

NATO and out of area insecurity

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is committed to the defence of a certain region, yet that region has no special geographical meaning and exists only by virtue of the definition given to it in the treaty text. Though the contracting parties agree that the whole region is to be defended, in practice, planning takes place largely for the defence of Western Europe; there are no specific plans for what Europeans might do to bolster American territorial security. These two facts make it difficult to speak of NATO as a regional alliance in the strict sense of the term: no map clearly identifies the North Atlantic area, and security for the part of the area that does make geographic sense (Western Europe) largely guaranteed by an Alliance partner (the United States) whose homeland lies outside it. It is small wonder, therefore, that there should be doubts about how the Alliance should deal with threats that issue from outside the area. Since there is no 'place' called out of area, it is unlikely to seize the imagination of NATO officials, and to the extent that individual states develop their own policies for regions outside of Europe and North America, the NATO element in such planning is inevitably secondary. That is, a policy that may have NATO out of area implications from the viewpoint of a Brussels official is unlikely to be seen automatically in that perspective by the relevant officials in the governments of a member state as they seek to defend national interests outside the treaty boundaries. Since policy within the NATO area requires careful planning and co-ordination, a desire to retain a capacity to act independently, or abstain from action, is perhaps a natural psychological reaction to the binding nature of the Alliance in Europe.

Still, it must be remembered that the NATO boundary was originally drawn merely to delineate the area in which an attack on one member would be considered an attack on all. That area includes the territory of all the signatories and the islands under the jurisdiction of any of the parties north of the Tropic of Cancer, that is, 22 1/2° above the Equator. Vessels or aircraft operating in this area are also protected under the terms of the treaty, and an attack on these, no less than an attack on territory, would require the signatories to consult and decide on appropriate action. The treaty, therefore, in no sense prohibits consultation or even action outside the area defined, it simply does not make it obligatory. In fact, from its earliest days, NATO meetings have referred to the fact that insecurity in outlying areas might endanger member states or make defence of the NATO area untenable. In its resolution of December 1952 on the conflict in Indo-China, for example, the North Atlantic Council recognised 'that resistance to direct or

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indirect aggression in any part of the world is an essential contribution to the common security of the free world,' and thus expressed its support for French military action in the region.¹ At various intervals since then the many organs of NATO have declared themselves on the relevance of extra-European contingencies on NATO security. Since the early 1980s policymaking by communiqué on this issue has become more active. The current consensus is that member nations who have the means to take action outside the treaty area to deter threats should do so in consultation with allies (if it is established that their common interests are involved) and that states who are able to facilitate deployments out of area may do so. This is sufficiently vague to allow for most types of policies, including outright co-ordination of activities by a group of allied states.

If it is true that the member states of NATO have from time to time collectively sanctioned the need to consider threats outside the treaty area, it is also the case that individual members have often tried to implicate NATO as a whole in the defence of special interests beyond the metropolitan territory of the signatory states. Originally, France was able to insist that its Algerian departments be protected by the treaty and NATO was thus committed to consider threats to these areas in North Africa as engaging treaty obligations. Only when Algeria became independent did this cease to be the case. Portugal often presented its own commitments in Africa as worthy of similar attention. In October 1968 at a NATO meeting in Lisbon, the Portuguese Foreign Minister argued that 'the NATO Alliance should not be indifferent to the preservation for the West of vital strategic positions. We have never understood, for example, how one can separate the north Atlantic from the south Atlantic or how one can ensure the security of one without taking into account the security of the other.'²

The Portuguese government even offered NATO use of its bases in Africa in order to assist in the protection of the Cape route, but this offer was not taken up by other member states, who were more concerned that Portuguese policy in Africa lead to a smooth transition to independence for her African possessions.³ The British policy of decolonisation and retreat from Suez was such that there was never any question of offering bases for so-called NATO use, though in 1967 the government signed an agreement with the United States that allowed the Americans to establish facilities on the island of Diego Garcia. Up until 1974 the British also had an agreement with South Africa for use of the base at Simonstown, but the UK never sought the array of foreign bases in Africa that the French were successful in developing. British arms sales policy towards South Africa sometimes brought the government into conflict with other Alliance powers (notably Canada who thought the policy would injure ties with the Commonwealth), but the British did not explain policy in the region as necessary for Alliance security. Only at the time of the Falklands conflict in 1982 did British commitments and deployments out of area require dealing directly with NATO in so far

