



**QUO VADIS NATO?**  
**THE FUTURE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC  
ALLIANCE THROUGH THE EYES OF  
SLOVAK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**



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The North-Atlantic Treaty Organization exists already for more than 50 years. It has gone through many changes since 1949, but its primary goal – assuring security and protection for its members – is still highly up to date and is taking a new direction in the current context of international terrorism and local conflicts. The Organization stands guarantor for security, political and economic stability and its membership is and always was one of the main goals of foreign policy for transforming countries of Middle and Easter Europe, e.g. as for now Georgia or western Balkans.

With the upcoming Riga summit, many dialogues have been raised about how to prepare the Organization for upcoming challenges. Many ideas, that have been written on the papers are really brave, counting not only on taking in “young European democracies”, but also on expanding its membership and missions far from the heart of Europe. This kind of expansive proposals may be attractive, but they would rather bring NATO to extinction than to renewal. NATO’s current agenda should concentrate on consolidation, not on chasing the global agenda, which leads only to overloading by its own obligations. There are some echoes that NATO is not able to overtake the global responsibility. Its potential is currently on the edge of its possibilities, mostly in the context of difficult situation in Afghanistan. The future of NATO is taking place in deserts and mountains of Afghanistan, and NATO does not have the choice to fail.

In the context with the advised ambitions of expansion, NATO is threatened not only by becoming overlarge, but mostly by becoming paralyzed by different strategic interests and perspectives of its members. It does not matter whether we consider Afghanistan, Iran, Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Lebanon, there already exist different political views not only between both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, but also between European member countries. By integrating new countries from absolutely different strategic scenes, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will become just more diverse and awkward. Instead of this, NATO should rather concentrate on, at first sight more modest and realistic, but more important aims – enhancing its own energetic capacities, consolidation of current missions, completing plans for expansion in southeast Europe and adapting its own institutions for new political reality. The European part of the Organization should be more flexible in the military areas to produce capable, moveable and maintainable units. The question stays whether Europe should rather concentrate on developing Battle Groups (in ERRF) or on producing and assuring effective functioning of the NATO Response Forces. I would personally choose the second option, which is more perspective for the future.

At first place, leaders of countries from the Old continent should be willing to send their soldiers to the front lines and help to carry the burden of casualties, what would make them an equal partner for the USA, so the United States, counting on the European support in every situation, would not be forced to find solutions by creating many ad hoc coalitions of the “able and willing”.

Difficulties, which have come up at the Afghani mission point out European military insufficiency and exactly by strengthening the European partners would secure bigger effect than by considered integrating of countries from the Pacific region. Not only France is afraid that the American influence on NATO is too strong and makes a stand against the global assignment, in

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which NATO establishes special partnership with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and other countries. These ambitions in eastern Asia could end in a discord with China or eventually with the whole Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is by many experts taken as a counterbalance to NATO.

The Security of NATO members is not inseparable anymore, as it was at the time of Cold War, when there was only one common interest and one common enemy. Today, particular countries are differently able and willing to take on tasks and carry out missions. NATO has to adapt itself to this reality and deploy a more flexible decision-making process. This kind of flexibility would not mean the violation of solidarity principles or multilateralism, but a practical step, which is crucial to keep NATO relevant in the new world order.

Another counter-argument for NATO's loss of significance would be the number of countries, which are applying for the membership, being aware of the benefits emerging from the position of the Organization membership, and on the other hand from the absence of adequate efficient alternative. NATO still has a stable position in keeping peace and stability in the world. At the same time, NATO will stand face to face against a new challenge – whether it will be an effective, capable and functioning counter pole to increasingly more important world players – Russia, China, Iran and eventually India. We, Europeans have to understand who our competitor is. Iran is becoming more powerful, with Russia and China. These three countries strengthen their military capabilities, but it does not exactly mean the preparation for a military conflict. These powers should in the first place be taken as a partner and it would be a mistake for NATO to understand them as a threat, though if we want to play a primary role on the global scene, the USA-EU partnership within NATO must be strong in every aspect and ready for any scenario. And our military capabilities of course influence also the position on the global and economic market... everything is related to everything. And that is why NATO should take the road, which makes a provision for every mentioned possibility and orientates itself on a strong partnership strategy.

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been established long before I was born, in the after war period, right when the world was being divided in two strong irreconcilable blocks. The primary reason, and by many the only one, for which NATO has been established, was to protect the so called capitalistic West against the expanding Soviet Union by military means. As it turned out after the fall of the Iron Curtain, or the whole USSR, the reason and need for existence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is still existing and its importance does not descend, vice versa ascend. During the Cold war, there were two blocks in two static positions standing face to face against each other, because the cards have been given for a long period. But the current world is completely different, it is changing rapidly and if the Alliance would stay unchanged since the past, it would lapse or it would just become another existing, but non-functional discussion club. NATO is a kind of cover, which protects its members. The whole military power is fortunately only the secondary method, because the most pressure from the Alliance is done by its own name. This symbol has been built for a long time, but the results and long term functioning of the Organization have assured itself the name of the biggest caliber. It is very important not to ruin this kind of credit, because only then it will be able to keep a protecting hand not only over its members, but also other countries without using weapons.

