

Financial Times, 17 mars 2006

## EUROPE MUST PLAY A BIGGER PART IN NATO

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Nato has not found a convincing role in the present security system. It was sidelined in recent international crises. After September 11 2001, the Bush administration in effect turned down the invocation by the allies of article five of the Nato treaty, which declares an attack on one member as an attack on all. During the run up to the Iraq war in 2002-03, Nato not only played no role in the preparation for the conflict, but was unable even to discuss effectively the opposing positions of its members, let alone bring them to a consensus. The action - such as it was - was at the United Nations Security Council. Nato was a sideshow.

Perhaps as a result, Nato is now attempting to do too much. George W. Bush, US president, recently suggested it take part in a humanitarian rescue operation in the Darfur region of Sudan. In Pakistan last December, Nato was called in to mitigate the consequences of the earthquake. However worthy these missions may be, they smack of desperation to find a function for an ill-defined body.

The question remains: what is Nato for? This is not to suggest that Nato should never help in emergencies, but this cannot be a substitute for its core function - to be an instrument at the service of its members' security. Similarly, Nato has used its post-cold war enlargements to try to save itself. This becomes perplexing when Ronald Asmus, former senior Clinton administration official who played a significant role in the last two Nato enlargements, now calls for Nato expansion to Israel and a future Palestinian state. Where will it stop? What definition of Nato's role lies behind such proposals? How would it be compatible with Nato's original function of self-defence? Should the present or a future US administration pursue this line, it would profoundly divide the west.

The reason Nato is groping for a role is that it is threatened by US ambivalence. America is reverting to its original suspicion of permanent alliances, cutting at Nato's core function. Geographically remote from threats and largely self-sufficient, the US prefers what it calls "coalitions" to a compulsory alliance such as Nato. In other words, the US reserves the right to use Nato, or not, as it sees fit. The rather inelegant formula "the mission defines the coalition" of Donald Rumsfeld, US defence secretary, recalls George Washington's 1796 exhortation that "it is our policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world", and Thomas Jefferson's 1801 warning against "entangling alliances". It would be wrong to think that from a US perspective the cold war Nato alliance was a normal state of affairs.

This return to transient coalitions would be unobjectionable if the US proposed transforming Nato into an enabler of such coalitions. But the permanence that is uncomfortable for America is, on the contrary, extolled as a necessity for Europeans. At the same time that it asserts its right to circumvent Nato when it chooses, America - with some European support - denies its partners the right to do the same. This is the reason for US opposition to the establishment of a European military headquarters, which would make it possible for the Europeans to intervene in international crises when the US will not get involved.

As a result, Nato has in recent years served to pick up the pieces after US interventions: this is the only logic for its recent forays into the Balkans, Afghanistan and now possibly Iraq. The only American rationale for a permanent Nato seems to be for when the US wants to be relieved of burdens (including self-inflicted ones). While convenient for the US, this is increasingly difficult for its allies, especially when they have doubts over the wisdom of a particular American intervention. This is a recipe for profound tensions within the west, endangering the rapprochement we have been witnessing for the past year.

Nato is ill-adapted to present requirements because its structure - inherited from the cold war - is problematic and unbalanced. The automatic "double-hatting" of Nato military commanders - always American ones - which allows them to act largely independently from the Nato authorities and report directly to Washington, is outdated and unsatisfactory. Nato is too dominated by the US to serve European purposes, and too multilateral for the most powerful country, which wants to act without shackles when it feels its security is at stake.

Nato needs to change: it is time to give the European Union (and not only its member countries) a voice within the organisation. This would oblige Europeans to face up squarely to their responsibilities in the security field, including financially. Militarily, Nato would also greatly benefit by giving added responsibilities, including important commands, to Europeans. This could be made conditional on their reaching specific and commonly defined capability levels, thereby encouraging them to spend more effectively on defence. Nato must be a useful instrument at the service of its members. It is a pity to waste its credibility in doubtful enterprises.

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