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NATO AND THE EU IN THE NORTH: WHAT IS AT STAKE IN CURRENT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT?

Alyson J.K. Bailes*

Abstract

Security for European states is now defined as covering a wide range of fields, in all of which the group of Nordic and Baltic states show significant national variations. NATO is still Europe's only 'hard' security provider but is reduced in that role by its new focus on remote crisis missions and by gradual US disengagement. The EU could intervene in new ways, in non-military emergencies, under new Lisbon Treaty clauses on 'solidarity'. If Nordic states were more united in their demands and proposals, they might have a better chance of gaining a decisive hearing in the EU than in NATO's current strategy debate. The EU has a potential, growing role in Russia-handling, and Finland is at least interested in exploring the 'solidarity' route to a perhaps stronger EU umbrella over members' territorial security.

Introduction

In an Icelandic university course during 2009, students were asked in their final examination as to whether NATO or the European Union (EU) was more important for the security of countries in the Nordic/Baltic region. Roughly equal numbers of them answered 'NATO', 'EU', and 'Both' – and none of them was marked wrong. The logical reason for the varying answers was, of course, the way that each student chose to define 'security' at the outset. That same choice is crucial for providing an answer to the question posed in this article: how important is the evolution of NATO's and the European Union's institutional strategy, respectively, for the future safety of Northern Europe – and why? What do countries in the region have to hope for, or to fear, from the possible outcomes to each institution's current major efforts of self-examination and self-transformation: namely, the implementation of the EU's new Treaty of Lisbon¹ and NATO's ongoing debate on a new Strategic Concept?

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¹ The Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009 – text at http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/full_text/index_en.htm.

The subject is large and the space here limited, so a line of argument will be followed that cannot do full justice to all the relevant concerns. First, the modern European definition of security and its application to the Nordic/Baltic region will be discussed, with a focus on national perceptions and variations. Secondly, the evolving role division between NATO and the EU will be sketched. Third, and last, there will be a brief speculative discussion of issues and possible outcomes in each institution's strategy-building work, as seen from the Northern European angle(s) earlier defined.

1. What is 'Security' for Europeans – and for the North?

In principle, it should be easier than ever to answer the above question, since as many as 27 European states belong to the EU and the EU has possessed its own European Security Strategy (ESS) since December 2003.² At the end of 2008, moreover, Ministers noted a report from High Representative Javier Solana updating and extending the original strategy's analysis.³

However, even leaving aside the rather generalized nature of the ESS, which does not translate easily into day-to-day policies, there are at least two large reasons why it fails to settle all open questions. First, the 2003 document and 2008 update cannot be seen as an objective and complete statement of Europe's risks and concerns, even if the latter ranges more widely than the former. Being drafted within the EU's Council Secretariat, they had to steer clear in practice both of the 'hardest' defence issues and risks that most EU states saw as the province of NATO, and of the 'softest' issues – such as economic and social security – that largely fell within the competence of the Commission. On top of this, the contemporary political climate and related fashions in security thinking led in the 2003 document to a probably quite excessive focus on terrorism and WMD proliferation, but had a part also in pushing climate change to the fore in 2008. As a result of all these and other constraints, both in 2003 and 2008, the ESS's drafters signally underplayed the obvious strategic challenges posed by Russia for Europe and said

² *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, adopted by the European Council on 12-13 December 2003, text at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

³ Text at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=266&lang=en>.

even less that was meaningful about China. In December 2008, they could not even start to depict the possible security consequences, external and internal, of Europe's plight in the global financial and economic crash.

The second problem with a collective EU 'strategy' is one that even the most skilful drafting will not overcome. Europe is an extremely diverse continent, and more so since post-Cold War enlargement: not just in political and cultural traditions, but also in the objective geo-strategic circumstances of different states. Variation in national outlook exists along many axes – between large states and small states, those global in vision or more regionally attuned, close to potentially threatening 'others' or far away and well cushioned, land-locked or maritime, central or peripheral, and so on. These factors are central to traditional, military security, but under a wider modern definition of security that includes internal, functional, and human dimensions, an almost infinite range of further variables would have to be added. A nation's comprehensive security agenda will be shaped by its degree of internal homogeneity or division (with risks of civil violence or terrorism at the extreme), the strength or lack of everyday law-and-order, strong or weak border control, exposure to and sensitivity to migration, energy self-sufficiency or dependence, exposure to different natural hazards and climate shifts, heavier or lighter dependence on various large-scale infrastructures, and many more.

Finally and not least, national threat and risk perceptions are strongly influenced by subjective and cultural or traditional elements, as are national views on the 'right' way to tackle a given defence or security problem. Attitudes to the use of force are key, and show a wide range of variation across Europe: but so do the perceived standing and legitimacy of armed forces and other security services, the nature of civil-military relations, the strength of democratic institutions and public debate in shaping security policy, and broader features such as individuals' preparedness for risk, natural solidarity or lack of it, and resilience after traumatic events.

