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# PAPER SERIES

## SUMMARY

Author argues that there don't have to be a kind of choice between applying Article 5 and out-of-area operations, because they go hand in hand. Today, without a single overriding threat, differences in geography and history will push allies towards different conclusions about risks to their territory. Doubts over NATO's commitment to defend Central Europe drain support in the region for ISAF. Reassurance measures can arrest the trend. The alliance needs to find the resources to guarantee a successful reinforcement in case of a crisis; mutual defence is the NATO's core purpose. New allies are anxious because, in their mind, NATO has ceased to function as crisis manager in Europe. But NATO should also create a mechanism that would monitor crises on NATO's borders – not just those with Russia but all borders. Finally, the alliance needs to be able to address the needs of both types of missions at the same time. The key to its continued validity lies in being able to convincingly address multiple challenges at the same time.

## THE FALSE CHOICE BETWEEN 'HOME' AND 'AWAY' MISSIONS

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NATO will adopt a new Strategic Concept in November 2010. Among other things, the document will assign priority to NATO's different missions, and guide what sort of forces NATO countries are to build for the next 5-10 years. Much is at stake – especially because money is tight – so the allies have launched a lively debate about the concept's recommendations. The most controversial discussion to date has revolved around the right balance between 'away' missions, such as the one in Afghanistan, and 'home' operations; those meant to defend allies against an attack on their own territory. NATO countries have divided into roughly three camps, who have been accusing each other of exaggerating their 'preferred' threat and of squandering NATO's time and resources on unnecessary armaments.

nature and can be implemented with little impact on the mission in Afghanistan.

### **Different yes, but divided?**

NATO countries have never faced such a diverse variety of threats and threat assessments as they do today. This is not to say that the 'old' NATO of the Cold War was without disagreements: Turkey and Greece, for example, always seemed more worried about each other than about the Soviet Union. But broadly speaking, for the first fifty years of its existence, NATO served to defeat one enemy: the USSR. By 2010, NATO has become an alliance of multiple threats and interests, which sometimes inflict competing demands on money and attention from NATO's headquarters and command structure.

This paper will argue that the above debate is both necessary and superfluous: necessary because it helps NATO countries to reconcile differences in what they expect from the alliance, and superfluous, because the allies already have, by and large, the right hardware for both kinds of operations. NATO does need to improve its ability to manage crises in Europe. But the necessary measures are largely non-military in

The debate on home and away missions is a good example. At its heart, this debate is about Russia. One group of NATO countries, mostly the new member-states along with Norway, worries that Russia may stumble into a conflict with one or more allies. They want NATO to pay more attention to this possibility, and to take some political and military measures to deter Russia. The second group – US, Canada, UK and others – have



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a tactical disagreement with the first. They share some of the new allies' worries about Russia but their main concern is 'away', in Afghanistan. Their priority is to make sure that if NATO puts in place preparations for a conflict in Europe, it does so in a way that does not detract money and attention from Afghanistan. The third group of allies, led by Germany with Greece, Spain, Italy and France largely agreeing, does not think Russia a threat. Their disagreement with the first group is fundamental: they think that instead of planning defence against Russia, NATO should be engaging Moscow.

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Divisions of this depth and importance will be increasingly common in the future: without a single overriding threat, differences in geography and history will push allies towards different conclusions about risks to their territory. The key to making this new NATO work is for allies to learn to agree and stick to a common strategy even as they disagree on the priority of threats. To put it differently: the new measure of allied solidarity is not whether the Balts are prepared to risk life for a 'home' conflict involving Russia, or whether the Americans are investing the necessary resources into an 'away' war in Afghanistan but the other way around: the strength of this new NATO will be measured by how willing the Central Europeans are to fight in Afghanistan, and by how ready the US and Western European countries are to address the Central and Northern Europe's concerns about Russia.

This requires that the different groups of allies understand the other sides' point of view and the current and historical reasons that have shaped it. The debate on home and away missions, though divisive, has been helpful in this regard. The first group has made a case for NATO to pay more attention to Russia. The alliance has responded by restarting 'contingency' planning for the Baltic states, and renewing air patrols over the region until 2014. Individual countries have gone further: US forces held military exercises with the Baltic states in 2010. Even though Washington thinks Afghanistan should be NATO's top priority, it has recognised that being an ally in this more heterogeneous NATO occasionally means doing things for others – as the Baltic states did, when they sent troops to Afghanistan.

The 'home v away' debate continues. The Poles and the Baltic countries want NATO to take additional steps to hone its physical defences against a home conflict (more on this below). But they are finding it difficult to build consensus for their plans, and this feeds doubt whether NATO takes seriously its obligation to defend the new member-states. The opposition to new members comes largely from those countries that disagree that Russia is a threat, and it will persist until the allies agree a new strategy on Russia.

