

Nick Williams

# **Crisis Management versus Collective Defense**

**The NATO Experience**

# CWS Policy Papers

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**Nick Williams** is a former UK Defence and NATO official, who worked extensively in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans. From 2000 – 2004, he was attached to the French Ministry of Defense to further Franco-British defense cooperation. He is a senior associate of the European Leadership Network, associate of the Prague Institute of International Relations, and a member of the academic board of the Centre Européen de Recherches Internationales et Stratégiques, Belgium.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, NATO has developed unparalleled experience in mounting, sustaining, and controlling multi-national military operations. This experience is too often taken as a given, something that NATO as a military organization is naturally good at. But the extent to which, and difficulty with which, NATO had to adapt from a Cold War role of defense and deterrence to one of crisis intervention is not widely understood or appreciated. Yes, NATO's adaptation in function and purpose is widely understood, but what is underestimated is how it adapted its procedures and organizational structure in order to mount and control multi-national military operations beyond its borders, something which NATO did not have any experience with during the Cold War.

In the 1980s, NATO had 4.5 million troops committed to it in Europe to deter, and if necessary defend against, a Soviet attack against Western Europe. It was a single purpose, single use organization. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the value of NATO as a collective defense organization, and hence the value of NATO itself, was difficult to explain, except perhaps as a hedge against the unlikely possibility of a resurgent Russia.<sup>1</sup>

The early 1990s was a period where a Europe 'whole and free' was a believable prospect, if only on the back of a seemingly weak and compliant Russia. In those circumstances, a role for a collective defense organization was difficult to envisage. If Europe were to be 'whole and free,' that meant that Russia should be included. Why then maintain a costly collective defense, when there was no one to maintain it against? Already in NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept, while the Soviet Union still – barely – existed, NATO signaled the end of the "comprehensive linear defense" which had been the key feature of NATO's forward defense posture for decades.<sup>2</sup> This was the first step in the dismantling of NATO's comprehensive collective defense posture.

The Balkans saved NATO from irrelevance, because it rescued its distinctive feature, the integrated military structure, from redundancy, forcing it to adapt. When the former Yugoslavia began to break up and descend into conflict, NATO resumed its role as an indispensable, and at that time the only, multi-national military organization. Apparently seamlessly, it assumed its new *métier* as an instrument of crisis management and military intervention, even incorporating willing partners from its Partnership for Peace initiative,<sup>3</sup> as well as long-standing allies.

From 1990 to 1995, NATO transformed itself from a single purpose collective defense organization to a multi-purpose security organization, specifically specializing in military interventions beyond its borders. In 2017, more than 20 years after the first interventions in the former Yugoslavia, NATO

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<sup>1</sup> At the time, the author of this paper was a member of the NATO team of speechwriters (of which Michael Rühle was the leading thinker) for NATO Secretary Generals Manfred Wörner, Xavier Solana, and Willy Claes. In speech after speech we made the case for the continued existence of NATO not on the basis of collective defense or crisis management, but NATO's wider contribution to security and stability as part of a system of "interlocking" institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 45b of NATO's 1991 Strategic Concept

<sup>3</sup> Partnership for Peace (PfP) was originally a military idea unveiled by the then Supreme Allied Commander EUROPE (SACEUR), U.S. General John Shalikashvili at a meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Travemünde, Germany, in October 1993. Against the background of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, the military idea behind PfP was to develop the forces of non-NATO partners, primarily central and eastern European, so that they could participate compatibly in peacekeeping operations. The Combined Joint Task Force initiative proposed by SACEUR at the same meeting was the means by which allies and partners could intervene in crisis beyond NATO's borders.

has over 4,000 troops in Kosovo and 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, reduced from 140,000 at its peak in 2011.

How did this transformation happen? Specifically, how did NATO members succeed in transforming NATO as a military instrument? Importantly, what was a remote possibility in the early 1900s - a strengthened and assertive Russia - is now a reality. Russia is now able to challenge a NATO that, in the meantime, has expanded to Russia's borders. Must, and can, NATO transform its military structure again to return to its original function of collective defense? Or is the increased military flexibility and experience that 20 years of crisis management have instilled in NATO sufficient to meet the challenge of a resurgent Russia? These are key questions that this paper tries to answer.

