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A NATO Vehicle for the Road Ahead

SIR BRIAN KENNY

Undoubtedly NATO is at a crossroads, having won the Cold War. But rather like an automobile after a long journey over some fairly rough going, NATO now needs to be overhauled and redesigned. Standing at the crossroads I will describe how I see the road ahead, the design strategy for the NATO vehicle, and the shape it might take.

The last two years have seen some of the most dramatic changes in modern European history, not least the unification of Germany. For the military, perhaps the most remarkable twist has been the change of attitudes of the Soviet Union towards NATO, and I can demonstrate this from my own experience. About two years ago, in my last appointment as Commander-in-Chief, British Army of the Rhine, I spent a day with General Snetkov, the commander of the Soviet Forces in East Germany, at his headquarters south of Berlin. I had full and frank discussions with him and his staff before watching units training nearby and talking to officers and soldiers on the firing range. Three aspects of Soviet thinking left lasting impressions: first, the "occupation forces" mentality, manifest in the immense morale problems of both soldiers and officers now living on the Germany economy; second, fear of German unification, with General Snetkov thumping the table and saying, "Unification, never. History repeats itself"; and finally the sense of history and patriotism which is drilled into every Soviet soldier, and with it hostility towards NATO.

Contrast these attitudes with those manifested 14 months later by General Moiseyev, the Soviet Chief of the General Staff, during his visit to NATO headquarters and SHAPE. It was quite remarkable to see him being greeted by our officers and families as we in the United Kingdom might greet Her Majesty The Queen. Who would have thought that possible only one year before? Although helped along by President Gorbachev, this remarkable

change in Soviet attitudes no doubt had as its watershed the NATO London Summit Declaration in July 1990 when NATO leaders extended the hand of friendship to the Soviet Union and referred to the Soviets "as no longer being our adversaries."

This change is remarkably significant for NATO. For the past 40 years we have been faced in Europe by the direct threat of the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact—a threat which had not only given NATO members a unifying sense of purpose but which the French would have said was the *raison d'être* of NATO. Now, as we see the collapse of the Warsaw Pact followed by the Soviet forces' withdrawal from Eastern Europe, we also see the ebbing away of the enthusiasm of some nations to contribute effectively towards collective defense. Yet we can now see that lifting the lid of communism has revealed some very turbulent broth underneath. Notably, none of the so-called economic, political, or military experts predicted with any degree of accuracy the true feelings of the people in Eastern Europe over the past few years, or indeed the state of the economic or political chaos which existed. This really underscores how unreliable information can be and how very difficult it is to interpret the warning signals even over a long period. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait reminded us as well how dangerous it is to assume we cannot be strategically surprised.

Instability and Areas of Potential Conflict

Now that we see the familiar threat we have known for 40 years retreating, what are the risks of conflict and sources of instability on the road ahead for NATO? They are many and they stretch much further than Eastern Europe. They include regional and religious tensions, the resurfacing of old rivalries, and the persecution of ethnic minorities. Other important developments are taking place on the horizon, such as mass migration on the scale of the movement of people in Europe after the Second World War. From the Soviet Union alone we could see three million fleeing west when faced with starvation, anarchy, unemployment, or civil war. We have already seen 500,000 ethnic Germans returning to the Fatherland over the past two years, and as they have come in the front door of the Federal German Republic, Asian and Turkish

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“guest workers” have been encouraged to leave by the back. Islamic and Arab fundamentalism, boosted by the population explosion in North Africa, is already leading to many emigrants moving into Italy and Spain, for example, causing growing unemployment, housing shortages, and a rising crime rate. These sources of instability are in countries bordering NATO, and they could eventuate in anything ranging from limited aggression and regional conflict to civil war, all of which could spill over to affect alliance members. There is even the danger of such developments leading to an accidental confrontation between NATO and the Soviet Union.

None of these growing risks is quantifiable in terms of opposing divisions, aircraft, and ships, and we cannot therefore use them as a benchmark for determining NATO defense requirements. As military planners, we have no alternative but to fall back on the yardstick of the Soviet military capability in the future. Even after implementation of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty in 1991, the Soviet Union, however benign the leaders may appear politically, will still remain a nuclear superpower with the strongest conventional military capability in Europe for the foreseeable future, possessing something like 90 divisions. The Soviets will, for example, retain 13,150 tanks west of the Urals, which underlines the need for collective NATO defense to balance the Soviet capability.