But this is where the 'home v away' debate has again been useful. A new strategy appears to be emerging. The 12-member Group of Experts, who the NATO secretary-general asked to reflect on the Strategic Concept, has suggested a dual-track approach of engagement and reassurance. “Because Russia's future policies towards NATO remain difficult to predict”, the experts conclude, “the allies must pursue the goal of cooperation while also guarding against the possibility that Russia could decide to move in a more adversarial direction.” In practical terms, the experts recommend that NATO intensifies cooperation with Russia by, among other things, inviting it to take part in NATO's missile defence programme. But they have also called on NATO to take additional military and political steps to reassure allies that NATO is not ignoring the possibility of a confrontation with Russia. The US exercises are one example of such 'reassurance' measures.

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The allies gave the experts' study a mixed response. But the dual track approach, based as it is on hundreds of discussions in Russia, Western Europe and the US, offers the best template for a badly needed common NATO policy on Russia. It points the way to reconciling the different views on Russia in NATO, and to easing the new members' worries about NATO's commitment to their defence. A Russia strategy that contains reassurance measures could also boost the Central Europeans' support for Afghanistan. Allies need to feel safe at home if they are to deploy their best forces abroad. And today, doubts over NATO's commitment to defend Central Europe drain support in the region for ISAF. Reassurance measures can arrest the trend.

### What hardware for 'home' missions?

There is another, military, dimension to the debate on home and away missions. It revolves around whether the sort of troops and equipment that NATO asks the allies to buy for Afghanistan is also useful and relevant for home missions in Europe. This would be a sensitive question even in normal times, for it determines how NATO countries ought to spend their defence budgets, and what weapons NATO needs to own collectively. But these are not normal times: the allied operation in Afghanistan is going badly in part because NATO lacks equipment and troops willing to fight. To make things worse, the economic crisis has prompted allies across NATO to cut defence budgets, in some cases dramatically – Germany announced in August 2010 that it would cut its armed forces by a third. For the foreseeable future, allies will be more adamant than ever about spending on the right priorities.

Those allies who view Afghanistan as top priority generally want NATO to put little time and money into building up armaments in Europe. They argue that NATO needs to invest in winning the war that it is in, not a 'home' one that is not imminent. Countries that do not think Russia a threat are even more resolute; they think that placing new hardware in Central Europe is at best a waste of resources and at worst a provocation to Russia.

Those allies who worry about a conflict with Russia do not have a common view but what most want, in military terms, is for the alliance to reinforce NATO's network of airfields and ports in the region. There is a good case for that: at the time of enlargement, 'old' NATO countries told the then-candidates that the alliance does not need to station bases or troops on their territory because in times of trouble, allies would send help from abroad. But this presumes that the new members can receive such help; that their runways can accommodate western jets, and that US and West European ships can dock in Central European ports. The alliance has upgraded many of the relevant facilities in the new countries but many more remain in poor shape, and NATO lacks money for their upgrades.

The alliance needs to find the resources to guarantee a successful reinforcement in case of a crisis; mutual defence is the NATO's core purpose. Allies should agree to close unnecessary Cold War bases in Southern and Western Europe and apply the saving to upgrades in Central Europe. However, the new NATO countries would have a much better negotiating position if their own military reform efforts are solid and if they spend enough money on the military – some, like Hungary and Lithuania, are among the lowest spenders in NATO.

However, at its heart, the new allies' yearning for NATO to pay more attention to 'home' conflicts is not about military hardware. New allies are anxious because, in their mind, NATO has ceased to function as crisis manager in Europe. The alliance acted decisively during the Bosnia and Kosovo conflicts. But allies did little when Russia and Georgia went to war in 2008. Obviously, Georgia was not a NATO ally and could not expect the same level of support. But the new members fear that the divisions that kept NATO from acting on Georgia – over who was culpable or whether it was wise to confront Moscow – would also paralyse the alliance in case one of them comes to conflict with Russia. They also saw NATO deny Turkey request for consultations in 2003, when Ankara felt under threat during the US-Iraqi war. The event shook the new allies' confidence in the validity of NATO's mutual defence clause, Article V.

The best path to tackling these anxieties is not through military means. It lies in restoring NATO's ability to manage crises in Europe. Contingency plans for NATO's eastern border, which the alliance has begun to draw up, are clearly a part of good crisis management. NATO should go one step further: it should create a mechanism that would monitor crises on NATO's borders – not just those with Russia but all borders. This 'crisis management centre' should also have the capacity and authority to draw up possible NATO responses and put them to NATO's political authorities for consideration.

This will give the new allies what they most want: the ability to call NATO's attention to potential trouble on their borders, and the knowledge that NATO has the right software to respond in a timely manner. That ought to be a higher priority than military improvements.

There will continue to be tensions between the demands of the away and home conflicts. But the differences between the two tend to be exaggerated. The most effective measure for dealing

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with home conflicts – the creation of a new crisis management centre – can be implemented at little additional cost. And even where financial conflicts do arise, such as in case of infrastructure upgrades in Central Europe, the alliance needs to be able to address the needs of both types of missions at the same time. NATO faces a complicated set of challenges. And the key to its continued validity lies in being able to convincingly address multiple challenges at the same time.

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