Where can Europe's Nordic/Baltic region be placed along this spectrum of variation? First, it is a largely *peripheral* space: in the double sense that *geographically* the countries North of the Baltic Sea and Iceland lie at the edge of Europe's landmass, and *politically* they border on a region beyond the EU and NATO where sharply different systems and values may prevail. In some parts of Europe, strategic pressure may tail off towards the periphery - *vide* Ireland or Portugal - but the North since the early 20th century has never been free from some degree of strategic tension. It is partly that the Soviet/Russian 'other' lies directly to the East and indeed, since 1990 has had its only direct land borders here with integrated Europe; and partly

that modern technology has opened up the uninhabited High North as an arena of strategic confrontation. Throughout the Cold War the main US and Soviet nuclear arsenals faced each other across, and underneath, the polar ice. Even if their numbers and the perceived risk of war both declined after 1990, the prospects of Arctic militarization are now under discussion again because of the likely opening up of new sea passages and access to new natural resources due to climate change.⁴

Secondly, in face of the Eastern neighbour but also compared with the resources deployed for East-West balance the nations of the Nordic/Baltic space are in a profoundly *asymmetrical* strategic position. As small-medium states with limited populations (Sweden, the largest, does not exceed nine million), they are dwarfed both by the historic Russian adversary and by the friend – the USA – best qualified to protect them. Norway, Sweden, and Finland are especially exposed in their thinly populated Northern provinces, while Finland and the Baltic States possess only modest means of resistance in the easternmost corner of the Baltic which has been a Russian breakout point since the time of Peter the Great. They are anyway outflanked by the sovereign exclave that Russia has retained in Kaliningrad.

The third and most idiosyncratic feature of the Nordic/Baltic space is that in modern history its nation-states have opted to counter these dangers through a kind of *disaggregation, variety, and balance* in their strategic postures, rather than seeking strength through unity. Sweden, the region's largest and once hegemonic power, has been neutral or (as it is expressed today) non-allied for more than two centuries. Together with Finland it has so far stayed out of NATO, while Norway and Iceland remain outside the EU; and Denmark's EU membership is still subject to four opt-outs including defence and internal security cooperation negotiated at the time of the Maastricht Treaty. The Nordic Cooperation that developed after World War Two between the five Nordic states and their sovereign territories steered well clear of defence issues, and has only recently opened up to a debate on non-warlike security collaboration. The newly independent Baltic States after 1990 were denied entry to that group and had to form their own Baltic Council. The two sub-regional cooperation frameworks that include both the Baltic and Nordic states, namely the Council of Baltic Sea States and Barents Euro-Arctic Council, are active in fields of 'soft' security but also have the Russian Federation as a member. That is also the case for the EU's Northern Dimension, created in

⁴ Holtsmark, S.G. and Smith-Windsor, B.A., *Security prospects in the High North: geostrategic thaw or freeze?*, NDC Forum Paper No 7, NATO Defence College: Rome, May 2009

1999 and renewed in 2006 as a framework primarily for economic cooperation and development.

During Cold War times, the dividing line of Alliance membership between Norway and Sweden was the fulcrum of a 'Nordic balance' that denied full control of the Baltic space to either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Both in theory and practice, the absence of face-to-face confrontation lowered the military temperature in Northern Europe and left space for peaceful interchange, trade, and cooperation with Eastern neighbours. It also liberated Nordic energies that could be turned towards efforts for a general détente – like Finland's role in creating the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) or towards global aid and peacekeeping. Iceland aside, all the Nordic states began a still continuing tradition of 'punching above their weight' in services to world security.

However, to explain Nordic and Nordic/Baltic disunity purely in terms of high-minded services to Europe's peace would be missing much of the point. If the Nordic balance had been only a Cold War construct it would be difficult to understand why, in twenty years since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the countries north of the Baltic have been so slow and cautious in exploring the scope for changes of status. Aside from Sweden and Finland's entry to the EU in 1995 (the strategic meaning of which the Swedes played down at the time),⁵ Nordic institutional alignments remain basically the same today as in the 1950s. The difference is that Nordic non-members can now exploit numerous 'half-way house' arrangements to get closer to NATO and the EU, respectively – Partnership for Peace, the European Economic Area, and Schengen – while the case for greater inter-Nordic military and security cooperation can at least be publicly addressed, as in the Stoltenberg Report of February 2009.⁶ Iceland also applied in July 2009 for full EU membership, but that decision came in exceptional political conditions and may well be negated by a popular vote in the eventual referendum to be held on membership. Overall, this 'Nordic syndrome' of limited institutional liability forms a marked contrast with the unanimous and strenuous efforts made by all

⁵ EU membership was more openly portrayed in Finland as providing a kind of 'soft deterrence', as well as economic security.

⁶ Report presented at the request of the Nordic Foreign Ministers by ex-Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg, text at http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/Whats-new/news/2009/nordic_report.html?id=545258. Of 13 proposals put forward in this document, the quickest to be sidelined in official discussions were one for a Nordic pledge of mutual defence assistance and an idea for all Nordics to help police the airspace of Iceland.

three Baltic States to get into *both* the EU and NATO as soon as they could: a campaign in which they consciously sought to suppress their mutual differences,⁷ and which was crowned with success for all three in 2004.

