

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies

Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität Bonn



Marten van Heuven

Where will NATO be ten years from now?

Discussion Paper

C 67
2000

Marten van Heuven is a Senior Consultant at RAND, a Senior Associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and a Distinguished Lecturer at the State Department's National Foreign Affairs Training Center. A graduate of Yale, he holds an LL.B. and a Master's Degree from Columbia University. He was a Mid-Career Fellow at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School. From 1985-1987 he served as a Director of the Office of Western European Affairs at the Department of State and from 1987-1991 he was a National Intelligence Officer for Europe and a member of the National Intelligence Council. In 1995 he served as a Senior Advisor on the U.S. Delegation to the UN General Assembly. He is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London), the American Council on Germany (New York), and a Board member of the Atlantic Council of the United States.

Marten van Heuven

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

1. Introduction

This might seem like an innocent question, hardly worth much attention in the midst of NATO's fiftieth birthday celebrations. It implies that NATO will be around a decade hence. It suggests that, like people, NATO will grow naturally more mature and, hopefully, more respected. It assumes that prediction is possible. We should know better. So let us look again.¹

NATO is a bundle of commitments, efforts and procedures agreed upon by a growing number of countries over the past half century to safeguard their vital interests. It now faces a world marked by accelerating change, in which everyone is connected but nobody is in charge.² Its utility as a tool to serve the security interests of its members—demonstrated with resounding success during the Cold War—is not a given in the current age of transition and globalization. So the title question is serious. It deserves a serious answer. This answer will not be predictive.³ No one can tell where NATO will be ten years from now. However, it is possible to build an estimative assessment. Such an assessment can examine key variables and identify so-called drivers. This approach can lead to an appreciation of the factors that

1 The author gratefully acknowledges the comments of Ambassador Robert Hunter, recently United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council, and of Samuel F. Wells, Associate Director of the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC.

2 The phrase is Thomas L. Friedman's, in "Left Behind as the Globalization Train Speeds Up," *International Herald Tribune*, February 3, 1999, p. 6.

will influence the future of NATO, key events that may determine its course and, hopefully, policy choices on the road ahead.

This paper will not, however, go into the question whether one possible scenario is more—or less—likely than another. To be sure, the official world of estimative intelligence usually does make such an effort.⁴ In this paper, however, there is neither the time nor the space to apply probability analysis to the many issues making up this complex subject.

2. Variables

One key variable is membership in NATO. The next decade is likely to see further growth, so that by 2010, NATO membership will have grown beyond nineteen. Slovenia and possibly Romania might be members. So could Austria, if it overcomes its preoccupation with neutrality. Bulgaria is a possible wild card. More speculatively yet, there might be room for the Baltics, though under arrangements involving less than full membership and enjoying Russian acquiescence if not support. A growing NATO would be demonstratively open to more members. Such a NATO would be viewed by members and nonmembers alike as the principal organization for European security. Partnership for Peace would be a precursor for potential new members. Such an evolution would leave plenty of scope for a key American role in European security.

There are other scenarios. One is that by 2010, NATO may have no more members than it did at the end of 1999. The contrast between the rhetoric of an open door and the reality of frozen membership would keep alive—if not exacerbate—the current picture of insiders and outsiders and, worse, leave the impression of a new division. This division would not be bridged

3 Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein are variously credited with the comment that prediction is difficult, especially about the future.

4 In recent years, the National Intelligence Council has revived the practice of assigning probabilities, and doing so by percentages rather than the use of words such as “unlikely,” “possible,” “even,” and “probable.” See Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Peering into the Future,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1994, p. 82.

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

by Partnership for Peace, which could come to be seen as a second-level security tier, or even a no-man's-land. Another scenario is that this division *could* be bridged by Partnership for Peace if East Central European countries saw that as what they *really* need.

Furthermore, the enlargement process of the European Union (EU) might have gathered steam, with a larger EU and more effective security and defense cooperation among the European members of NATO. Thus, by 2010 there could be a stronger European Pillar of NATO, posing the issue for the United States of how best to deal with this evolution. Alternatively, European countries could be handling security issues more actively outside the NATO process, facing the United States with the difficult issue of how and how much to engage, on which issues, and with whom. However, regardless of progress by EU countries toward their goal of a Common Foreign and Security Policy and a European Security and Defense Identity, the EU in 2010 is not likely to have taken the place of NATO as the most relevant and effective security organization in Europe.