In short, the prioritization of crisis management as the prime NATO task has been achieved at the expense of the ability to mount a collective defense. NATO needs again to adjust its military structure and procedures. Doing so will be as difficult as NATO's first military transformation after the Cold War. After more than 20 years of focusing on crisis management and intervention, NATO knows how to do crisis management, but has to relearn to do collective defense.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. NATO and the Integrated Military Structure

NATO's role in the Cold war was simple and unipolar: defense and deterrence against the Warsaw Pact, and particularly the Soviet Union which was considered to have considerable superiority of in-place conventional forces and the advantage of being able to mount a surprise attack. NATO achieved its aims primarily by military means, which had the objective of demonstrating that no political or military purpose would be served by the threat or use of military force by the opposition.

Because the Cold War was a war of perceptions, NATO's military structure and organization was marked by rigidity and predictability. Rigidity and predictability were built into the system; the only element of unpredictability was the uncertainty and ambiguity that NATO deliberately fostered about when and how nuclear weapons would be used if a conventional attack against NATO territory could not be stalled by conventional means alone. Today, it is largely forgotten that for all its military might in the Cold War, NATO could only do one thing with the 4.5 million troops purportedly committed to it:<sup>5</sup> defend and deter against an attack from the east. There was no flexibility, or alternative scenarios, envisaged.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dr John Manza, the distinguished Director of Operations on NATO's International Staff, has reached the same conclusion: "Right now, if I were to give us a school grade on conventional Deterrence and Defense, I would give us a "D minus." See Lelia Rousselet, "John Manza Gives NATO an "F" in Projecting Stability," <http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2017/12/13/john-manza-gives-nato-f-projecting-stability>.

<sup>5</sup> According to "NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Force Comparisons," NATO Information Service, [http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137795/0228\\_NATO\\_and\\_the\\_Warsaw\\_Pact\\_1984-Force\\_Comparisons\\_ENG.pdf](http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/3/137795/0228_NATO_and_the_Warsaw_Pact_1984-Force_Comparisons_ENG.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> For example, the author of this paper was in a reserve (UK Territorial Army) unit based in the city of London from 1979 – 1985. The function of this unit was to deploy from London within 48 hours to a particular place in West Germany and set up forward observation posts to report on the advance, and identify the armored vehicles, of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Shock Army as it rolled above our heads. As part of NATO's General Defense Plan, the unit deployed to the same place to do the same thing every year. There was no other role.

The features of this system which made it both effective and collective included:

- **A Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area**, which designated the threat from the Soviet Union and the strategy for countering it. In 1967, NATO's Military Committee, closely following prior political guidance, approved document MC14/3 "Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area".<sup>7</sup> MC 14/3 then spelled out three types of military responses to aggression against NATO. Direct Defense would attempt to "defeat the aggression on the level at which the enemy chooses to fight." Deliberate Escalation added a series of possible steps "to defeat aggression by raising, but where possible controlling, the scope and intensity of combat" with the "threat of nuclear response" - the third type of response - "progressively more imminent."<sup>8</sup> The enemy was specified as the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.
- **An Integrated Military Command Structure**, whose purpose was to organize and coordinate the defense of Europe according to the Strategic Concept, including reinforcement from North America.
- **An annual Defense Planning Questionnaire and Process in which allies committed troops to NATO and planned to remedy their weaknesses in capability up to five years in advance.** The first year of this commitment was deemed to be a firm commitment, *i.e.* NATO could count absolutely on the forces being made available to the Strategic Commanders<sup>9</sup> in the timeframes indicated.<sup>10</sup>
- **A NATO General Defense Plan<sup>11</sup> for the forward defense of West Germany in particular.** Every military unit committed to NATO had its place in the plan, with reaction times from a matter of days to weeks, or even months for some reinforcements. Each ground unit had its piece of territory to defend as far forward as possible, and practiced deploying and defending that piece of territory year on year. Every unit had their place and knew their place in the line, and trained and exercised for its unique place in the general plan.
- **Annual and regular exercises at every level of the structure.** The annual Winter Exercises (WINTEX) practiced the political responses to a threat or warning signs of an attack at the

