

The enlargement of NATO's missions and the construction of Europe's area of security in its internal and external dimensions: rationalisation, encroachment or overlapping?

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Abstract

The way in which the Atlantic alliance's new role is perceived in the post Cold war context has clearly shown that Americans and their European allies tend to diverge increasingly on several critical issues. The military campaigns that NATO has undertaken since the end of the Cold War have pointed out the divide which adds to the technological gap also known as capacity gap. These successive assessments have led the European members to wonder about the necessity of providing NATO with new missions in order to respond more efficiently to contemporary security needs and requirements and to maintain NATO's relevance in a post-Cold war era.

In the meantime, the United States has launched a wide reorganising process in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, including governmental decisions and the acceptance by the Congress of bills meant to reconsider security's stakes in a new environment which is deemed more threatening. These measures consist in a strengthened protection of the American homeland, the creation of new structures and a new way of perceiving risks. Washington is

trying to progressively export these new steps and measures, seen as a model to be followed by the United States' partners and in particular by those belonging to the Atlantic alliance.

Priorities and security stakes have evolved and the member states have gradually enlarged the Alliance's missions and skills. This is not the first time an international organisation has to adapt to a new context. The major changes that have occurred on the international scene since the end of the Cold war have also had tremendous effects on many other organisations' missions, roles, structures and tools. The CSCE (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) was changed into OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe); the GATT was transformed into the WTO, and the WEU has come back on the stage before it disappeared again in 1999, when it was integrated to the EU.

Better connections and a strengthened cohesion of the EU represent in themselves tremendous stakes for Europe. The EU has acquired new tools and received new missions. But NATO continues to coexist along Europe and hesitates on the issue of missions, although officials, among whom General Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, keep underlining the relevance of NATO's "traditional" missions, a way to enhance its continued legitimacy.

Yet, some questions remain, among which: What role should NATO be given in Europe's internal area of security after the Cold War? Is NATO still an indispensable guarantor of security? Can it share this guarantee with other actors such as the EU and the OSCE? Is the EU strong enough to do without it?

Because it now deals more and more with internal and civil security issues, NATO sometimes fuels the discontent and dissatisfaction of some of its members and has progressively lost the consensus and cohesion it maintained all through the Cold War because of the Soviet threat. Moreover, NATO's new missions regarding these domains may lead to an encroachment or a duplication of activities and structures that either already exist or are progressively being implemented in the common security area of European states and NATO members.

An extended role of NATO in terms of external security could therefore lead to more complex modalities and instruments in the internal and external dimensions of the emerging European security areas. It is thus necessary to assess the variety of changes that may occur in the near future.

NATO holds an unquestioned legitimacy militarily speaking and can be useful in the fight against terrorism thanks to its specific defence capacities. It is currently developing a civil programme, in particular through the Urgent Civil Plan (UCP). Yet, as civil programmes are not part of its charge, some member States, France being among them, wish that NATO's civil and military dimensions would remain strictly limited, without any encroachment on the role of the UN or the EU.

NATO's added value in terms of politic and diplomatic efforts in the fight against terrorism is eventually not clearly demonstrated and remains to be proven. France is in this respect against this evolution and wishes the Atlantic alliance could focus on its missions and duties as a defence military organisation.