An EU that is more effective in security affairs in 2010 might allow Washington to accommodate itself to—and over time even come to like—the more even distribution of tasks and responsibilities it has long called for. But it may be too much to expect any substantial readjustment of the respective American and European roles within NATO without friction. The United States will not find it easy to change its ways—if not the view of its proper role—and a greater European role could accentuate differences among the European NATO members.

Another variable is tasks. Historically, NATO has moved from defense to deterrence, then detonate, and now cooperation. NATO tasks in 2010 may contain elements of all of these. One scenario is NATO involved in peacekeeping operations in its vicinity (i.e., out-of-area). Another is heavy NATO peace enforcement in the Balkans. Yet another would have NATO engaged in security-enhancing activities in and beyond the periphery of Europe, perhaps simultaneously in more than one geographic area. A more serious scenario would have NATO coping with an Article V threat against one or more members, or perhaps a Partner for Peace country scheduled to

become a member. A cataclysmic scenario would have NATO defend against an attack by weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Finally, any comprehensive analysis must make room for a scenario in which NATO simply does not act.

The NATO strategy of cooperation raises the important issue of relations with Russia. Hopes early in the nineties for a determined turn from Soviet communism to parliamentary democracy and a free market economy have been overtaken by a confusing reality and uncertain prospects.⁵ Amidst the uncertainty about Russia's direction there are few moorings for a reliable estimate. By 2010, Russia could have moved in many directions, even if not precisely those scripted by *The Economist*. A vast country with a large population, and subject to internal stress, Russia's future will be shaped by many factors, some of which may not be discernible today. Yet some estimative judgments may be warranted.

First, Russia's evolution will be shaped by Russians from within. Not that external factors—interface with the West and with the rest of the world—won't count. A purposeful Western policy of cooperation will remain important to help Russia reform and to meet the sensitive issue of Russia's perception of itself as a world power. But Western cooperation will be validated only to the degree reform takes hold from within Russia. Second, Russia's need for reform will create some form of dependency on the West, creating mutual incentives for cooperation. Third, Russia will be mindful of its large Eastern neighbor, and China's aspirations. This is another possible incentive for cooperation with the West.⁶

5 *The Economist* sketched what it called “Four faces of a Primakovian Russia,” along two axes, from competent to incompetent, and from nice to nasty. The optimistic view saw Russia as Poland (on the whole, competent and nice). Three pessimistic views, however, likened a future Russia variously to Ukraine (nice but incompetent), China (competent but nasty), or Congo (nasty and incompetent). *The Economist*, March 13, 1999, p. 59.

6 According to Brzezinsky, however, this possibility must be regarded with caution. “Moreover, Russia has still to make its fundamental geostrategic choice regarding its relationship with America. Is it a friend or foe? It may well feel that it has major options on the Eurasian continent in that regard. Much depends on how its internal

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

There is one other factor. By 2010, Russia may have regained its military strength. This possibility reinforces the advisability of a Western policy of cooperation now. The institutional context of this cooperation may be principally in advanced forms of today's institutions: the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and—beyond NATO—the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations Security Council. Chances are, however, that the next decade will see the creation of yet other institutional arrangements to meet the needs of the moment. So the institutional context may change. The objective of cooperation will not. Whatever the range of NATO tasks by 2010, their focus will be on the spectre of new threats. Some of these threats are already on the horizon. They are the product of technical innovation and possible destructive behavior, terrorism in particular. The NATO of 2010 will, in addition, be deep into issues of infrastructure defense on land, in the atmosphere, and in space. Missile defense could be prominent on NATO's agenda.

NATO involvement and potential action in 2010 will be shaped by the solidarity of NATO members in the face of common challenges. During the Cold War, the Soviet threat produced basic cohesion among the allies under American leadership. By 2010, however, a direct relationship between threat and cohesion may no longer exist. For example, use of WMD against a NATO member might well trigger a divisive debate on the nature of the response, with adverse consequences for NATO cohesion. When German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer recently suggested that NATO consider adopting a no-first-use policy, the alliance members kept a stiff upper lip. But this issue is not off the table, and the episode suggests how divisive it can still be.

A third variable is organization and leadership. As to organization, the differences between 2010 and today will be not so much in the size of the NATO family as in the way it operates. NATO members and Partners for

politics evolve and especially on whether Russia becomes a European democracy or a Eurasian empire again.” Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 1997, p. 44.