The fact is that national differences of security outlook and culture, of the kind sketched above for Europe as a whole, also create complex divisions between the five Nordic states and between them and the three Baltic nations. Taking concrete factors first, in *geo-strategic* terms there is a huge distance from Finland's long Russian frontier to Iceland's mid-Atlantic site, or from the exposed Russia-Norway border down to Denmark with its continental setting as many as five Allies now cushioning it from the Russian front. The range of climatic conditions, topography, population size, and population density is equally wide. Historical experiences diverge between the long-standing Swedish and Danish kingdoms and the six other Nordic and Baltic nations that attained modern statehood only in the 20th century. Every state had a different fate in World War Two with the Baltics' *de facto* subjugation to Soviet rule at the extreme. Turning to functional aspects of security, the one thing that at least the five Nordic states hold closely in common is their social welfare tradition: but that makes only a limited impact on other security features aside perhaps from a shared high level of dependency on IT and other modern infrastructures to guarantee quality of life.⁸ In other dimensions, such as energy dependence, there is again a wide gap from Iceland and Norway, with their near self-sufficiency thanks to geo-thermal, hydroelectric, or hydrocarbon sources, to the Baltic States and Finland with their high – though still varied – levels of dependence on Russian imports. Norway has been one of the least damaged and Iceland possibly the most damaged European state in the recent global economic crash. None of the region's states has seen serious internal violence in recent history, but ethnic divisions loom larger for Estonia and Latvia, and latterly Denmark, than the others, and Denmark has been the most exposed to Islamic extremism and terrorism.

⁷ In the late 1990s, some Westerners thought it would be easier for NATO to accept Lithuania than the others and for the EU to accept Estonia than the others. While events in 2001-2 (notably the aftermath of 9/11) largely explain why all three Baltic States were included in the 'Big Bang' enlargements of 2004, credit should also be given to the initiatives taken by Baltic governments to avoid negative competition among themselves and among other candidates. These included the formation of the 'Vilnius 10' group of applicants who worked together notably to influence US opinion.

⁸ It is no doubt also one the factors accounting for the limited scale of Nordic national defence spending.

Even more striking, given the widespread belief in a common Nordic ‘model’ or identity, are the differences in North European states’ internal political systems and cultures, and the variety of solutions that they have found for broadly comparable security challenges. To start with the more obvious strategic features,⁹ Finland maintains one of Europe’s largest conscript armies while Iceland has never had armed forces. Norway’s default strategy, clearly expressed under the present government, is to concentrate military efforts on its Northern provinces while Denmark since the early 2000s has virtually stopped making any effort for territorial defence at all. Sweden has one of Europe’s larger arms industries but has reduced its standing forces below 18,000 and is moving to an all-volunteer army with the primary focus on peace missions. It is very reluctant to use force personnel for internal security tasks, while both Finland and Denmark in their different ways rely heavily on this solution. General approaches to security governance, or ‘security cultures’, also cover almost as wide a spectrum as one could find across all Europe, ranging from Finland’s close civil-military and public-private relations and acceptance of strong leadership, through differences of regional outlook within Norway, to many Swedes’ still visceral attachment to a civil-dominated ‘peace’ culture and the open anti-militarism of the Icelandic Left.

Moving to general external policy, Russia is clearly still the dominant and defining strategic factor for Finland, Norway, and the three Baltic States – producing in each case a subtly different balance of military readiness and efforts at détente but plays a far less central role in Swedish, Danish, and Icelandic thinking. Attitudes towards balancing Western power, the USA, are partly but not entirely a mirror image of this pattern of concern. The newly independent Baltic States, as the most ‘asymmetrically’ exposed, quickly made up their minds to work (and pay as necessary) for bilateral US support over and above formal NATO membership; but Denmark in the last decade has also aligned itself closely with Washington, for reasons linked more with non-European and global than territorial threats. Sweden’s relative disengagement from the Eastern threat can explain its default position of disapproval towards US power excesses, but Finland also distanced itself from George W Bush’s invasion of Iraq, and Norway had some trouble swallowing both this adventure and NATO’s earlier activism in Kosovo. Iceland, furthest from

⁹ For a fuller discussion of points in this section see Bailes, A.J.K., *Does a Small State need a Strategy?*, Occasional Paper of the Centre for Small State Studies at the University of Iceland: Reykjavik, 2009, text at http://stofnanir.hi.is/ams/sites/files/ams/Bailes_Final_1.pdf.

the Eastern front, had the most complete strategic dependence on the USA up to 2006 when American forces were unilaterally withdrawn, leaving the Icelanders divided and uncertain over their future alignment. A complete, further article could be written about the subtleties of external-political alignments as between the three Baltic nations, where Estonia's claims to a 'Nordic' identity and Lithuania's closer kinship to the Visegrad states¹⁰ offer just two of the salient examples.

Against this background, the lack of a unitary Nordic or Nordic-Baltic 'bloc' in the European security architecture hardly needs explanation. Variety is the default regional tradition, grounded in a now-peaceful but robust and unabashed sense of national identity on every side. The activities of Nordic Cooperation and the inclusive sub-regional organizations are better seen as ways to compensate for and cushion the range of national idiosyncrasies, than as harbingers of any serious, organic, or willed move towards convergence. Does it make any sense at all, then, to think in terms of a general 'Nordic', 'Baltic', or 'regional' agenda vis-à-vis NATO and the EU as institutions, or on the issues bound up with their future strategies? Before returning to this question, it is time to consider what NATO and the EU can offer to Europe's North, and Europe as a whole, under the widely defined heading of 'security'.

