
Defense Report

AUSA



After The Cold War — Reshaping NATO

Since the Cold War ended, any number of strategists have proposed some form of alternative military structure to shoulder the burden of guaranteeing the security of Europe. Among the organizations offered as a possible replacement for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is the nine-member Western European Union (WEU), a largely political and economic grouping of Western European nations.

Others who would seem to be posturing for the dominant role as provider of security to Europeans include the 12-member European Community (established to pursue the goal of economic and political union among its member-states), and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or CSCE (a 35-member human rights organization that has lately ventured into the political arena).

There is no question that the threat that led to the creation of NATO — a massive Soviet attack — has all but disappeared. But it is equally accepted that there still exists the threat of abuse of military power to settle political affairs within states, similar to that in Lithuania and in Yugoslavia. NATO is the only organization in existence that can provide Europeans with an acceptable degree of military protection. Further, NATO has the ability to exert a great degree of influence on security challenges beyond Europe.

But NATO is more than just a military alliance. In its 42 years, the North Atlantic Alliance has evolved into a community of Western democracies sharing common values and interests. That the Alliance has been able to adapt to these new times and to serve as a facilitator of change gives it a new and greater legitimacy each day.

Already, NATO's defense ministers have proposed reductions in forces and weapons that, while sufficient to meet current security threats, would contribute to the stabilization of the post-CFE balance of forces in the region.

Oddly, it is the spectacular success of NATO in facing down the Soviet-Warsaw Pact threat that has moved some observers to conclude that the Alliance has worked itself out of a job. That might be true some time in the future, but until the WEU or the EC or the CSCE are better prepared to substitute for NATO in security matters, this alliance of democracies will endure.