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<sup>7</sup> From 1967 to 1990, NATO's strategic concept was popularly known as "Flexible Response", but it was flexible only in terms of its escalation options, *i.e.* from conventional defense to nuclear use, not in terms of alternative threats or scenarios.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory W Pedlow, "NATO Strategy Documents: 1949-1969," NATO International Staff Central Archives, <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/intro.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> For most of the Cold War these were the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) and Commander-in-Chief Channel (CINCHAN).

<sup>10</sup> In the British-Argentine Falkland's conflict of 1982, the UK hastily deployed forces to the South Atlantic in respect of which they had made a 'firm' commitment or promise of rapid availability to NATO. The author of this paper participated in a NATO consultation at NATO in which NATO's military staff and other allies tried to assess the harm to collective defense and deterrence from the absence of a range of high readiness UK forces. The consultation was futile. The forces were already en route for the South Atlantic. The UK promised to return the forces to their normal NATO role if a Soviet attack was imminent.

<sup>11</sup> NATO organized the General Defense Plan of Germany into eight national corps, whose commanders retained crucial command authorities, e.g. authority over training, logistics, task organization, and mission assignments, among others "Oplan 4102," GlobalSecurity.org, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oplan-4102.htm>.

level of the North Atlantic Council. Field exercises and training to respond to an attack were conducted at all levels of the military structure, sometimes in conjunction with, and in response to, the North Atlantic Council decisions in the exercise. At the highest level, with little variation, they were fundamentally same exercise with the same outcome each year: the North Atlantic Council, in a simulated response to a simulated attack, managed the successful forward defense of Alliance territory through timely deployment and mobilization, or through the restoration of deterrence by a demonstrative (albeit hypothetical) use of nuclear weapons.

- **The certainty of substantial U.S. reinforcements.** Together with a system of equipment sets prepositioned in Europe (POMCUS - Prepositioning Of Materiel Configured in Unit Sets), the United States aspired to have 10 Divisions in place within 10 days of a decision to invoke NATO's collective defense obligation, six of those would come from the United States. NATO's annual 'Reforger'<sup>12</sup> exercises practiced the deployment of substantial number of troops, mostly from the U.S., but also from the UK and Canada.
- **Cooperation and coordination with France.** Though France withdrew from the NATO's Integrated Military Structure in 1966, its military nevertheless still retained a very precise role in the NATO order of battle in the event of a Soviet attack on Western Europe.<sup>13</sup> The Ailleret-Lemnitzter accords in 1967 specified that the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army could be reattached to NATO's integrated command structure in the event of war, should the French President authorize it. Detailed plans for this contingency were worked out in accordance with NATO's General Defense plan.
- **The strict interpretation of the Washington Treaty 1949** on which NATO was founded. This specifies not only NATO's purpose,<sup>14</sup> to resist armed attack, but the geographical area and limitation in which the treaty collective defense clause can be invoked, the North Atlantic Area.<sup>15</sup>
- **Political control.** An important feature of this system was that the whole process, from defense planning to the decision to launch a mass mobilization of NATO forces, was under strict and tight political control. However, the key element of political control was pre-established agreement and consensus, from NATO's Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area to the annual Defense Planning Process, of the circumstances in which Article 5 would be triggered. The Allies having agreed beforehand what the response to attack should be, all consequent and subsidiary decisions could rapidly follow.

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<sup>12</sup> Reforger - from **Return of Forces to Germany**.

<sup>13</sup> Claude Cartigny, "1966: La France Quitte Les Organismes Militaires De L'otan," *Recherches interationales* 75, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>14</sup> Article 3: "the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack". Article 5: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all".

<sup>15</sup> Defined in Article 6 as: "the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer..."