2. NATO and the EU as European Security Providers

It has often been remarked that many of the Central European applicants to NATO, including the Baltic States, would have liked to join the NATO of around the 1970s rather than the one actually on offer in 2004. One of the features of Cold War arrangements that could understandably provoke nostalgia is that the roles of the two strongest Europe-based organizations, NATO, and the EU (or earlier: the European Communities, EC), were clearly demarcated and perfectly complementary. The territorial security and physical survival of member states was entrusted to NATO, providing the protective umbrella under which Western Europe could attain unique heights of inner peace and prosperity. The EC/EU brought a deeper political reconciliation and economic interdependence that

¹⁰ These states are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Lithuania is also the Baltic State that has most energetically promoted cross-border and sub-regional cooperation, even with its most difficult neighbour – Belarus.

doubly underpinned this peace, while making states rich enough to afford large standing forces combined with social progress. NATO did not venture (at least operationally) outside its prescribed Euro-Atlantic defence area; the EC from its earliest days conducted European trade relations across the globe, but was far from venturing into military or even overt security issues.

Many would date the final breakdown of this duality to December 1999 when the EU adopted the first version of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) allowing military missions to be carried out anywhere in the world under independent European command. Certainly, the USA at the time and some others (notably Turkey) ever since have been concerned that the EU's rival operational role could undermine and confuse NATO's primacy, weaken trans-Atlantic solidarity, confront participating states with dual capability standards, and so on. In any event, not only the EU's capacities and competence but also its rationale for selecting missions have turned out to be quite different from NATO's,¹¹ and the only serious cases of overlap or confusion between the two have related to relatively low-key missions involving assistance to third parties.¹² Nevertheless, the great majority of studies on NATO/EU relations and role divisions have so far focused on this rather narrow field of expeditionary missions and on the related military and civilian capabilities. Bearing in mind that neither institution had such tasks originally at its core, it could be more interesting to look at the broader pattern of their present and prospective contributions to security, in its wider sense, for European states and for the Euro-Atlantic region as a whole.

The large canvas this opens up may be simplified by considering areas of governance where the institutions have moved in parallel; those where they share tasks in complementary style; and whether or how leadership is shifting between them across the remaining dimensions. The clearest general parallel between NATO and the EU is the way they have adapted to changed conditions since 1989/90, a) through geographical enlargement, b) through the creation of wider partnership networks and c) by changes of direction and balance in their security-related agendas. Future historians will probably find the similarities of timing and scope in the NATO and EU enlargement processes more striking than the divergences between them, of which Norden's pattern of split membership is actually the largest example

¹¹ Bailes, A.J.K., What role for the European Security and Defence Policy? *International Affairs* Vol. 84 No.1 January 2008 pp 115-130.

¹² E.g. support for African Union operations in Sudan, protection for shipping against Somali pirates.

and Cyprus and Malta's non-membership of NATO perhaps the second. Both institutions had similar underlying motives, ranging from the applicants' demands, through persistent US advocacy, to European members' own appreciation of the need to bolster stability by eliminating a potential strategic 'grey area' to their East (of a sort that brought fatal results as recently as the 1920s and 1930s). It is interesting to recall, however, that in NATO's case a broader argument was sometimes made for enlargement as a way to retrieve the Alliance's very *raison d'être*, while for the EU – whose rationale had never been so Cold War-dependent – the debate was more about whether integration's gains might be diluted and damaged by expansion. At any rate, in retrospect, both institutions carried off the process more smoothly than many would have predicted and have suffered less than expected from trouble digesting the new members. This is clear if contrasted with the almost insoluble problems confronting both institutions over the question of where (if at all) to enlarge next, aside from the relatively uncontroversial case of the Western Balkans.

The strategic watershed of 1989/90 also created a whole set of new challenges in Europe-Russia and Europe-US relations. In these two fields, up to now, the complementarity between NATO and the EU's roles has perhaps been clearer than any close parallels, or conflicts, between them. If there is still a 'hard' security threat from Russia it is clearly the responsibility of NATO, if anyone, to deal with it and the same applies (at least so far) to the obverse issue of pursuing military arms control and confidence building. If there is a problem of constructing a framework for sustainable, mutually profitable coexistence with Russia in the fields of trade, finance and migration, and for tackling soft-security dimensions like energy relations, pollution control, nuclear *safety*, disease and so forth, that can only be the EU's task. Whether either institution has yet risen fully to its responsibilities is another question, and the continuing confusions and inadequacy of Russia strategies on both sides have doubtless been aggravated by the procedural blocks in the way of direct, frank, NATO-EU discussion on such overarching issues. Even so, it is clear that divisions *within* each body have been far more important in this context than possible crossed wires between institutional approaches.

Much the same is true of the relations with the USA, which split both the EU and NATO's members along similar lines at the sharpest point of the Iraq crisis in the spring of 2003. The difference is that while European policies on Russia have been hampered not least by a collective failure to take the issue seriously enough or invest major resources in it, both NATO and the EU have carried out very significant adaptations of their agendas in response to US needs and demands to keep

Atlantic partnership alive. Since 2001, NATO has shifted its entire conceptual and operational agenda towards dealing with non-traditional, transnational threats such as terrorism, proliferation, and weak states, and is now conducting by far its largest operation ever in a non-European theatre, Afghanistan. The EU meanwhile has developed far more extensive and for its citizens – burdensome policies and actions against terrorism and proliferation, and on transport safety, travel control, money laundering and a host of connected issues, than it would have done in pursuit of its own security needs alone. On one of the hottest individual challenges, Iran's nuclear plans, it started tackling the problem in a complementary way to the USA only to end up now in complete alignment. Considering that these results were achieved during a period when many European leaders and publics in both institutions were profoundly out of sympathy with George W Bush's Administration, and were having to withhold cooperation from it in some further, legally or ethically sensitive fields, what is most striking is how well the transatlantic relationship survived as a result right up to the turning-point of President Barack Obama's election.