The threat is not, of course, made up solely of military capability. Intentions are even more relevant, but they are hard to predict and, as history shows, they can change over night. The hard-liners in the Soviet Union are clearly beginning to reappear, and the military is reasserting itself; we also have seen evidence of cheating on the spirit of the CFE Treaty.¹ None of this augurs well.

We must look at the threat not as we have done in years past—eastwards from Germany—but with a broader vision, through the eyes of our flanking nations, Turkey in particular, surrounded by these potential areas of conflict. It takes a single small spark to ignite a fire which can quickly get out of control. We should remember that World War I was started by just such a spark in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. More recently, events in Kuwait and Iraq exemplify how

a regional conflict can quickly escalate. Fortunately both superpowers condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. We should consider, however, that only two years ago we could have seen the superpowers on opposing sides.

The Design Strategy

Let me now turn to the design strategy for building the new NATO vehicle for the road ahead. For this we have had considerable guidance in the Declaration which followed the 1990 NATO Summit in London. NATO and SHAPE headquarters are now fleshing out that guidance into military strategy, concepts, force structures, and so forth to ensure that the NATO vehicle is dynamic and able to respond to change.² I would like to cover some of the essential new elements of the design strategy and, where I can, draw parallels with the 1990-91 Gulf War because I believe we have already seen some of these new elements reflected in that conflict. Our new strategy will no longer be a warfighting strategy directed against a specific enemy. It will be a seamless strategy redirected to protecting the peace, preventing peace from turning into a crisis, and preventing crisis from turning into war.

Arms control agreements and the CFE Treaty in particular will be the linchpin for protecting the peace. They must, however, be backed up by smaller standing land, air, and sea forces to provide the core of the main defense forces and the reaction forces. Those forces must be sufficient to demonstrate alliance solidarity and burden-sharing, as no European nation in the future is going to be strong enough to defend its own territory alone. These forces must be active, well trained, highly mobile, high-tech, and where possible multinational. They must also provide the needed framework for reinforcement/augmentation forces should that be necessary.

We already have multinational tactical air forces and naval task forces, but in future the force structure will put greater emphasis on multinational ground forces in line with the political guidance in the London Declaration. This will apply to the Central Region, where one nation will provide the framework for multinational or binational corps. For example, the one remaining US corps will include one US division, one German division, and Canadian forces, and the southern German corps will include a US division. Why the emphasis on multinationality? There are important advantages. The large number of flags deployed by a multinational force increases deterrence by showing alliance cohesion, resolve, and a sharing of risks, as an attack on one is an attack on all. Politically, multinational forces reinforce collective defense and argue against the renationalization of defense. Most important, multinational forces will also help to drive interoperability and standardization, both of which are currently so lacking across Allied Command Europe. But we must recognize the operational disadvantages of multinational forces as well. For example, language differences complicate command and

control, particularly at the lower levels. Logistic support, which is a national responsibility, also becomes more complex in a multinational force. It therefore makes sense to base highly mobile armored reserve formations on national rather than multinational forces. The coalition in the Gulf War successfully reflected this blend of multinational forces with national ground, air, and sea elements.

Now to crisis. If peace turns to crisis, our strategy will depend on good crisis management. NATO must be able to take political, economic, and military measures sending a clear signal that it means business and that aggression will be resisted or a local problem defused. NATO has had a taste of this in supporting Desert Storm—by providing more airborne early warning coverage, through greater protection of the sea lines of communication, and in responding to the requests of Turkey with additional air defense protection and materiel support. Some specific examples are the first operational deployment of the three ACE Mobile Force (Air) squadrons from Germany, Italy, and Belgium; the setting up of US, Netherland, and German Patriot and Hawk units for the protection of Turkish airfields; increased surveillance and mine-field countermeasures in the Mediterranean; and the coordination of national contributions of ammunition, nuclear/chemical/biological suits, communications, etc. for Turkey.

The really crucial element of crisis management is force generation—being able to deploy forces quickly by concentrating them when and where they are required to match any Soviet buildup or other developing threat. Such force generation was well demonstrated in the swift buildup of forces from 32 nations in the Gulf which prevented a further Iraqi invasion into Saudi Arabia. The SACEUR currently has only a limited capability to do this, but to back up our new strategy the future force structure will include more effective and larger reaction forces which can deploy quickly, as follows:

- *Immediate Reaction Forces.* These exist today in the ACE Mobile Force (AMF) (Land and Air elements) and in maritime standing or on-call forces, but they will be enlarged in size and roles. The aim of these forces is to deploy as many national flags as possible to achieve maximum deterrence. The AMF (Air) currently includes contributions from six nations and the AMF (Land) Brigade is drawn from units of eight nations. New contributors to the AMF (Land) will be Denmark, Norway, Greece, Turkey, and Spain. The significant change in future crisis management will be that the AMF will no longer be limited to prior planned options but will be able to deploy anywhere across Allied Command Europe.