Above all, NATO's collective defense arrangements were designed to project credibility and resolve to a specific and identified adversary, the Soviet Union. NATO did not allow any doubt to exist that it was willing and able to defend NATO territory against attack. There was a single focus on Article 5, with all other articles in the Washington Treaty deemed to support it, *e.g.*, Article 3 the need to strengthen national and collective defense; article 4, consultation mechanisms in the event of a threat; and article 6, a clear definition of the geographical limits and circumstances in which the treaty could be invoked.

### 3. The Balkans – The End of “Inflexible” Response

The features which made NATO's collective defense so formidable and coherent in the Cold War were not adequate for crises for which there was no pre-ordained response. In the Cold War, rigidity and predictability were assets. They helped serve the purpose of deterrence, because a single purpose integrated military structure signaled to the Soviet Union that it should have no doubt about NATO's readiness, will, and capability to defend itself.

After the fall of the Berlin wall, rigidity and predictability were liabilities. NATO had a unique multinational military capability, but it was largely of no use because NATO's forces were organized, trained, and deployable only for the purpose of defense and deterrence against the Soviet Union, and nothing else. The forces that were committed to NATO were committed for a single purpose only. Henceforward, for its crisis interventions, NATO could not rely, as before, on forces being made available to it. NATO's military had to negotiate and evaluate contributions on a case by case basis, according to a new procedure – the Force Generation Conference.

NATO's new Strategic Concept, agreed at NATO's Rome Summit in 1991, set the political direction for a NATO that was struggling to find a role in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. It introduced the concept of crisis management but was vague in its view as to whether NATO should prepare itself for intervention in crises beyond its borders, and whether its military forces should be adapted and trained accordingly. But the new Concept did make it clear that the overall size of the Allies' forces, and in many cases their readiness, would be reduced, and that that the maintenance of a comprehensive in-place linear defensive posture in the central Europe would no longer be required.

Significant reductions in NATO forces were foreseen, but so was the adaptation of NATO's force structure in anticipation of a new role in crisis management. The new Strategic Concept, which unlike its predecessors was not only for the defense of the North Atlantic area, recognized that “available forces should include, in a limited but militarily significant proportion, ground, air and sea immediate and *rapid reaction elements able to respond to a wide range of eventualities, many of which are unforeseeable.*”<sup>16</sup> It went on to say, “in the event of use of forces, including the deployment of reaction and other available reinforcing forces as an instrument of crisis management, the Alliance's political authorities will, as before, exercise close control over their employment at all stages. Existing procedures will be reviewed in the light of the new missions and posture of Alliance forces.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Italics added by author

<sup>17</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept," [https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm). Paragraphs 45 and 46

While the 1991 Strategic Concept was cautious and vague as to the nature of potential crises to which NATO could respond, the reality of the situation in the former Yugoslavia soon became clear and compelling. The political difficulties that NATO faced in responding to the crisis on its doorstep have been well documented – the debate whether NATO should intervene in crisis then deemed ‘out of area,’ the rivalry with the EU/WEU, the U.S. pressures on the Europeans to take initiatives and risks without being willing to take similar risks themselves, and the search for legitimacy for a NATO use of force. For the purposes of this paper, it need only be said that NATO’s military engagement in the former-Yugoslavia was at first improvised and tentative. The 1991 Strategic Concept implicitly harked back to a confrontation with the Soviet Union, still then in existence, as the only realistic crisis which NATO would ever have to face.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, within nine months of the Strategic Concept being approved by a NATO Summit in Rome in November 1991, NATO agreed, in July 1992, to deploy a naval force in the Adriatic to assess compliance with United Nations sanctions on Yugoslavia. The following year, the naval force was given the authority by the North Atlantic Council, in accordance with UN Security Resolution 787, to enforce the sanctions. In November 1994, NATO undertook its first ever, very tentative, bombing raid.<sup>19</sup> In the following year, between 30 August and 20 September, NATO conducted an extensive bombing campaign against Bosnian Serb positions involving 400 aircraft and 5,000 personnel from 15 nations. By the time of the signature of the Dayton accords in 1995, NATO had planned and sent an Implementation Force<sup>20</sup> (IFOR) of 60,000 peacekeepers to Bosnia, which included absorbing UN forces in the country that were not NATO members. The planning capability and experience NATO derived from its role in Bosnia was invaluable and provided an operational template for its intervention in Kosovo four years later.