As commentators have not been slow to point out, the new President has eased some problems of Atlantic relations but thrown others more clearly into focus. He seems free of misgivings about the EU's emerging strategic role and, if anything, keen to encourage more self-driven European activism in military affairs and security generally. In part, this reflects his greater affinity with the 'European values' highlighted during tussles with his predecessor, in matters such as legality, the value of multilateralism, cross-cultural understanding, and arms control. The other component is, however, an increasingly open element of *distance* from Europe's home-grown agenda, bred by the same shifts in the USA's own existential interests that gained a sharper unilateralist expression under George W Bush. The Obama Administration has tried to 'reset' relations with Russia not primarily in order to make Europe safer, or even to bind Russia closer into Western institutions, but for its own reasons including a drive for strategic nuclear cuts – negotiated, of course, bilaterally; the familiar need for Russian help on other regional crises such as Iran; and a general interest in reducing national liabilities by allaying risks. It has re-planned its forward missile defence deployments in a way that still protects against Iran and mollifies Russia, but no longer gives any physical reassurance to the Europeans, who are the most nervous about Russian proximity.

The fact is that the real threats to the USA itself for two years now have all been economic, and they have pushed the issues of co-dependence and co-existence with a rising China – or with the BRICs more generally – to the top of Washington's

external priorities. True, in the short- and medium-term, the need to cope with the global economic crash has kept Europe visible as the USA's main economic/financial partner and co-owner of the Bretton Woods inheritance. However, this is another aspect of European affairs where the EU has all the competence and NATO none at all, and at times even the EU's profile has suffered from scene-stealing efforts by national politicians. While the US recovery is gathering strength, the latest Greek crisis has distinctly tarnished the euro. In addition, as has been pointed out *ad nauseam*, at the Copenhagen Conference of December 2009, the EU was shut out of Obama's final horse-trading for a bargain with other national powers – not because European policies were wrong, but because they were too 'right' (i.e. advanced) to have any hope of providing a solution with which others could live.

One lesson that this suggests is somewhat of a cliché by now, namely that Europe is intrinsically of less strategic importance to the USA following two historic successes in pushing back earlier threats, at the end of the Cold War and with the Big Bang enlargement. The other is also simple, albeit harder for many to accept: that the circumstances of this US shift threaten the continued rationale of the EU much less than that they do that of NATO. For one thing, the EU has its independent *raison d'être* and stands on so many different legs of competence. For another, the EU has a residual and not necessarily shrinking relevance for Washington in the economic and functional field, including many specialized areas important for transnational Western security. To the extent that US ties are still a component of security from Europe's own point of view – in the double sense that Europe wants to get certain things from America and at certain times to restrain it – this in itself would be reason to take the EU's significance as a strategic actor more seriously. Can the same point be made about the institutions' relative importance as direct purveyors of security to their European members?

Here, the question which aspects of security matter most must be posed again. In just about every dimension other than state-to-state military security relations, including quite 'hard' aspects of border and migration control, crime fighting, and anti-terrorism, Europe is protected by the EU and/or by global frameworks of regulation and cooperation, not by NATO. The limited exceptions include NATO's ability to safeguard energy and other trade routes by military (mainly naval) means, its NBC expertise, which could also be used in civilian accidents, its input to the understanding of cyber-threats, and its remaining competence in civil emergency operations (although Europeans seemed less keen to resort to these than to the EU's corresponding 'Community mechanism' that has solid funds

behind it). Some would argue, of course, that NATO's fight in Afghanistan is defending its home territories against Islamic extremism; but to this author at least the claim rings increasingly hollow, not least because of statistics showing how the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions have actually increased the world's total of terrorism. More mundanely it can be noted that only a minority of NATO members have been attacked by Islamists on their home soil up to now.

Even the strongest apologists for Afghanistan would find it difficult, in any case, to show that Europe's homeland has gained as much from NATO's new pattern of activity as it has lost through the last two decades' downgrading of territorial defence cooperation within the Alliance, seen most clearly perhaps in the sharp reduction of foreign troop stationing. NATO's historic decision not to extend such a presence, or nuclear weapon deployment, into any new member state after 1989 has left a large part of Allied territory almost devoid of the physical evidence of the Alliance, and even such exercises as are held have had non-home-defence scenarios. Politically, individual Allies who have felt themselves pressured by Russia have been unimpressed by NATO's responses, up to and including the quite serious attacks experienced by Estonia in 2007 over the Soviet statue dispute. All of this explains why a group of leading Central European individuals sent President Obama a letter in July 2009 calling for NATO to turn more attention back to 'East-West' issues and to the basic defence of its homeland.¹³ Alongside the aspects needing refinement in NATO's new expeditionary policies and the shortfall in related capacities, this growing pressure for the Alliance to 'come home' has been and will remain a central theme in NATO's ongoing Strategic Concept debate.

Whether this gap in traditional defence cooperation matters or not – a question raised again from a Northern perspective below – it is clear that the EU is not in a position to fill it. Despite some highly qualified language about mutual military assistance in the Lisbon Treaty,¹⁴ there is no political basis in the Union today for exchanging guarantees among all its members and still less for building a real mutual defence mechanism parallel to NATO. Even if the Europeans wished to attempt this, British and French nuclear capacity is patently inadequate to maintain the larger framework of deterrence against Russia (or others), and important EU states including Germany are opposed to taking co-responsibility for a nuclear

¹³ Text at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/east-central-europe-to-barack-obama-an-open-letter>.

