



Another name for NATO

By Willem Post



Miracles sometimes happen, such as when a local table wine from Europe turns into a superior vintage wine of world class. What to do if customers in our global supermarket suddenly realize that new ingredients become dominant in their product? Well, change the name and rules of engagement between the product's participants.

Once we had NATO 1, from a US perspective created as the military consequence of President Truman's political containment doctrine. With hindsight it is crystal clear that NATO's narrow scope in its very first year was already undermined by the shocking events in China, in those days a staunch ally of the Soviet Union. One year later the Korean War began. My home country, the Netherlands, participated in that war under the auspices of the United Nations and not NATO.

NATO, because of treaty limitations, was from the start not allowed to adapt to a changing world, although it was to prove successful in the 'European' Cold War. In short, NATO was handicapped. The Korean and Vietnam Wars were no sideshows away from the main European theatre. The United States, in particular, paid a heavy price for this fundamental misunderstanding. The wars were all part of a global struggle against communism.

Nowadays NATO 2 is in a much better position to confront security problems on a world scale. In the early 1990s NATO was an alliance of sixteen countries that had never conducted a military operation and had no partner relationships. But on 11 August 2003 NATO took over the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. NATO literally entered a new world. Now, in 2008, NATO has established partnerships with over 20 countries in Europe and Eurasia, seven in North Africa and the Middle East and four in the Persian Gulf. Global partners such as Australia and Japan are working with NATO in Afghanistan.

Almost every military, political and social problem has global implications. There is a real possibility that this age will become a 'Pacific century', featuring the rise of China as a great power in combination with a Russian resurgence. Almost everywhere, sleeping cells of terrorism, activated by radical civilians and paramilitary organizations, can suddenly become alive.

That means a metamorphosis for NATO in a world with different threats. NATO's mandate, structure and personality need to change accordingly. It will lead to an increasingly stratified alliance.

If, because of internal political circumstances and/or different military skills and traditions, allies prefer nation-building in, for example, northern Afghanistan instead of counterinsurgency in the violent south, so be it. At least for the moment. In our times, first and foremost, we need a flexible NATO. There is nothing wrong with a two-tier NATO. The first priority is commitment, which can also be translated into a higher financial contribution.

We live in a transition period, coming from a world dominated by a 'lonely superpower'. '9/11' was proof to the world that even this 'new Roman Empire' had its power limits. It is more than a turnaround in perception. Washington definitely needs NATO. To solve international security problems and to prevent future wars in a peaceful way, Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier urged NATO in Foreign Affairs (September/October 2006) to transform rapidly into 'global

NATO'. Why not expand NATO with staunch, reliable partners in Asia and South America?

For the moment Daalder's and Goldgeier's ideal is a bridge too far, but they are pointing in the right direction. For the near future, I cherish an essentially Euro-US alliance as a bedrock against the authoritarian Chinese and Russian actors on the global scene. Bound by the same democratic values, we can create a common and even better counterbalance against competitors and enemies. NATO's enhanced power is not unlimited because it can not overrule the veto-power of the United Nations Security Council.

We have to change NATO's 'entrance hall' and take the first measures to enlarge new NATO in a more responsible way. The 'Membership Action Plans' (MAP) are considered by aspiring non-NATO countries as virtual and quick guarantees of membership. We need more time to test their democratic and military qualifications. In the end we can present our allies, our partners, and indeed the rest of the world, with the best reasons why we want newcomers, to join our

military-political alliance. And yes, Mr. Medvedev, including Ukraine and Georgia. Especially Kiev got already signals from NATO in 2006 that it is on the right track. Popular support in these countries is still relatively low. An extensive, professional information-campaign with reasonable targets must be adopted in MAP's for aspiring countries. Support will rise as was the case with other new members like the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

With self-confidence and facing new realities, we can in the meantime change the name of NATO. The Atlantic Ocean will become more and more an ordinary lake, just like the other seas. As a gesture to the world, and hopefully also as a lightning-rod, it is more fitting to opt for 'Global Treaty Organization'. Let's toast to a better world!

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