In effect, the Balkans transformed NATO from a purely defensive alliance designed to deter or repel an attack on its members into an organization with an offensive and interventionist capability. This was a significant turnaround for an organization which over the previous decades was accustomed to the incremental build-up of defensive capability against the Warsaw Pact in line with the predictable and orderly pace of the year-on-year defense planning process.

Three new features helped this transformation of the integrated military structure from a mobilization model to a crisis management and intervention capability:

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<sup>18</sup> In June 1992, in Oslo, in what was then considered a landmark decision, NATO Foreign Ministers decided to make NATO resources and expertise available to the OSCE (then CSCE). They declared that “The Alliance has the capacity to contribute to effective actions by the CSCE in line with its new and increased responsibilities for crisis management and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In this regard, we are prepared to support, on a case-by-case basis in accordance with our own procedures, peacekeeping activities under the responsibility of the CSCE, including by making available Alliance resources and expertise.” Craig R Whitney, "NATO Sees a Role with Peacekeepers for Eastern Europe," *The New York Times*, 5 June 1992. The irony was that the CSCE were not primarily engaged in managing the crisis in the former-Yugoslavia, which was so preoccupying NATO Foreign Ministers.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Cohen, "NATO, Expanding Bosnia Role, Strikes a Serbian Base in Croatia," *The New York Times*, 22 November 1994.

<sup>20</sup> This was a force to implement the military aspects (Annex 1-A) of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Dayton Agreement).



- **The development of an operational planning capability in SHAPE aided by a significant injection of U.S. expertise.** Much of the operational planning for IFOR was done by U.S. planners, given the significance of the role that U.S. forces would play. But the net result through interaction between U.S. and NATO operational planning staffs was that NATO itself acquired the skills and expertise for the first time to plan for peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations.
- **The initiation of a Force Generation Process.** In the Cold War, every unit committed to NATO knew its role and place. In the radically transformed security situation of the 1990s, a force like IFOR had to be organized and composed from scratch. No NATO member could, or would be expected to, commit its forces for a purpose or an operation that was unforeseeable. The firm commitment of forces to the Integrated Military Structure for the upcoming year could no longer apply. In the new circumstances, NATO would have first to agree the mission at the political level, and then seek allies willing to commit troops to it. The Force Generation Process was thus born from the necessity of negotiating with each ally the forces it would make available to the Alliance, under which circumstances and conditions it would make them available, and over what timescale. This was, and still is, a painstaking process for which the Cold War did not provide a template.
- **The importance of non-NATO allies in filling gaps and niches in a force structure** - and even more importantly, the gains that arise from multi-national political legitimacy for a NATO operation undertaken outside the Washington Treaty Framework of collective defense.

There was one key feature of the integrated military structure which persisted and arguably was the basis for the successful military transformation of NATO in the years to come: the close and effective relationships that the NATO military authorities had developed over 40 years, both formally and informally, with the military staffs and particularly planning staffs of each NATO member. It was this collaborative culture above all which facilitated and enabled the military transformation of NATO. It was this mutual understanding and confidence between NATO and national military planners which marks NATO out as the preeminent multi-national military organization in Europe, and indeed elsewhere. For example, the EU, for all its longstanding security ambitions, has not developed anything near the common collaborative culture among military establishments that NATO has. Because the EU is unable to establish a planning HQ equivalent to SHAPE, this natural, even day to day, contact with allied and partner military staffs is still a far distant prospect for the EU.