as UK military activity in the South Atlantic naturally drew down forces earmarked for the treaty area. The Americans in Vietnam had also been forced to convince Alliance partners that forces deployed there would not seriously diminish American strength in Europe. In the event, the United States reduced forces in Germany by as much as a quarter, but did so by thinning out units rather than by removing any in their entirety, thus diminishing the 'optical' effect of this reduced power.⁴ More recently, the Spanish were concerned that entry into NATO would do nothing to attenuate their main security concerns in North Africa, notably the need to protect their enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. In negotiating the form of their military participation in NATO the Spanish have argued that their capacity to assist in the defence of areas near North Africa should be taken as a contribution to Alliance security.

Specific threats

A number of Alliance members have evoked their own national interests outside the treaty area either to ask for direct assistance from other NATO members, or to justify the conclusion of certain security agreements with powers beyond the NATO perimeter, or to excuse the temporary removal of forces from the treaty area. NATO allies have traditionally been flexible in accommodating themselves to the diverse needs of Alliance members. There have, of course, been a few glaring instances of disagreement. The American resistance to the Anglo-French operation in Suez in 1956 and European disquiet over American policy in the Middle East in 1973 and in Grenada in 1983 are very important examples of occasions when the imperatives of national policy seemed so overwhelming that effective consultation to reach consensus was virtually impossible. Interdependence within the Alliance has not yet reached the stage where there is a perfect match between conceptions of national and collective responsibility. This problem is inevitably more acute out of area since the expression of individual Western power in outlying regions is so often tied up with conceptions of national prestige. Still, the Alliance has discussed in detail possible reactions to specific threats beyond the area; notably in South Africa and the Middle East. This has led to numerous discussions and briefings within the NATO Council, a number of joint studies, though little actual planning, on out of area policy making and activity.

In the mid 1970s concern centred for some time on problems in South Africa. Fears of the putative Soviet campaign of 'total onslaught' in southern Africa led to worries that strategic materials located there would be lost to the West or that the Cape route might be effectively controlled by the Soviet Union. Inevitably there were a few who felt that NATO should act to prevent this from happening or should at least be prepared to protect its interests. Speculation that NATO developed extensive plans with South

Africa to this end have led to accusations of 'collusion', and critics of NATO have sometimes argued that the Alliance had chosen to sup with the devil in order to protect its interests. In fact, while some studies were done in the 1970s by Allied Command Atlantic on the defence of South Atlantic shipping and other contingencies south of the Tropic of Cancer it never received a license to plan operations.⁵ Even if the South African government would have liked to implicate NATO in its own security policy it has not succeeded in doing so.

South Africa's attempts to develop a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation must be seen in this light leaders in South Africa have consistently argued that Soviet naval activities in the South Atlantic might turn the area into a 'Communist lake' and have sought to enlist other governments into a loose military organisation in order to protect 'Western interests' in the area. In the late 1970s and early 1980s various Argentinian officials seemed openly to support the idea of a South Atlantic defence pact. Other countries in the region have been less enthusiastic. The statement by the Foreign Minister of Brazil in September 1976 to the effect that 'There is not the slightest possibility of establishing a collective security system in the South Atlantic, especially with the awkward and unwanted presence of South Africa,' is perhaps typical of that country's approach.⁶ In the early months of the Reagan Administration there were some fleeting references by American officials visiting South American countries on the desirability of greater military collaboration among South Atlantic powers, but the difficulty in bringing the relevant parties together meant that the idea was never carried very far.⁷ In any case, the Falklands war sufficiently complicated the strategic situation in the region to put an end to whatever hopes some might have entertained for the establishment of a South Atlantic security system. If a few admirals steeped in Mahanite thinking have occasionally suggested the importance of uniting politically and operationally the North Atlantic and South Atlantic 'strategic spaces' these ideas have never held any currency at NATO or in national Alliance defence establishments.