¹⁴ Article 47.2 of the Treaty requires states to assist each other if requested in the case of military attack, but it defers both to NATO's primacy for its members and to the special policies of non-allied states.

defence anyway. More generally, the 21 EU members who also belong to NATO cannot wish to hasten the weakening of Alliance credibility, and of US national engagement, by suggesting they have an easy alternative up their sleeve.

It would thus be surprising if the EU made any early moves even to explore the substantial conditions for a 'common defence policy'. What it has resolved to do is to raise to a new level its common approach to non-warlike contingencies, now enshrined in Article 222 of the Lisbon Treaty regarding 'solidarity' in the event of major terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and their consequences.¹⁵ The Article commits member states to answer each other's call for help in such cases with all the 'means at their disposal', not excluding the use of military personnel and assets in a civil support mode. Moreover, as the Treaty language includes obligations to help forestall such contingencies and prepare 'joint' reactions, the Brussels organs will have to consider how to develop their own structures, capacities, and procedures to underpin and coordinate possible member-state inputs. This together with other aspects of Lisbon follow-up¹⁶ could presage a step change in the EU's self-awareness and operational readiness as an *internal* security provider. The range of roles it may play could also be described in a real, and partly new, sense as *territorial* protection – albeit against different risks and 'enemies' from the kind once linked with that concept in NATO.

3. Northern Agendas

If these issues and choices are looked at through Northern European eyes, the one option that does not really arise for anyone in the region¹⁷ is to 'adopt' one European institution as sole protector and reject the other. In Southern Europe, nations such as Turkey and Cyprus may leverage their favoured institution against the one they are locked out of or have a grievance against; while the UK and some

¹⁵ For more detail see Quille, G., *The Lisbon Treaty and its implications for CFSP/ESDP*, European Parliament Briefing Paper (2009), at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/200805/20080513ATT28796/20080513ATT28796EN.pdf>.

¹⁶ Including a new EU Committee (of high officials) on Internal Security (COSI), and changes in security-relevant Commission portfolios.

¹⁷ Iceland has been an exception since internal polarization tends to make its strongest NATO supporters anti-EU, and EU supporters sometimes sceptical about NATO. Younger thinkers are, however, starting to see the value of multi-institutional support for such a small and isolated nation.

other more 'Atlanticist' members of both institutions have sometimes openly tried to cut EU ambitions down to size to protect NATO.¹⁸ In Europe's north, by contrast, the small size and asymmetrical plight of all Nordic and Baltic states gives them all a basic stake in the *multilateralization* of regional security governance. Whether they articulate this as a policy principle or not,¹⁹ their natural strategy is to explore every institutional framework for maximum profit, either as full members or partners: provided of course – and here the other Northern peculiarity comes in – that the price to be paid is not too high in terms of sovereign freedom and national identity. Thus, Norway has exploited all forms of security relationship with the EU short of membership, including contributing to peace missions under the European Security and Defence Policy (now the Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP)²⁰, and Finland and Sweden do the same with NATO. All three of these countries have, moreover, supported EU-NATO compatibility and worked for positive synergy and the defusing of institutional tensions wherever they could. The Baltic States may initially have been less impressed by the EU as a security player, but they have never tried to obstruct the CSDP or abstain from its missions, and have recently been given a harsh insight into the importance of economic security where the EU was their most obvious front-line protector.

The deep strategic reality is that all the states of the region have relied, and still rely for their survival and comfort, on the more vulnerable Northern territories getting the protection they need. Sweden and Finland benefited as much as anyone did from NATO's success in maintaining regional balance and deterrence throughout the Cold War. Nowadays, the Baltics' alliance status protects the Eastern Baltic basin just as surely as Sweden and Finland's abstaining from NATO membership has helped to keep tensions low – and indirectly, to limit the strain on national defence resources – throughout the region. These are pointers to the fact that lack of Nordic unity may be not only compatible with, but perhaps integral to the way the region's security is assured – in 21st century conditions no

¹⁸ The only nearby state recently behaving this way is Poland, which – for instance – tried hard in 2007–2008 to give NATO a lead role in energy security. Denmark made EU defence one of its four opt-outs from the Maastricht Treaty, but Danish elite and popular opinion has turned round since and hopes to scrap the optouts to allow deeper engagement in EU security work.

¹⁹ In Finland and Norway, while the elite see the need for multilateral back-up clearly, there is also a cultural disposition to stress self-reliance and favour a bilateral adjustment to 'living with' the Eastern challenge. Sweden is also more sincerely multilateralist on global issues than in its choices at home.

²⁰ This change of nomenclature was contained in the Treaty of Lisbon.

less than in the Cold War. To take a further example, in the mid-1990s when the Nordic States declined to create a defence community themselves with the three Baltic States but settled into a common policy of promoting the latter's entry into NATO,²¹ this could be seen as a lack of neighbourliness and a step back from regional unity. It can also and more correctly be read as a pragmatic recognition that only big-power guarantees could shield the newfound independence of the South-East Baltic coast, and that securing this new potential grey zone was vital for the whole region's accustomed balance and stability.