The transformation of NATO's political decision-making process occasioned by its interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo was equally profound. As noted above, for the first time NATO had to consider the political framework and control of military operations. Whereas previously there was consensus and agreement that the purpose of NATO's military forces was to defend and deter, as set out Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area, henceforward every stepping up of the military pressure on the Bosnian parties or every new intervention (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya) had to be discussed and planned as a new venture. Unlike in the Cold War, the political purpose and approval of an operation, and the use and limitations of military force, had henceforth to be carefully defined on a case by case basis. There was no pre-existing consensus about whether NATO should intervene, let alone how.

## 4. NATO's Crisis Response System

In the more than twenty years since NATO's first, tentative steps in 'out of area' crisis management, NATO procedures have developed significantly. There is an agreed Crisis Response System which aims to provide the Alliance with options and measures to manage and respond to crises. The North Atlantic Council approved the Response System in 2005, and since then it has been under constant development and adjustment in the light of lessons learned in actual operations. The process is initiated once indications suggest that there is an emerging crisis that may affect NATO's interests. It is a six-phased process:

**Phase 1 – Indications and warnings of a potential or actual crisis.** The North Atlantic Council considers if such a crisis affects NATO's interests, and, if so, decides to initiate the next phase.

**Phase 2 – Assessment of the developing crisis and of its implications for Alliance security.** The Council tasks SACEUR to develop a SACEUR Strategic Assessment.

**Phase 3 – Based on assessments from Phase 2, the Council tasks the development of potential response options.** These may range from proposals deliberately limited in scope, such as statements of political concern, to more ambitious options involving the precautionary activation or even proposals for the employment of Alliance Forces. Phase 3 ends when, having considered options for responding to a crisis, the North Atlantic Council, decides on a preferred course of action and authorizes the next phase (planning) by means of a North Atlantic Council Initiating Directive. This is a politically developed and approved planning directive to NATO's Military Authorities. It defines precisely the Alliance's objectives in a crisis, and the end-state to be achieved by NATO's intervention.

**Phase 4 – Planning.** In this phase, SACEUR develops a Concept of Operations, for agreement by the NAC and a strategic level Operation Plan (OPLAN), again for NAC approval. This phase culminates in a NAC Execution Directive by which the North Atlantic Council authorizes and initiates a NATO-led operation or mission.

**Phase 5 – Execution.** After the planning, comes the execution. During the execution phase, periodic assessments are conducted for NAC consideration. These reviews are primarily intended to assess the progress being made toward attaining the NATO end-state and the desired strategic, political and military objectives. If necessary, these reviews can lead to the adjustment of the end-state and strategic objectives as defined by the planning documents approved at the end of Phase 4. For reasons of political inertia, this rarely, and in the author's experience never, happens.

**Phase 6 – Transition and Termination of NATO's Crisis management intervention.** If and when the end-state appears to be in sight of achievement, the NAC considers options for a possible withdrawal, handover to other actors and termination of the NATO operation.

It will be noticed from the above that the NATO Crisis Response System requires political decisions at all key points and phases in the process. The system is constructed in such a way that no phase of this six-phase process can start without a political decision. Military planning does not formally begin until Phase 4. But the NATO military authorities make assessments and give their advice before political decisions are taken. They are at the heart of the process. But political control is paramount. This has led to criticisms within NATO, and particularly among senior military officers,

that the Crisis Response System assumes an almost leisurely development of a crisis in order for NATO to respond in a timely way.

A fast-moving crisis which demands rapid intervention, as in Libya, requires the condensing of NATO procedures, and even by-passing them. For instance, the procedures for associating partners with a NATO operation, *i.e.*, the certification by SHAPE of the interoperability of a partner's offer of a force contribution, had to be by-passed in interest of speed.<sup>21</sup> But more significantly, the initial air campaign was conducted by a coalition of like-minded countries, buying time for NATO procedures to catch up.

One key and adverse result of 25 years of NATO crisis management is that, in planning for an operation, SACEUR does not know which forces he can rely on for what purpose, whereas in the Cold War the SHAPE defense planning staff knew precisely what forces could and would be mobilized in the event a threatened attack. As emphasized above, for crisis management, every operation has to be planned and mounted from scratch. The forces needed for an operation have to be identified and then negotiated and persuaded through a Force Generation Conference hosted by SHAPE for this specific purpose. Because of the close collaboration between NATO planning staffs and national staffs, SHAPE planners may be familiar with what forces may be available, but they cannot depend on them.