Much more serious work has been done at NATO on the problem of security in the Middle East. The need to protect Western economic interests in the Persian Gulf and the fear that these interests could be compromised by a 'Soviet grab for oil' led planners in the United States to develop the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), now subsumed under United States Central Command (US CENTCOM). In the early 1980s the United States put considerable pressure on its NATO allies to explain how they might assist the United States in the event it was required to deploy forces to the Middle East, especially given the fact that US forces that might be used in South West Asia are earmarked also for action in Europe. The NATO Council therefore asked the Military Committee to produce a paper later known as the South West Asia Impact Study which analyses the effects on NATO of a US deployment to the Gulf. The study

was critical of both the size and prospective uses of the US RDF. US arguments that European allies should facilitate deployments to the Gulf or at least compensate in Europe for a reduction in American reinforcement capacities have nevertheless found their way into the language of NATO communiqués.

There has been broad agreement among allies that compensation of some sort would be necessary if the United States were to deploy forces to the Persian Gulf. But the way in which such compensation would be managed has not yet been calculated. The issue of compensation is politically sensitive owing to its immediate association with the longstanding debate on burden sharing. Provisional measures for compensation were not included in NATO's 1985-1990 NATO Force goals despite a recommendation made to that effect in the South West Asia Impact Study. It is likely that the compensation issue will begin to figure more prominently in the Defence Review Questionnaire sent out by NATO to those countries participating in the integrated military structure, but it will be some time before there is any measure of agreement on who should compensate for what at what time. While on the surface 'facilitation' may appear easier to organise, it is a more politically delicate issue, since it virtually implies agreement with American policy rather than merely taking measures to account for it as is the case with 'compensation'. Decisions to facilitate must also be taken quickly and positive answers are likely to be forthcoming only if the facilitating state agrees without any reservation to the action of the intervening state. Furthermore, countries will not want to be isolated by virtue of their having accepted to facilitate. Portuguese officials now very much lament that Portugal was the only European country to assist in American deployments to the Middle East in 1973. Recent hesitations about what to do to combat terrorism in the Mediterranean region and doubts whether military strikes in the Middle East are appropriate measures indicate some of the challenges that exist at present for co-ordinating NATO policy.

The nature of Western policies in the Middle East and the growing importance of the special issue of terrorism means that the awkward term out of area primarily now refers to the Middle East. This is the only area in the world for which NATO has proposed making specific contingency plans, even if this means only compensating in-area for national forces deployed out of area. The principal Alliance interest in other parts of the globe, Central America, South America, Southern Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific, is to avoid disputes among Alliance members that might break the consensus necessary for NATO to protect its central interests in Europe. One of the very important virtues of a conservative interpretation of the treaty terms to the effect that the Alliance has no business beyond its constitutionally defined area of operations, is that it allows individual states to develop regional policies while insisting that they are not acting 'on behalf' of NATO or generally agreed 'Alliance' goals. Were NATO to adopt a more

liberal reading of the treaty and openly to admit that no area is really out of bounds (a position easily justifiable on a close analysis of the treaty text and its 'legislative history') this would probably complicate the policies of a number of Alliance members. In short, the allies must have out of area policies, but those that are developed or carried out under a NATO banner should probably be carefully circumscribed.

Different Western interests

The relations that individual NATO states have with states outside the area are clearly matters of national policy though they should be the subject of close political consultation with other Alliance members both bilaterally and within the NATO Council. Given that there will be times when certain Western states will have interests of equivalent weight in certain areas and similar interpretations of how to protect these interests, it is wise for Western states to sometimes develop policies together. Given also that there are times when Western states find themselves acting simultaneously (as in the Lebanon 1982-1983), it is important that they be prepared to organise their actions collectively. There is no single answer to the question of what Western policy should be out of the NATO area, since Western interests are sometimes different and often divisible while policies for certain regions need to adopt special shapes. But that some coordination in Western policymaking is required should now be beyond dispute. Certainly it is not necessary to accept the theory that the world is a single strategic stage to reject the notion that any given part of it can successfully be insulated from outside events. Western leaders must carefully consider when and where a collaborative approach to out-of-area problems is possible.