It seems safe to conclude, then, that no one in this region could want NATO to fail in its strategy-writing exercise, or to decline too fast in relative status, within the European architecture or globally. Furthermore, the Nordics would like to see aspirations for closer NATO-EU dialogue and cooperation written into policy manifestos from both sides, and the Baltics should not strongly disagree. Secondly, and more substantially, it would seem to be an objective interest for the entire region that NATO's future policies should be strong, united, and shrewd enough to hold at bay whatever residual strategic threat exists from Russia as a consequence either of Russia's aggressive self-assertion of or of its weaknesses and possible collapse. If US *military* inputs and assurances are needed to this end, it is through renewal and adjustment of NATO's fundamental mutual defence agenda that these must be secured.

It is here, however, that the problems and complications start. First, the Nordic/Baltic community cannot lobby in NATO as a bloc because of Swedish and Finnish non-membership. It is telling that the one official seminar these states were allowed to host during the Strategic Concept consultation process was on peace missions and crisis management, free of any reference to Europe's own needs.²² The region's countries that do have a 'vote' in NATO are among the Alliance's smallest members in population terms. They do not have any intrinsic means of leverage over the USA, *when and if* Washington has decided that the boundary between them and Russia is not a point of keen strategic concern for itself. At the moment, the USA is taking a relatively relaxed approach even to the issue of future control of an ice-free Arctic where Norway, at the least, has an influential part to

²¹ The idea of a Nordic/Baltic pact had been mooted by the British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and the US analyst Ron Asmus (who later changed his view and helped to guide the Baltics into NATO).

²² The event was held in Helsinki on 4 March 2010, see http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/events_61864.htm.

play.²³ After 9/11, the Bush Administration offered a new chance for Europeans to gain its favour – and they might hope, some extra strategic protection – by joining its ‘coalitions’ to attack Afghanistan and Iraq at a time when their neighbours were reluctant or hostile. The three Baltic States and Denmark duly made full use of this, and Norway and Iceland on a lesser scale. Today, however, what Washington wants most urgently in Afghanistan are substantial counter-insurgency troops that no one from Northern Europe can supply, while in the medium term it is clear that Obama’s team are neither likely to start another controversial invasion nor particularly interested in splitting Europe again. If the Alliance’s leading power neither worries much about the North *per se* nor has cause to pay the region’s states for *ad hoc* political favours, the laws of politics make it unlikely that Northern voices will dominate in strategy debates.

Where Northern demands are similar to those of larger Central European members – notably Poland – there is more chance of their being heard; and this is why the revised NATO Concept is more likely than not to include agreement on measures to signal concern and solidarity towards the Alliance’s new peripheries. Clearer guidelines on consultation in national/local crises, more exercises (with local defence relevance), continued cooperative monitoring, updated reinforcement plans, and perhaps more infrastructure currently seem to be within the range of the possible. They are unlikely to satisfy the most nervous local states, but equally cannot be pushed too far without meeting objections from those Nordics who are more concerned about non-provocation and stability. For the fact is that the local states’ underlying stake in each others’ safety is far from leading them to agree on the best way to assure it. Rather, their prescriptions on individual policy choices differ according to their general security cultures as well as variables in their risk calculations. Even in the Cold War, the three Nordic Allies imposed limitations on the way NATO was allowed to defend them – no local nuclear or foreign force stationing, no exercises in Norway’s extreme north. Today, Norway is among the NATO states calling the loudest for a disarmament solution to the quandary over NATO’s tactical nuclear weapons, while Sweden would make this conditional on Russia’s also disarming, and the Baltic States want to keep the nuclear deterrent

²³ The US Arctic strategy adopted in late 2009 calls for peaceful exploitation and multilateral governance in the High North and discounts any imminent military competition. The USA has not yet signed the Law of the Sea Convention that would allow it to make territorial claims in polar seas, and would have only modest claims in connection with Alaska anyway.

posture unchanged.²⁴ On the Arctic, Sweden's analysis has tended to highlight new Russian threats while Norway and Iceland would like the Alliance to keep a non-provocative posture there and to show its 'softer' side (supporting search and rescue, etc). In short, the second weakness of any putative Northern lobby in the Alliance's current debates is that it is rarely united – with the usual fault lines running between the Baltics and the rest, or if the whole Baltic is included, between Poland and Germany.

It would not be hard to find similar cases during security-relevant debates in the EU. The limited success of the EU's Northern Dimension in its first incarnation (from 1999) has been ascribed to Finland's wanting to manipulate it too much for bilateral purposes. Poland stood alone in holding up an EU-Russia agreement in 2006 in protest against Russian behaviour over its meat exports. The above-mentioned regional variations in energy security have led the Baltic States to join Poland in strong protest against a Russian 'Nordstream' gas pipeline bypassing them to supply Germany, while Finland has been calm on the issue and Sweden – after debate – recently chose not to oppose it. Denmark more often than not agrees to disagree with Sweden and Finland on intra-EU issues including security-related ones.

Even so, the calculus of Northern interests and influence is interestingly different from the NATO case, starting with the fact that in the EU the US is absent and the range of alignment options correspondingly changed. There is a clearer North-South dialectic on several issues including the agricultural policy, transparency, budget control, foreign aid, gender policy and more. All countries do have the veto in foreign and security policy matters – as the cited Polish case shows – and two or more Northern states acting together have managed to visibly shape common policies in areas such as environmental governance or the civilian side of crisis management. In terms of influencing the EU's strategic development Swedish and Finnish non-alliance has not so far proved a handicap, while if anything the Baltic States have sometimes marginalized themselves through a too aggressive pro-US stance. Even Norway, as a non-member, appears to have made a real impact on the framing of the EU's Arctic strategies in a Commission paper of 2008 and Council of Ministers guidelines from December 2009.²⁵

²⁴ Chalmers, M., and Lunn, S., *NATO's Tactical Nuclear Dilemma*, RUSI Occasional Paper: London, March 2010.