Initiatives such as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the broader NATO Response Force are designed to boost collective defense and introduce a degree of certainty in NATO's response to the defense of exposed allies in the east. And since NATO's Warsaw Summit, there have been contingency plans developed, named "Graduated Response Plans", which seek to identify an illustrative and possible list of forces which would be needed and could be made available for the defense of a particular ally, in addition to an ally's home defense forces and NATO's high readiness forces. But there is no certainty, no pre-commitment, and no overall plan for the defense of the North Atlantic area.

Ironically, with the Russian threat again being invoked as a possibility, there are powerful arguments in favor of returning to the sort of firm commitments of forces in time and place that existed before 1991 to deter and defend against the Soviet Union. A Force Generation Conference is not an adequate response to a crisis or a threat emanating from the Russian Federation.

## 5. Afghanistan – The Endless State

The European allies have become weary of long drawn-out commitments. NATO's operational involvement in Afghanistan dates from 2003, when it took over responsibility for International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Although NATO assumed the task two years before the NATO Crisis Response System was first formally approved by the North Atlantic Council, nevertheless, NATO's Afghan experience followed, albeit imprecisely, the main elements of the process. It provides a practical example of the launch and control of NATO operations, particularly insofar as the dissemination of strategic direction is concerned. Every six months, NATO reviews the operation and assesses progress towards the so-called end-state. However, it also provides a

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<sup>21</sup> Sweden, Jordan, Morocco, United Arab Emirates and Qatar participated as partners in NATO's Operation Unified Protector, its contribution to enforcing United Nations Security Resolution 1973.

practical example of the shortcomings of a crisis management response system designed to be rational and politically driven, but which ends up setting impractical strategic objectives.

All NATO operations have to define what is termed an ‘end-state’ in the planning phase (Phase 4) of the NATO Crisis Response System. An end-state is what ideally the situation in the crisis country should be after the successful intervention of NATO forces. According to the specifics of a crisis, a NAC Initiating Directive, *i.e.*, the beginning of the planning for a crisis management operation, should contain the desired NATO end-state and the strategic, military, and non-military objectives that NATO needs in order to achieve that desired end-state. In other words, an end-state is defined at the outset of the planning process before experience on the ground or reality sets in.

This is a significant draw-back. All interventions alter the dynamics of a crisis, usually unpredictably. For instance, NATO ground operations, where the NATO force is the most significant among the international community in terms of size and effort (as previously in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and currently in Afghanistan and Kosovo), tend to create a dependency culture and thus reduce the incentives for the host nation to achieve the conditions specified at the outset.

In 2004 the political end-state for the Alliance was defined as: a self-sustaining, moderate and democratic Afghan government in line with UNSCRs.<sup>22</sup> A self-sustaining Afghan government remains elusive even in 2017, with a much reduced and less ambitious NATO successor mission to ISAF named Resolute Support.

End-states can be adjusted throughout the operation as a result of the six-monthly review whose recommendations are submitted for agreement to the North Atlantic Council. In terms of military end-states, in 2010, after General McChrystal made his famous Commander’s Initial Assessment, the desired Alliance end-state was that “GIROA (Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) is able to meet its responsibilities to provide security, order, stability and reconstruction in order to provide a better future for the Afghan people and to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a haven for terrorists.” This too was clearly far too ambitious. The NATO end-state for Resolute Support is for the ANDSF to be able to provide viable security without the need for NATO support, to help prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for international terrorism. This probably means that Afghan security forces must be able to protect the major Afghan population centers without need of outside military help. Even this reduced level of ambition seems far from being realized.

The problem with politically determined end-states, defined before boots even hit the ground, is that they tend to be unrealistic and idealistic. Even when amended, they are political wishful thinking, and therefore unachievable. But above all, the designation of unrealistic desired end-states at the beginning of an operation, before reality sinks in, is a recipe for the indefinite and unnecessary prolongation of a military mission beyond its useful life, as is becoming increasingly apparent in Afghanistan.

