

NATO seeks significance in a post-Cold War climate

As NATO searches for a new identity, it appears to be more popular among its former Warsaw Pact adversaries than with its own membership. While the alliance has celebrated the end of East-West tensions, most officials acknowledge these provided an essential part of NATO's rationale.

However, NATO's new areas of interest in some cases have seemed to run across the responsibilities of other existing or planned institutions. NATO has sought to improve contacts with and guard against encroachment by the European Community (EC), the Western European Union (WEU) and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE).

To one senior diplomat, NATO may only survive as "last-ditch insurance, as the French want, or until other institutions can take over". Others already see a 'division of labour' between these institutions and note that NATO and the USA voluntarily gave way to the EC and the CSCE in trying to resolve the Yugoslav conflict. One US diplomat noted: "It struck Washington as a wonderful idea" to let the EC take the lead.

Concerning NATO's institutional rivalry with the CSCE, one diplomat assigned to NATO said the CSCE was "not a reliable institution" and that its dependence on consensus would probably paralyse its effectiveness.

Other NATO backers have also been highly critical of the EC's emergence in defence and security issues. Some have railed against the fact that the EC had a full role in the CSCE and the Washington conference on aid to the former USSR although it has no real foreign policy, while NATO had only observer status.

NATO itself has acknowledged that future security risks are more likely to emerge from economic, migratory, environmental or other civilian problems not appropriate to military action. This has on occasion led to diplomatic strains between the various advocates. The USA, UK and the Netherlands have been the prime NATO defenders and France, Spain and to a lesser degree Germany and Belgium have favoured the expansion of the EC or CSCE, while all want to maintain the alliance and the US presence in Europe.

Among NATO's most notable recent

NATO is at a crucial turning point that will decide its fate in a new Europe. Marc Rogers reports

activities has been the creation of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC), composed of NATO countries and all former Warsaw Pact states. This has led to spectacular sessions of ministers and military chiefs of staff from the former antagonists. One session was noteworthy for a message from Russian President Boris Yeltsin referring to his country's hope for eventual membership to NATO. Numerous other East European leaders, including Lech Walesa, Wacław Havel and Josef Entall, have also expressed their interest in membership.

However, NATO's reluctance to visualize the possibility of membership for East European countries or to provide security guarantees for these neighbours has been one of its most conspicuous shortcomings. Some Eastern officials have expressed deep disappointment in this response. The new NACC has been described as both a scheme to maintain the US presence in Europe and a way of stalling East Europeans without giving them much more than observer status.

NATO also suffered the indignity of having its offers to help co-ordinate

As the new SACEUR, Gen Shalikashvili inherits a command whose original rationale has disappeared



humanitarian aid to the former USSR ignored and had to dismantle a planning cell assigned to the purpose at NATO headquarters after a few weeks.

One of NATO's recent successes, according to one source, was to "rescue CFE from oblivion". Early this year, the new High-Level Working Group structure was useful in reaching agreement with the new Soviet republics on complying with the terms of the 1990 treaty cutting conventional forces in Europe and working out the details of cuts allocated to each republic without a difficult renegotiation. But even that has become bogged down with the reality of doing business with the new republics.

Militarily, its 'New Strategic Concept', issued at the Rome Summit late last year was described privately by one senior diplomat in Brussels as "an amorphous concept — more a slogan than a science". It abandoned the dated language of flexible response and nuclear deterrence in favour of general support for smaller, more flexible multi-national forces. A top official also said it would take several years to work out the details. The form of the much-discussed rapid action force is also proving difficult to work out. It may not be operational for years and even then may still be limited to the NATO area.

This restriction is what kept NATO largely limited to shoring up Turkey during the Gulf conflict, while the WEU, which has no forces, helped co-ordinate some European elements in the Gulf.

In addition, NATO is having to keep some of its major achievements from unravelling. Canada is to withdraw all its military personnel from Europe, a serious blow to the symbolic concept of maintaining a North American presence.

An example of this frustration was illustrated in the US Senate by the influential William Roth, who early this year called the NATO changes "cosmetic" and warned that "if the Alliance fails to act in this regard — and to date it has failed to act — then it is our duty as US legislators to point out that this emperor has no clothes, that, tragically, NATO has degenerated into an alliance in name only and, sadly, it is therefore no longer deserving of our support or membership." JDW

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