Peace today comprise forty-three countries. This total will not be much different in 2010. But new patterns of interaction will have evolved. One possible pattern would show a clear division of commitments and practices between members on the one hand and Partners for Peace on the other. Members would caucus and plan, as now, among themselves—within the integrated military command—about how to maintain stability and security in Europe. Nonmembers would be part of a more extended pattern of discussion and consultation on a selection of Partnership for Peace issues outside the context of the obligations of Articles IV and V of the Washington Treaty. A more likely pattern would reflect a blurring line between members, members-to-be, and Partners for Peace. In such a scenario, distinctions as to commitments among members and with respect to nonmembers would be gradual, not sharp.⁷ Also, in this scenario most if not all European countries would play a part in a pattern of security cooperation in parallel with cooperation in other areas in the context of a widening European Union.

Each pattern of interdependence raises the issue of leadership. In Europe, one country could emerge as a natural leader. The candidate for such a role is Germany. Germany's many assets would give weight to such a role—its size, location, economic strength, and its military capacity. However, by 2010 Germany may not have fulfilled the promise of internal cohesion implied by unification. Also, the toll of coalition politics may be an obstacle to effective leadership. Furthermore, any perceived strong German role in Europe is likely to trigger a common reaction from the rest of Europe. France could play such a role only when its European partners

7 On March 24, 1999, in the middle of the Kosovo crisis, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana wrote to the Prime Ministers of Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia, and the President of Macedonia, to reiterate NATO's support for the territorial integrity of their countries, to emphasize that any Yugoslav threat to the security of these countries would be unacceptable, and to underscore that the Alliance would view any attack on them with the utmost seriousness. In contrast to the attention given on both sides of the Atlantic to the issue whether NATO should extend its commitments by taking in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as new members, this expression of NATO commitments received virtually no public notice.

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

became convinced that France was pursuing European rather than national French objectives. European leadership in 2010 will therefore more likely emerge from the interaction of the larger countries. The effectiveness of smaller countries will depend on their ability to join efforts.

The American interest in a stable, democratic, and prosperous Europe will in 2010 be the foundation of a willingness to continue to play a leadership role in maintaining European security. NATO will be the instrument of choice. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any other organization, present or future, that could command the loyalty and US domestic political support as does NATO. Most likely, by 2010 the United States will still be working its way through the dilemma how to share a leadership role in NATO with European allies who carry more responsibility.⁸ Budgetary constraints and the press of global responsibilities will, however, nudge the United States in this direction. Much will depend on the degree of American confidence in the ability of the "European Pillar" to pursue policies in NATO that are seen as broad lying support—and not in derogation—of American interests.

Finally, a key variable will be the resources that European NATO members will be committing to NATO in 2010. The picture today shows American forces superior to those of its NATO allies. This situation will not change much in a decade, though European leaders understand the correlation between military capability and the ability to influence regional if not global affairs.⁹ By 2010, force disparities will continue to make an American role in European security—and in NATO—significant if not indispensable.

8 This is the theme in David C. Gompert and F. Stephen Larrabee (eds.), *America and Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 1997. For a speculative essay on what a new division of labor along these lines would look like, see Marten van Heuven and Gregory F. Treverton, *Europe and America: How Will the U.S. Adjust to the New Partnership*, RAND, IP-171, 1998. Congressional disinclination except in crisis situations to focus on Europe, if it persists, remains an important element in this mix.

9 For the argument that Europe should create the military strength to create a partnership of equals, see James A. Thomson, "A European Defense Identity Would Bolster NATO," *International Herald Tribune*, February 19, 1999, pp. 6-20.

3. Drivers

Five sets of issues will drive the condition of NATO in 2010. First, the threats. Some may be old-fashioned, affecting or directed at the territorial integrity of members of the NATO family, on NATO's eastern border and in Turkey. NATO's challenge will be not so much the capacity to meet these threats as the will to do so. Other threats will be new, asymmetric, directed at populations and infrastructure, and possibly of indeterminate origin: Kosovo presents a variant of these new threats. NATO is using force against a European country in an effort to deal with large-scale human rights violations that are regarded by the Alliance as so serious as to constitute a threat against both the interests and the values of the NATO community. These new threats will occupy a large part of the NATO agenda and will pose the challenge of fashioning effective strategies. Still other threats will come from beyond the NATO periphery, such as from instability in the Gulf and the Maghreb, forcing the out-of-area issue, and raising the question for the United States of where European roles and responsibilities give way to American engagement with global issues beyond the comfort of NATO alliance arrangements.

Second, the evolution of Russia. In its current transition, Russia has but limited ability to affect global events. Furthermore, an unstable Russia would make for an unstable Europe. However, a Russia that is focused forward on reform rather than backward on lost empire, and that cooperates with NATO, will be an indispensable and positive factor in European security. This should be the continuing objective of NATO policy.

