO is the place to learn practical lessons.

As a constellation – a patchwork – of national interests, NATO is responding to globalization but it is not about to become a global alliance. It simply cannot. NATO works better in the Euro-Atlantic neighborhood – from Eastern Europe over the Middle East to North Africa. It is here that the trans-Atlantic bargain works best: the United States offers security and leadership to the Europeans; the Europeans in return help shape and invest in policy and operations. Outsiders – from Asia or elsewhere – will increasingly be invited to partner with NATO in this geographic and political context. Partners should be mindful of two things in particular. The first is that NATO can be hard to figure out: its priorities are multiple, as this article has demonstrated, and sometimes the Alliance cannot give clear direction to partner dialogue. The second is that NATO, for all the talk and complexity, is a serious multilateral alliance that sometimes makes decisions that commit forces from 28 democracies, the United States foremost among them, to difficult missions. NATO is a talking shop because neither the United States nor any other ally can command action. It takes persuasion to move NATO. The downside is that there is a lot of talk in NATO; the upside is that once a commitment is made, it is serious and of considerable political impact.

As a constellation
– a patchwork
– of national
interests, NATO
is responding to
globalization but
it is not about to
become a global
alliance.

- 1 James Goldgeier, "NATO Expansion: The Anatomy of a Decision," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1998, pp. 83-102.
- 2 United States, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, February 1996, 37.
- 3 NATO, *Study on NATO Enlargement*, September 3, 1995, paragraphs 3 and 24.
- 4 NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy*, April 15, 2011, paragraph 19.
- 5 Martin A. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War through cold peace to partnership?* London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 9-12.
- 6 Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- 7 NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy*, April 15, 2011, paragraphs 21-24.
- 8 The EAPC is a follow-on to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) that in 1991 reached out to the former Warsaw Pact countries. The EAPC was formed in 1994 at which point the MD was also created. ICI originated at the 2004 Istanbul summit.
- 9 NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy*, April 15, 2011, paragraph 30.
- 10 NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy*, April 15, 2011.
- 11 Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Goldgeier, "Global NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 5, September-October 2006, pp. 105-113.
- 12 Zbigniew Brzezinski, "An Agenda for NATO: Toward a Global Security Web," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 5, September-October 2009, pp. 2-20.
- 13 The citation is from NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security*. See also David Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, Washington: USIP, 2014, pp. 213-219; Karl-Heinz Kamp and Heidi Reisinger, *NATO's Partnerships after 2014: Go West!*, Research Paper 92, NATO Defense College, May 2013.