

Defense Report

from AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare



Consensus and NATO's New Strategic Doctrine

The year 1999 will be a significant one for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO. Not only will the Atlantic alliance celebrate its fiftieth anniversary as what many have called the most successful collective security alliance in history, but it will further adapt itself for continued service for decades to come. This will come through the adoption of a new strategic doctrine that will give direction to the alliance for operations in an era no longer focused simply on adapting to the end of the Cold War.

In the immediate period after 1989, NATO struggled to redefine itself, to be no longer simply an organization designed to counter the possibility of a massive Warsaw Pact attack on its members. The immediate period after the fall of the Berlin Wall was one of dynamic change. Nation after nation that had been satellites of the Soviet Union broke free and ended their membership in NATO's adversarial alliance, the Warsaw Pact. As they did so, they also demanded that the Soviet Union remove its forces from their territory, a process that accelerated when the Soviet Union itself collapsed in 1991, breaking up into Russia and numerous smaller independent republics, such as the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, as well as Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, and the nations of Central Asia, such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and others.

As this dramatic change occurred, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the nations of Central Europe, in particular, turned their focus toward the West, believing their natural role should be as members of Western Europe's organizations such as the European Union

(EU) and NATO. Both organizations found themselves faced with the challenges of adapting to these new forces of change and making themselves relevant for the future.

The European Union has begun to reach out to these nations, after having earlier enlarged to absorb the former neutral nations of Sweden, Finland and Austria. It is presently considering further enlargement to take in many of the Central European nations. But the complexity of adapting those nations' laws and economies to meet the EU's monetary, regulatory and social regulations is enormous, and it will probably be many years before there is an extensive inclusion of those nations. Further, the EU is moving to develop a common security and defense policy to work in concert with its common monetary and economic policies. While this new common security and defense policy will make it easier for the EU to coordinate its members' defense policy with that of NATO (of which most EU members are also members), it will make the absorption of new member nations even more difficult. This slow process of EU enlargement is one of the reasons why the Central European nations have pressed so hard to join NATO, which has fewer criteria for membership than the EU. NATO membership would give those nations a sense of belonging to one of the Western organizations, thus formalizing their freedom from Soviet-imposed "colonization."

As NATO has begun to enlarge and take in new members, the pressure to revise and adopt a new security strategy to replace the one adopted in 1991, and which

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DEFENSE REPORT is published by the Association of the United States Army's Institute of Land Warfare. The series is designed to provide information on topics that will stimulate professional discussion and further public understanding of the Army's role in national defense. Questions regarding the *DEFENSE REPORT* should be directed to: AUSA, Institute of Land Warfare (Attn: *DEFENSE REPORT*), 2425 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington VA 22201.

April 1999/DR 99-3

still refers to the Warsaw Pact to which the new NATO members once belonged, has increased.

In addition to these structural pressures, NATO realizes that it must adapt itself to the new realities of international security. In addition, it needs to codify many of the new forms of engagement that it has created to deal with the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, such as Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.

Certainly there is no massive external threat to NATO as existed during the Cold War. However, in the eyes of many this massive threat has been replaced by a series of other threats, such as ethnic conflict, terrorism, transnational crime, narcotic trafficking, and weapons of mass destruction deliverable by intermediate-range missiles. In a sense, these new threats are as dangerous to NATO member nations' security as the old threats of the Cold War. Also, since the threats are international in scope, NATO needs to adopt a strategy that allows it to operate wherever it needs to, regardless of whether threats to its security are within or without the physical boundaries of the member nations.

In order to meet these new threats, NATO not only needs to have a strategy to manage them, but also must adapt itself to have forces capable of rapidly reacting to them, no matter where they are. During the cold War, most NATO member nations structured their forces for static defense of their territory against an enormous Warsaw Pact conventional and heavily armored attack, centered along the then border dividing East and West Germany. These static defense forces, incapable of rapid deployment, are being replaced with lighter and more mobile forces, albeit at a slow pace, as most NATO member nations are reluctant to increase their defense budgets when their citizens are clamoring for "peace dividends" after years of Cold War spending.

NATO has also considerably streamlined its command structure since 1991, again to reflect the realities of the new security environment in which it is now operating. This process was not simple, as the concept of national equities is strong in NATO and each nation still wants to have its appropriate level of representation in the command structure. The inclusion of new members will also affect the form of the new command structure that NATO will take into the new century.

NATO operates on the concept of consensus decisionmaking. It also uses its international staff and various committees to develop positions. Thus, the

development of a new strategic doctrine will reflect the views of all the member nations of the alliance. Even though the United States, the dominant leader of NATO, will have the most influence on the eventual language of the document, it cannot exclusively write it, and the final wording will reflect the agreed direction of all member nations. It is for this reason that the proposed draft document to be approved by the national leaders during the April 1999 summit may not be as imaginative as some would like. Still, it will be a document that all the nations can support.

Over the past several months, NATO's staff and the national delegations have devoted considerable effort toward developing a strategy for the alliance that will be relevant for at least a decade to allow the members to create and equip the proper force structure to implement it. As they have worked in secret, trial public balloons have been floated about what various nations would like to see included in the strategy. While most are not controversial, some have been, such as a German suggestion to modify the alliance's refusal to publicly adopt a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons as a part of its defensive concepts. The immediate unfavorable reaction of many of the other nations, to include the United States, makes it more than likely that this suggestion will not be adopted. Nevertheless, this is an example of why NATO has existed for so long: the concept of democratic nations, regardless of size, developing concepts and making decisions through consensus, and without the process being decided by one or more of the larger nations.

In sum, the new strategic concept to be approved and announced by NATO at its Washington summit will reflect the new realities of European security, with a heavy emphasis on having mobile forces capable of rapidly reacting to threats to the alliance's security regardless of where they occur, but in ways that can be supported by the members and be in accordance with their concepts on adhering to international law. It will also reflect the alliance's desire to further engage the new democracies and to cooperate with Russia and Ukraine on issues that threaten stability and security in Europe. The new alliance strategy may not fully satisfy all members, but it will be one they can live with and support. It will likely require some modification over time as new strategic realities arise, but it will give guidance to NATO's commanders and staffs. With the strategy in place, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will continue on its historic course as the most successful military alliance in history.