Third, the state of the European Pillar in NATO. This will be shaped by the way European members of NATO manage the issue of European stability and cope with the range of threats in and on the periphery of Europe. It will depend also on the way the European members of NATO handle the leadership issue, and in particular what role Germany will play and whether this role will be accepted by the other components of the pillar.

Fourth, the American commitment to NATO. It will be present, but Washington will have to spread its resources to fulfill a global role in the Middle East, the Gulf, the Pacific, and in Latin America. America will

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

want a stable and strong Europe. By 2010 it may be more accustomed than it is now to sharing decision making.¹⁰

Fifth, the state of the global economy. Security cooperation is difficult, even in good times. Economic stagnation, however, would decidedly create an unfavorable climate for security cooperation. Serious economic imbalances would trigger beggar-thy-neighbor policies that would impede effective defense cooperation and security policies in general.

Last, cataclysmic events which, were they to occur, would fundamentally change the outlook for European security and for NATO. The use of nuclear weapons near or against Europe would have severe but incalculable effects. An energy crisis could drive a wedge between Europe and the United States. A health disaster caused by inadvertent or intentional environmental pollution would have unpredictable but serious effects on the cohesion of the alliance.

4. Interests

In a period of profound change it is crucial to be clear about interests. The American debate following the end of the Cold War has been but sporadic. Where it has not led into blind alleys,¹¹ it has produced meager results. A recent Council on Foreign Relations effort could agree unanimously only on physical defense of United States territory as an American vital interest.¹² The Commission on America's National Interests, however, booked some success. With respect to Europe, it agreed on three vital interests: That there be no new hegemonic threat to Europe, that the

10 On this issue, see *America and Europe*.

11 Administration terms of "democratic engagement" and "new world order" have failed to leave permanent marks. So have academic efforts, such as the term "epoch of mutualism." See Hugh DeSantis, *Beyond Progress*, 1996.

12 Council on Foreign Relations Project on U.S. National Interests After the Cold War, 1994-1995.

European allies survive as free and prosperous states, and that NATO continue as a powerful political-military alliance.¹³

The discussion in Europe has also been less than satisfactory, focusing on "architecture" and employment policies. In France, the discussion has zeroed in on the objective of countering perceived American hegemony. The notion of a hegemonic America resonates oddly with anyone familiar with the effort to get American domestic political support for a barely adequate funding level for the conduct of foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. American political leaders talk a lot about leadership, but Washington is profoundly aware of the need for allies and draws on long and mature experience with the process of alliance consultations.

The European Commission has also been far from clear. Its rhetoric has been a jumble of interests and principles, laced with references to threats and power, wrapped around the notion that Europe must become more active in external relations in response to "growing calls" from its citizens for greater unity.¹⁴ This is an odd statement coming from an organization in which the drive for unity has been top down rather than bottom up. The flabbiness of the discussion about interests on both sides of the Atlantic notwithstanding, there are several interests that could be served by NATO in 2010. One surely is the incorporation of East Central European countries into European political, security, economic, and social structures. Without some encompassing framework of unity, there will not be order in Europe. Another is to provide a framework for the German Question. A post-Cold War united and sovereign Germany will fit better into a European order that features a continuing, albeit reduced, American presence within the

13 On a global scale, what the Commission called "Blue Chips" are five: (1) Prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attacks on the United States, (2) Prevent the emergence of a hostile hegemon in Europe or Asia, (3) Prevent the emergence of a hostile major power on U.S. borders or in control of the seas, (4) Prevent the catastrophic collapse of major global systems: trade, financial markets, supplies of energy, and environmental, and (5) Ensure the survival of U.S. allies. Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, July 1996.

14 *Agenda 2000*, DOC/97/6, 28, July 15, 1997, p. 28.

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

framework of a common security structure. A third interest is a more inclusive, cohesive, and capable European Union. In this respect, the NATO interest is not in the grand schemes of an "ever closer Union" but in the more urgent business of bringing the countries of East Central Europe into this structure of European order.¹⁵ This should be the priority, not the perfection of relationships among the current members of the European Union, important as that task may be.

5. Values

Interests, to paraphrase Lord Palmerston, tend to remain more or less the same. Interests of the members of NATO will continue to differ in 2010 as they do today. But throughout the history of NATO there has been a commonality of values. It is these factors that make NATO attractive to members and nonmembers alike.¹⁶ It is a common interest of all members of the alliance—present and future—to promote those core values of freedom, common heritage and civilization, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, and peace. What will hold NATO together in 2010 is the inherent logic of European Atlantic cooperation based on these values.