Interests that might have to be protected beyond the NATO area are naturally various and difficult to define. They range from a desire to ensure the exclusion of Soviet influence to the need to maintain a secure supply of strategic materials to the protection of Western nationals from domestic turmoil. Traditional approaches to guaranteeing Western security interests in outlying regions are now probably inadequate given the widely acknowledged complexity of international conflict. Neither the threat of direct military intervention nor the development of regional pacts is likely to assure the local stability required to mollify Western concern. Furthermore, the existence of interests, of whatever type, does not imply the possession of influence, and overt attempts to shape local politics in ones own image may serve less to strengthen local friends than to create new enemies. The Western Alliance therefore dearly has no interest, this at least can be dearly stated, in pursuing fanciful policies out of area that require large reservoirs of domestic support in order to be sustainable and whose dividends are far from evident. In the face of this confusion and uncertainty the

only wise approaches are *ad hoc*, of which there are many examples some more successful than others. The experience of individual approaches to managing relations out of area can give some guidance as to what form future policies might take.

Principally because of the development of various organs of the European Community (EC) and notably the increased use of European Political Co-operation (EPC), European states have been able to fashion transregional policies that pay no lip service to the special and arcane geography of the NATO treaty area. The aid policy of the EC to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states codified in the various Lomé accords has succeeded in linking these states closely to the West, many of whom already maintain close ties either through the British Commonwealth or the loose grouping of francophone states led by France. French power and influence especially with the francophone African states remains very strong, even if it is unlikely to grow. British influence within the Commonwealth has been on the wane and may have suffered an irreparable blow after the dispute in the summer of 1986 over sanctions towards South Africa. Still, these arrangements, based as they are on strong historical traditions ensure a continuity of Western influence in outlying regions. While the EC arrangements are naturally built on these individual experiences, and while they served to give a dear European definition to much of Western aid policy to these areas, there has always been in EC policy an uneasy relationship between the degree of activity undertaken, the amount of power sometimes desired and the level of responsibility all this has entailed. Much effort has sometimes been spent that has led to no great increase in political influence, and this in turn has affected the depth of European collective commitment to strengthening links in these areas. These dilemmas were particularly evident in the Community attempt to develop the Euro-Arab dialogue, a grand design that faltered owing to the fact that its architects had a sense of style but not of structure or purpose. This said, the fact that EPC exists, has forced European foreign ministers to consider much more carefully the views of their partners before national foreign policies are fully developed and the centripetal effect of this habit brings European foreign policies closer together.

In some instances European states have joined together for military operations: the Multinational Force of Observers (MFO) in Sinai in 1981, the Multinational Force (MNF) in the Lebanon in 1982-3 and the collective minesweeping activities of the British, French, Italians, Americans and Egyptians in the Red Sea in 1984, showed that European military power abroad still had some use. The fact that these operations, especially in the Lebanon, were not always well organised has led some to suggest that a European Rapid Deployment Force (ERDF) be created or that at least more joint training take place between European special units so that these actions have a greater chance of success. At the moment it appears that there is insufficient political

will to generate this sort of military collaboration. A more likely avenue for progress in the immediate future is that European states increase their inter-regional contacts in the security field.

Some hints of progress have taken place in the Middle East. In early 1985 exploratory talks took place between the EC and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) the aim of which was to establish some sort of contractual agreement relating to the security of oil supply on the one hand and preferential trade agreements on the other.⁸ In these negotiations the question of the Gulf War and its implications for regional stability and inter-regional relations was an important factor. The GCC's modest role in promoting internal and regional stability may be supplemented by the already proven willingness of France and West Germany to support Saudi Arabia and the evident capacity of Britain to do the same for Oman and the United Arab Emirates. But any formalised security arrangement between the relevant European states and the GCC will still depend on agreements amongst the European states on how to manage their co-operation in the region. Would such co-operation be limited to agreements on how to spread arms sales through the region and to declarations on the need to allow regional solutions to regional problems? Could it extend to concrete advice on how to establish local rapid deployment force structures to which the six monarchs of the GCC pledged themselves in 1984? Clearly the principal European states have an interest in developing a security and economic package for the Gulf that assures them increased leverage in the area, but the form of such a policy has not yet been worked out, and any established policy would still be hostage to the vagaries of the Middle Eastern situations.