- *Rapid Reaction Forces.* These will be newly established forces with a high degree of readiness assigned to SACEUR. The air and sea elements would be deployed under the local regional functional commander, with the land components being put under operational command of the major

subordinate commander. The composition of the Rapid Reaction Force (Land) is still under discussion but the nucleus will be a United Kingdom-led corps which will include two UK divisions (one based in Germany and one in the UK) and two multinational divisions. Outside the corps there will be a number of other formations contributed by Germany, the United States, Italy, Spain, and possibly others.

The "old" NATO strategy was based on going from peace to all-out war measures with full mobilization and reinforcement across Allied Command Europe. The new strategy will allow more selective measures to be taken and, if they succeed, for de-escalation. However, if the measures do not succeed, we must have a strategy for war based on defense of a larger NATO territory and restoring defense, much as we do today but with a different emphasis. For nuclear operations, our theater nuclear force will rely on dual-capable aircraft, which one hopes will be equipped with the new longer-range missile. In accordance with the London Declaration, nuclear weapons will be weapons of last resort, meaning a higher nuclear threshold and the necessity to sustain conventional operations for a longer time. Conventional forces will therefore require a broader range of options to deal with anything from local conflict to all-out aggression. Again, force generation and mobility will be the key elements. Although operational concepts for the Northern and Southern Regions will remain much as they are today, in the Central Region there will no longer be a specific General Defense Plan as there is no longer a specific forward defense requirement on the German border. Forces in the Central Region must be ready to respond to any situation that arises.

The extent of strategic mobility which we saw in Desert Shield and Desert Storm will be fundamental to the new NATO strategy, not just for getting reinforcements to the right theater but for moving forces between and within theaters, particularly from the Central to the Southern Region. Of course, mobility, as we saw in the Gulf War, is expensive in terms of protecting sea lines of communication, providing air defense cover, and having enough modern roll-on/roll-off ships and wide-bodied aircraft to meet requirements. With reduced defense budgets the rule, only the United States is likely to be able to afford such platforms; strategic lift will therefore have to remain a NATO as opposed to a national responsibility.

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We await with great interest further applicable lessons from the Gulf concerning operational concepts, but it is already clear that AirLand Battle may move on to become air/land and maritime campaigning. Other important areas of adjustment will be the application of airpower; the need for joint precision interdiction and for good surveillance and target-acquisition systems; the application of high technology and modernization including the orchestration of systems on the battlefield; the importance of training commanders at the operational level and providing realistic training for the soldier, particularly as we become more dependent on reservists; the value of deception; and the need for greater interoperability of equipment in multi-national forces.

Building the Vehicle

So much for the design strategy for the NATO vehicle with its 16 passengers. Let me now look at the North American and European influence on the shape of this vehicle.

NATO is a winning combination that has proved itself over the past 42 years. We discard it at our peril. I would submit that it is the only organization that can provide an effective collective defense with an integrated military structure. But it must adapt to meet the needs of its 16 passengers. In the view of all of them, including the French, a large part of our vehicle must remain labeled "Made in North America." Indeed, this label needs to be very visible. Strong US leadership has often overcome European hesitation, and a strong North Atlantic presence is essential for European defense. Here I would quote the British Foreign Minister, Douglas Hurd, in his address to the Germans in Berlin in December 1990: "European security without the US simply does not make sense. If we were ever foolish enough to try it, we would soon realize what nonsense it was!" Without the US and Canadian presence in Europe, the collective defense and the integrated military structure would be in danger of breaking up and could lead to a re-nationalization of defense by the Europeans. In some ways, the US has replaced the Warsaw Pact as the glue of NATO!

There is, however, a growing momentum in Europe for more of the parts of the NATO vehicle to be clearly marked "Made in Europe." Several European members see a need to strengthen the European component, and this could affect the shape of the NATO vehicle. There is a strong feeling that as the US reduces its forces in Europe its overall political commitment to Europe will diminish and that the Europeans must therefore shoulder a greater responsibility for Europe's defense.