²⁵ Texts at http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/press_rel201108_en.html and <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/loadDocument.aspx?id=1850&lang=EN&directory=EN/foraff/&fileName=111814.pdf>.

Greater openings for North European influence can, of course, only help the region's security if the EU has something to offer in that respect. The Union's non-military strengths are arguably less fully applicable in the Nordic/Baltic space than some other parts since levels of crime, terrorism, and other lawlessness are low, natural disasters and disease rarely (so far) cause such national disruption as in the Mediterranean, rich Northern societies need less subsidy from structural funds, and border control problems are mainly unidirectional with the old enemy – Russia and to some extent Belarus – as the culprit. As has been noted, stricter EU internal security rules can actually be felt as oppressive in Northern communities that feel less vulnerable and are keener on their liberties. EU support for nuclear safety improvements and the disposal of NBC waste in Russia's north has helped with a more existential Nordic concern but is not much known outside expert circles. EMU as a framework for financial and economic security has proved its worth to Finland but is not yet acceptable to Swedes or open to Baltic accession. Finally, while the EU has been a participant and supporter of the Baltic and Barents sub-regional groupings as well as the Northern Dimension's owner, this cuts both ways in terms of perception as any valuable EU inputs to these processes can be seen as helping Russia as much as or more than the Western members. The new Baltic Strategy that the EU is now working on is not likely to evade these contradictions even if it succeeds – as it should – in improving the definition of a 'soft security' agenda that can be shared by all Baltic neighbours, and for which the Union can bring real added value.

The reality is that despite Northern enthusiasm for some more modern discourses such as environmental security, the true strategic agendas of Nordic and Baltic states remain viscerally focused on national territorial survival. Just as the EU would struggle to replace NATO as a protector for all Europe in this sense, it could only start to be taken more seriously by its Northern members if it could show ability to act as a real restraint and transformative influence on Russia, and/or come to nations' aid in response to new forms of Eastern aggression. It cannot do either thing today, but does that mean it never will?

Aside from its internal policy divergences, the EU's problems in handling Russia are a compound of obvious military/strategic weakness and of its *sui generis* strength as a post-modern, in part genuinely supranational entity. Russia is even further along the scale than the Nordics in clinging to national identity and autonomy, with more reason (if shrinking evidence) to believe it can preserve them in a globalized world. It has been argued that the great bulk of its elite are simply

incapable of seeing what the EU is.²⁶ While that may not change soon or ever, the obvious way forward is for the EU to speak more in a language that Russia can understand, i.e. to define and protect its strategic interests almost as a nation might do, and then find ways of using its idiosyncratic strengths for leverage on disputed issues. The tactic has not been without success in some limited areas, e.g. in negotiations with Russia over Kaliningrad access before the 2004 enlargement, or when the Polish stance did actually drive Moscow to withdraw its meat embargo. Meanwhile, the EU may serve Europe and the North's stability in two other ways not open to NATO: through the much greater range of practical business it does daily with Russia in non-controversial fields, and through its ability to pose as mediator as seen in the Georgia ceasefire negotiations of 2008 and more recent interventions in Russia-Ukraine pipeline disputes.

Conclusions

It follows that if the Nordic/Baltic states could reach more common positions on their Russia-related security concerns, the EU might offer not only a more open ear than NATO, but real capacity to promote the goals in question - not by force but with its money-bags, functional assets, and non-zero-sum diplomacy. It is too early to write it off as a potential actor and defender of its members' interests in the Arctic, even if Russia currently hopes to keep it out.²⁷ Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, could the Lisbon Treaty's new 'solidarity' obligations develop into something tangibly underpinning local states' security? Against military attack, the answer for the moment is No; and if a Baltic state (for instance) called on EU partners to respond forcibly to a non-military emergency that it saw as Russia-provoked, it is doubtful whether Europe's larger, agenda-setting powers would want to face the evident escalatory risks involved. However, if the usually shrewd Finns are calling for Brussels to work seriously on Article 222 (non-military) 'solidarity' contingencies,²⁸ they must have some sense that building a habit of and capacity for mutual aid in more innocuous cases - say, natural disasters - might gradually

²⁶ Haukkala, H., *The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership: The limits of post-sovereignty in international relations*, Routledge: London, 2010.

²⁷ Bailes, A.J.K., Potential roles of NATO and the EU in High Northern Security, *Polar Law Yearbook 2010*, publication pending.

²⁸ Speech by Foreign Minister Stubb, 1 March 2010, at <http://formin.finland.fi/Public/Print.aspx?contentid=187846&nodeid=15145&culture=en-US&contentlan=2>

lead the EU towards a deeper sense of common responsibility for its members' survival against all hazards. At the least, showing a common readiness to explore the new clauses could be a way to raise useful new questions in Russian minds. Finally, if it were possible for any Nordic or Baltic elite to look unemotionally at the relative probability of threats and risks to their territory – as the students mentioned at the start were asked to do, but as is rarely possible in real politics – they would have to concede that the kind of crises the EU deals with (especially after Lisbon) are more likely and frequent than the direct armed threats still covered by NATO. However, they cannot be expected to cut NATO out of their answers until the latter have gone for good.