The existence of regional organisations in various parts of the developing world does not mean that these have successfully served as magnets for groups of Western states seeking appropriate fora for promoting local stability, and when contact has taken place, it has not led to successful conflict resolution. No special form of co-operation has taken place with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), nor has there been any particular approach made to the Asian nations grouped in South Asian Regional Co-operation (SARC). There is some Western military co-operation in the Pacific through Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises that involve units from Britain, Australia, Canada, the United States and Japan. Most NATO members including the United States have had close dealings with the Contadora Group in the hope of finding a solution to the Central American conflict, but these attempts have been frustrated in part by the fact that the Group has only minimal influence on the principal actors in the conflict. The EC has close relations with the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), but this has not given it any leverage in solving regional conflict. The Five Nation Western Namibia Contact Group was forced to

disband in the face of its own manifest incapacity to encourage change in the area.

This apparently mediocre record is somewhat compensated for by the fact that, at a minimum, groups of Western states have been recognised as *interlocuteurs valables* in most of these areas while the Soviet Union and its allies have been excluded from some areas and have not been as successful as the West in other areas given the narrower range of diplomatic and economic tools at their disposal. While the Soviet Union certainly takes advantage of local instability to exert military influence and install favourable regimes, its own 'out-of-area' policy is less dynamic and variable than that of the West. The Soviet Union clearly poses serious challenges to Western interests in the Third World but the range of Western policy in developing countries remains wider. A second compensating factor is simply the objective fact that most regional conflicts are not susceptible to easy management and do not have obvious solutions. However inventive Western diplomacy, there are limits to what it can accomplish in areas where conflict is endemic and change unpredictable.

Common responsibility and non-singularity

The West as a whole can be said to have two basic goals out of area. The first is defensive: to prevent developments in the Third World from affecting the military and economic security of the West. The second is more positive: to contribute where possible to the resolution of regional conflict. The traditional concerns of Western diplomacy apply in both cases: policy should be directed so as to prevent the use of force, though the threat of it might be necessary to ensure this; and policy should be fashioned to avoid embroilment in the domestic politics of developing states, which can so often be counterproductive. The pursuit of these ends is in almost no way hindered by the provisions of the NATO treaty. The single essential concern, that Western forces deployed out of area do not detract from the West's capacity to defend itself within the area, has already been a matter of considerable discussion at NATO. There remain numerous problems to be solved but there is no reason of principle that should prevent this. The true challenge lies with individual allies or small groups of them acting together to coordinate their capacities and their talents, both military and diplomatic. This can happen largely outside the NATO framework.

As members of the Alliance with special interests in certain regions and with comparative advantages in them seek to develop their own approaches to the management of conflict they will often tend to seek wide support for their policies. The process of consultation itself ideally should produce a minimal consensus that will strengthen Western policy and improve the chances for success. Where there are truly general interests to be defended the guiding principles outside the NATO area should

be no different than those that obtain within area. When the decision was made to deploy intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe to counter the threat posed by Soviet SS20 missiles, emphasis was placed on the fact that the decision had wide Alliance support and that more than one country was directly implicated in implementing the policy.

The principles of 'common responsibility' and 'non-singularity' should equally guide Western policies out of area in those instances where general as opposed to uniquely national interests are being defended. Policies should remain individual when these do not affect other allies' vital interests. There will sometimes be disputes about this important consideration, but as long as the out of area challenge is discussed without complexes then it will be possible to develop policies that are mutually tolerable. There will inevitably be arguments, as there always have been, between the United States and its European allies on what to do out of area, but these will remain 'affordable' so long as there is no attempt to strive for globalism and individual interests out of area are understood. If there is free discussion of out of area questions within NATO councils then the differentiated approach allies have taken to these issues will be to the West' s advantage.

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¹ Resolution of the North Atlantic Assembly Ministerial Meeting, Paris 15-18 December 1952.

² Cited in Christopher Coker, *NATO the Warsaw Pact and Africa*, RUSI Defence Studies Series, MacMillan, 1985, p. 54.

³ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁴ Johan Jorgen Holst, 'NATO and the Wider World: Strategic Interests and Domestic Constraints', *NUPI Notat*, August 1982, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁶ Cited in, Andrew Hurrell, 'The Politics of South Atlantic Security; A Survey of Proposals for a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 59, no. 2, Spring 1983, p. 187.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 191.

⁸ Reinhardt Rummel, 'On EC-GCC Co-operation,' *Aussen Politik*, 1st Quarter, 1986, p. 84-85.