That much can perhaps be expected. Yet the limp European response to the Gulf crisis has also shown that Europeans must get their act together if they wish to respond to crises outside the NATO area and to establish a

capability to do so. The United States cannot be expected to go on being the world's gendarme on its own, and internal US pressures are unlikely to allow that in the future in any case. The NATO vehicle is not presently designed to go outside the NATO area, and several members, including the key player Germany, are unlikely to agree that forces under a NATO flag should do so or that the NATO area should be enlarged. To attempt to do so increase the NATO vehicle's range would be very divisive. We must therefore look for another vehicle, and arguably the most suitable one is the Western European Union with its nine members, all members of NATO, including France. (A European force without France would not make much sense.) The Western European Union was set up in 1948 to provide mutual defense for its members, and it has much going for it: its foreign and defense ministers meet regularly to harmonize views on security and defense; the WEU is not inhibited by geographical boundaries; and the WEU has already coordinated political and military response of European members in mine-hunting operations in the Persian Gulf in 1987-88, and in the Gulf and Red Sea during Desert Storm. The foregoing would indicate that the WEU is already *de facto* a defense arm for Europe.³ Some reorganization would be necessary, however, as follows:

- *Politically.* The WEU Assembly and Secretariat, currently located in Paris and London, could move to Brussels alongside NATO, allowing the NATO Ambassadors and Military Representatives to be double-hatted to the WEU Council and to a newly established WEU Military Committee. This would allow for a coordinated European view on defense matters within NATO and the necessary policy direction for deployment of European forces.

- *Militarily.* WEU member nations could dual-earmark NATO-assigned forces, which would be separable but not separate from the NATO force structure, to join other nonaligned forces to form a European Reaction Force for operations outside the NATO area. This would legitimize the use of NATO command and control facilities and infrastructure, and, if handled sensitively, might bring in the French. Specifically the ACE Reaction Force, which will be predominantly European in content, could form the basis of a European Reaction Force. Such a force would, however, be dependent on the United States for strategic airlift, underlining how important it will be to retain the NATO umbrella.

Relocation of the WEU would also allow a bridge to the third European vehicle—the European Community—which is currently concerned with political and economic union for the 320 million people of its 12 member states. However, there is strong pressure from some members, including the French, for the governing body (The European Council) to embrace defense policy as well as security as part of the move towards political union. They see the WEU as being under the aegis of the European Community rather than NATO. This would almost certainly be very difficult for neutral Ireland and other prospective

neutral members such as Malta, Austria, and Sweden, who would want nothing to do with directing defense as opposed to security policy. Such an arrangement could well undermine NATO and weaken the transatlantic link.

There is thus still a lot of froth being generated from the waves of European change, and it is by no means clear how the European identity will emerge—if it does! The variable geometry of the members of NATO at 16, the Western European Union at 9, and European Community at 12 makes any arrangement untidy. Above all, in the shaping of the European pillar we must be very careful not to marginalize our flanking nations, in particular Turkey and Norway.

Conclusions

NATO is the only organization associated with defense that has a proven military command structure capable of overseeing change, of managing crisis, and of making decisions. NATO has a vital part to play in the difficult transitional period ahead of us as arms control measures and the CFE Treaty are implemented against the background of a turbulent scene in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and beyond. The road ahead is full of potholes and the NATO vehicle must be rebuilt to cope with them.

In particular, our NATO vehicle may have to be built so that the European parts can be separable to allow the establishment of a European identity centered around the Western European Union members who are also among the NATO passengers. But the “Made in North America” label is also vital to NATO, and the Europeans still need the North Americans as co-drivers.

It was reassuring to hear General Colin Powell, in his address to the Royal United Services Institute in London in December 1990, stressing continuing US support for a vibrant NATO. He said, “Preserving a stable Europe, a Europe whole and free, remains as much an enduring interest and an enduring reality for us as it does for you. And our concerns in that regard are heightened by the spectre that looms menacingly over parts of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union itself.”⁴ NATO is a winning combination—for me it is NATO or bust!

NOTES

1. Though later negotiations appear to have brought the Soviets essentially into compliance. See Michael Z. Wise, “Soviets Accept Limits on Arms in Europe,” *The Washington Post*, 15 June 1991, p. A16.

2. Since this article was written, NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels on 27 May 1991 approved the broad outlines of the restructuring discussed here. See R. Jeffrey Smith, “NATO Sets New Stance for New Era,” *The Washington Post*, 29 May 1991, pp. A1, A25.

3. For an interesting discussion of this subject, see Thomas-Durell Young, *Preparing the Western Alliance for the Next Out-of-area Campaign: Linking NATO and the WEU* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 15 April 1991), *passim*.

4. Colin L. Powell, “The Eisenhower Centenary Lecture: Military Realities and Future Security Prospects,” *The RUSI Journal*, 136 (Spring 1991), 17-21.