6. Use of Force

Even with basic agreement on values, the issue of the use of force by NATO will be as difficult in 2010 as it is now. During the Cold War, deterrence was based on political unity, military readiness, and an American nuclear guarantee. NATO's policy was to respond to any territorial threat in a manner and place of its own choosing. The American

15 "The main danger to the future of Europe lies in the post-communist East, and that should be Europe's priority." Robert L. Hutchings, "Rediscovering the National Interest in American Foreign Policy," Working Paper, The Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., March 1996, p. 7.

16 See also the recommendations in "NATO in the 21st Century," *North Atlantic Assembly* GEN(98)3, rev. 1, October 1998.

commitment was firm, and regarded as such. The rhetorical question whether the United States would place its cities at risk to defend Germany remained theoretical. That policy worked.

In 2010, the commitments of the NATO members will be based on the same provisions of the Washington Treaty. The circumstances in which these provisions operate, however, will be entirely different. A larger NATO will find it harder to reach consensus. Moreover, even an armed threat or attack against a NATO member, while sure to set off intensive diplomatic activity, will not necessarily lead to a military response. It could even lead—paradoxically—to a review of what triggered the threat or attack in the first place.¹⁷ In any event, a decision to use military force will be highly situation dependent. Different interests among NATO allies could produce a military response involving some but not all members of the Alliance, perhaps using the concept of Combined Joint Task Forces, or perhaps simply a coalition of the willing. These considerations do not invalidate the essence of the Washington Treaty. They do, however, change the nature of deterrence, just as the strategy of deterrence is affected by the prospect that some of the threats NATO may face in 2010—such as cyber threats—may arise in circumstances in which the identity of the threatener is unclear. A key ingredient of deterrence under these new circumstances will be leadership of the Alliance and Alliance cohesion.¹⁸

If deterrence fails, the Alliance will face the issue of how to respond effectively. There will be a range of eventualities. One is a threat or an armed attack against a member state. Another is a threat or armed attack

17 This is what happened in 1991. At that time, the Turkish government, citing perceived territorial threats on its eastern frontier, requested NATO assistance in the form of the air element of the ACE Mobile Force. Ultimately, NATO aircraft did go to Turkey, but not until the German Bundestag had discussed whether Turkey, by its own actions, had brought the threat upon itself. The argument was made that had this been the case, the German government would not have agreed to the Turkish request. NATO would not have been able to respond.

18 In Kosovo, the NATO policy of deterrence, while expected to work, did not. NATO found itself using force, something it had wanted to avoid. NATO will have to reassess deterrence, in particular in contexts of domestic or regional strife in which nuclear weapons are clearly not a factor.

Where will NATO be ten years from now ?

against a prospective member. There is also the possibility of a threat or armed attack against a Partner for Peace. Articles 4 and 5 of the Washington Treaty commit members only with respect to other members.¹⁹ However, whether a threatened European country is a member of NATO, a prospective member, or a Partner for Peace will not, as such, make a decisive difference how the Alliance will respond in 2010. The response will be tailored instead by a host of circumstances, including the identity (if known) of the attacker, the nature of the threat, the ability to counter it on time and in place, and the political/economic/strategic equities at stake.

7. Conclusion

In 2010 the Alliance may be faced, as it already has, with a situation in which European peace, security, and stability are at risk because of events in its neighborhood beyond the territory of its members and Partners for Peace, such as in the Balkans. Such a contingency could raise the issues whether to employ military force, to what ends, how, with what rules of engagement, and for what period. No amount of scenario writing ahead of time will adequately equip the NATO of 2010 with ready-made prescrip-

19 Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides: "The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened." Article 5 states, in part: "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic Area." It should be noted, moreover, that when NATO established Partnership for Peace, it included in its invitation a provision to the effect that NATO would consult with any active participant in the partnership if that partner perceives a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security. Thus, as early as 1994, NATO created a formal obligation to consult with partners, with an implied indication that such consultation could trigger NATO action—diplomatic, political, economic, or perhaps even military—in case of a threat to the vital interests of a partner.

tions. NATO policies will need to be calibrated afresh each time. Whatever crises NATO may face in 2010, there will be no escape from the need for a hard strategic assessment, and for political decisions whether, and if so how, NATO should act, including with respect to the issue of use of force.

Thus, in 2010, as now, the Alliance will depend on the familiar elements of clarity of purpose, leadership, determination, readiness, and cohesion.

ISSN 1435-3288

ISBN 3-933307-67-8



Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Walter-Flex-Straße 3
D-53113 Bonn
Germany

Tel.: +49-228-73-1880
Fax: +49-228-73-1788
<http://www.zei.de>