

### **Smart Defense in Times of Austerity**

NATO has progressively moved beyond its original purpose, to a point where it is virtually unrecognizable from the alliance that in the words of Lord Hastings Ismay, NATO's first chief, once aimed to "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." The times have changed and the contradictory lessons learned from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the tumultuous events that unfolded two years ago in the Arab world, the recent bombings in Boston and present situation in Syria are only a few examples to demonstrate just how much more complex, unpredictable, and multipolar the global environment has become. As Stephane Abrial, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in 2012 remarkably noted, modern NATO faces a tough challenge to "prepare for the unexpected." Despite changing economic and historical context, NATO's original purpose – to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means – has remained constant through the decades.

Nevertheless, given the relatively peaceful era that started in Europe with the end of Cold War, defense and security are very often not the first things that come to our mind when we think about today's most pressing issues. In 2008, Europe and the whole world was hit by economic downturn; times in the wake of occurrence that became known as "the worst crisis since the Great Depression" continue to be challenging. Governments are applying budgetary restrictions to tackle this serious recession, and too often budget deficits come first and defense second (NATO 2013; Rasmussen 2011). As NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow recently maintained, the economic situation will test NATO members states' solidarity and it may well extend the capability gaps that already have been seen between many Allies – referring to those who are "able to hold the line of defense spending, and those who feel obliged to make further defense cuts" (2013).

It has become apparent that in a time of financial difficulties, it is more important than ever to make the best use of the resources and continue to adapt NATO's forces and structure for today's challenges and develop capacity to tackle tomorrow's threats (Huso, Escorcía 2012). At the Munich Security Conference in 2011, NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, presented a new approach to defense spending in a time of economic constraint. Rasmussen described Smart Defense as a method which refers to "ensuring greater security, for less money, by working together with more flexibility" (Rasmussen 2011). NATO webpage introduces Smart Defense as an idea of "renewed culture of cooperation" that encourages Allies to cooperate and advocates for transparent, cooperative and cost-effective approach to meet essential capability

requirements. According to Rasmussen's idea, for the purposes of smart defense, the Alliance nations must give priority to those capabilities which NATO needs most, specialize in what they do best, and look for multinational solutions to shared problems (NATO 2013).

Furthermore, as Rasmussen effectively notes, pooling resources and competences is not enough if "we do not put our money where the real priorities are." In his 2011 speech in Munich he identified several of these, including cyber defense, the fight against terrorism and piracy, developing a network and slimming down bureaucracy. Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero, the Deputy General of NATO, added another element to this idea, arguing that in a world where security is increasingly globalized, "NATO cannot successfully deliver stability and peace for its members, *alone*." Many experts and academics have advocated for moving towards 'global NATO' and highlighted the importance of broadening and deepening the network of NATO's partnership policy. Many of modern problems do not respect national borders and when it comes to tackling common challenges such as terrorism, proliferation, cyber-crime and piracy, there is a lot NATO can achieve by working together with its strategic partners (Bisogniero 2011).

Another dimension of the Smart Defense initiative entails rebalancing defense spending between European nations and the U.S. The North Atlantic Treaty originally presented the direct commitment by the U.S. to come to Europe's defense and has been a substantial part of the Alliance, however, few regard the situation where the U.S. accounts for nearly 73 percent of total NATO defense spending suitable and sustainable ("NATO drowning..." 2013). As Rasmussen argues, Europe simply cannot afford to get out of the security business, and it has to revitalize its role as the United States' prime security partner (2011). After all, NATO's foundation is collective defense and not all nations can afford or need all capabilities, but acknowledgement of NATO's indispensability and sustained commitment of each member state to follow through on their commitments is essential. NATO's success is not only "a matter of manpower or financial allocation, but rather the contribution that individual members can give in specific areas of expertise – Smart Defense can be seen as an opportunity for smaller countries to increase participation in NATO's operations and as an opportunity for them to partake more on the international stage (Roccia 2013).

During its 64 years in operation NATO has expanded from six to twenty-eight member states, built remarkable experience and know-how, faced tremendous challenges and experienced thriving successes. "When times are tough, we need each other more than ever. We all have a stake in keeping each other strong," was the key message of NATO's Secretary General Anders

Fogh Rasmussen in his recent speech. Indeed, despite tremendously changed environment, opportunities, risks, and threats, NATO Alliance has lost none of its relevance. Nonetheless, NATO will have to adapt, transform, and reinvent itself – just as it has done successfully many times in past. In the globalized world countless modern problems do not respect national borders and solutions to complex issues presuppose complex and innovative approach, but first and foremost, sustained commitment to problem solving and belief in our values and principles not only from politicians, but everyone across the board.

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