Perhaps it is time to define a ‘continuation-state’: the conditions which must be fulfilled by the host government in order for the NATO presence to continue with some prospect of progress. NATO’s Crisis Response System is highly successful in getting a multi-national military coalition into a crisis; it is not so good at getting it out.

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<sup>22</sup> SACEUR OPLAN 10302 – 25 June 2004

## 6. So What?

Faced with assertive and strengthened Russia, NATO has in recent years, and explicitly since NATO's Warsaw Summit in 2016, prioritized collective defense.<sup>23</sup> NATO's enthusiasm for crisis management and large-scale military intervention is on the wane. The prolonged and seemingly endless adventure in Afghanistan has soured the appetite of many European allies from getting involved in large-scale NATO operations and missions on the ground whose outcome and benefits to themselves are uncertain and negligible. Even so, NATO procedures for crisis management will still remain. These, as noted earlier, have been criticized by NATO's military as too cumbersome.<sup>24</sup> If NATO had to face a crisis with Russia, it would be the Crisis Management Response System that would be followed.

Does this matter? NATO's extended role after the Cold War was accompanied by the development within the NATO Crisis Response System of even tighter procedures for political control and a necessarily loose process of force commitment. This has its weaknesses as well as its strengths. The advantage is that there is no automaticity or pre-determined response to a crisis in the east, allowing decision-makers full freedom of maneuver using the full range of political, diplomatic, and graduated military responses to defuse the crisis. But the overriding weakness is that at every stage of the planning process there is ample scope for prolonged and hesitant political discussion before the next stage of the process is authorized.

In other words, the crisis management response system is ill-suited to rapid decision taking in the event of a crisis requiring a comprehensive collective defense. There is no certainty or dependability that a full range of forces could be made available for a crisis involving Russia. This was lost as NATO resorted to Force Generation Conferences to generate the necessary forces in a crisis as opposed to a general defense plan.

Does NATO now need to swing back and focus on a superefficient procedure and enhanced capability for collective defense, drawing on the rigidities and certainties of the past? Only up to a point. Large-scale upgrades in capability are probably not necessary. The NATO goal of each ally spending at least 2% of its GDP by 2025 is irrational and arbitrary. It is driven more by transatlantic burden sharing than by an assessed need for comprehensive increases in capability.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace" (Paragraph 5 of NATO's Warsaw Summit Declaration, July 2016). "The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. And so renewed emphasis has been placed on deterrence and collective defense" (Paragraph 6 of NATO's Warsaw Summit Declaration, July 2016). "NATO has responded to this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defense posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and by suspending all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia, while remaining open to political dialogue with Russia" (Paragraph 11 of NATO's Warsaw Summit Declaration, July 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Of NATO's intervention in Libya, an operation they judged a success, Ivo Daalder, then U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO, and General James Stavrides, then NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, wrote, "Within the command structure, for example, the alliance has failed to devote the necessary resources to developing key skills, including the capacity to ... plan joint operations in parallel with fast-paced political decision-making, ..." Ivo H Daalder and James G Stavridis, "Nato's Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>25</sup> See Simon Lunn and Nicholas Williams, "NATO Defence Spending: The Irrationality of 2%," European Leadership Network, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/nato-defence-spending-the-irrationality-of-2/>.

As in the Cold War, NATO underestimates both its own strengths and Russia's real weaknesses: this bias is an institutional deformation and proclivity. Looking from Moscow, it is safer to be an irritant to the West, than an aggressor. Nevertheless, NATO's one great asset is its credibility. Unless NATO can shorten the political decision-making to what is absolutely essential and move from illustrative to real force commitments in time and place, this credibility will be at risk.

Furthermore, NATO's credibility would be completely and irrevocably lost if, in the event of a crisis in the east, a coalition of allies and concerned regional partners, led by the United States, took the initiative to deploy and show resolve, while NATO procedures took their time catching up. In the absence of change, that is a real possibility.

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