As the history has shown, NATO was not here not only because of the Cold war, it was something more. It is a society of states of the so called Western civilization, which share a common culture, traditions and principles as, for example democracy, freedom of the individual or rule of law, as is written in the introductory regulation of the North Atlantic Treaty from 4. 4. 1949. These states grow from common roots and it is important to connect them all under this umbrella, because the Alliance stands on the columns, which natural to all of these states. I see this as an important task for the upcoming future of the Alliance, to as much as possible integrate and strengthen this geographic region of states, which are developing near to each other for decades, even centuries. This territory is very easily to determine by the European continent (including the Great Britain, Ireland and Island) on one side and the North America on the other side. Here comes up the problem of Russia, which has common European roots, but for more than 1000 years (since the eastern schism from 1054) it has undergone a different progress.

Unsure is also the position of Turkey, what should be its status in the Alliance. The importance of this Euro-Asian country is for the Alliance only in the political and military-strategic area. The value orientation of these countries is so different, that it would be better to sign a treaty with them about so called special membership or a status of some kind of observer, tasks of which would be set in advance and would relate only to some strategic areas, lucrative for both sides. I think that a full-value membership of these countries would fundamentally change the look and also one of the main pillars of NATO. I would see the future in a strong, connected and united Europe, together with both countries from North America and in finding certain status for Turkey and Russia, because these are countries, which are closest to this kind of demarcated Western civilization, even though they are not its integrated belonging, because it does not only stand on military-secure ground, but as well as on common values, culture or economics. The role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is to protect international peace and security, mostly of the member states, which grow from common Hellenistic-roman and Christian roots, by their common proceedings (article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty). Though it does not only stand for an organization based on rough force and power of weapons, because it would then be a very unstable and unsecure grouping. This organization has to have a strong philosophical basis



that would affect every member, only this is the subsoil that a strong alliance can be built on, without the need of enemy to survive. Many pessimists claimed that NATO was here just because communism was here. But that had fallen and the Alliance is still standing. We can see its power here, because it does not need to have a reserved stance against somebody, just to have an enemy, which would give it the right to survive.

If the Alliance will be able to integrate European states which are not members yet, it will create a strong, solid and fortified corpus that will dominate the world for a long time and play an important role in peace-keeping and observing human rights everywhere in the world. NATO is assuring the security for the whole so called West, but a strong competitive environment is evolving within its framework, between USA and the European Union. In close future, even more compact blocks will be formed in the scope of economic competition between North America and Europe. Exactly this competition will, while establishing common defense, will push the whole block forward in comparison to the rest of the world. Later on, when NATO will solidly mark out its pillars and borders, a greater space will come up for internal treaties and possibilities for adjusting an effective functioning. The system itself, which is now functional in the Alliance, is in a long-term point of view unsustainable, because it is very unfair and one-sided. The dominant position of the United States in the field of armament and the amount of finances, which they are investing, assure a substantial power and fighting power of the whole Alliance. Exactly this status will not be able to sustain in close future, if Europe's attitude to its own defense policy will not change. The whole Europe, which by the way has a half bigger population, invests to armament less than USA. The same inequality is also in the expenses for NATO countries defense, where US expenses are approximately 50 % higher than expenses of all European NATO members. It is crucial that an agreement, that will determine the rates of financial participation in defense and development fairly, is concluded. It is not sufficient if the members adopt the agreement; it has to be adopted through a very wide and social consensus, so that the stability will not depend on the result of polls held in the member countries. Interest of all the countries has to be similar, so that no harsh feelings will appear. This task is very difficult to accomplish, but on the other hand very necessary and EU should be the strongest motive power and not to put it head in the sand as it I now.

Thanks to financial consensus the spirit of transatlantic partnership may evolve in a vital way, because it will no longer be burden with problems resulting from financing. This fusion between "old Europe" and "free" America is excessively balanced and forms one big and cool-headed unit. As long as US have been strongly idealistic since the times of Wilson, Europe also thanks to Cardinal Richelieu or Bismarck is more realistic and tends to solve conflicts in a more diplomatic way in comparison to USA. Mutual unification of these characteristics creates a very positive image, because every party contributes with the best it has had in its long tradition. But Europe is a territory full of various nations, bigger or smaller. Every one of these nations is different from the other and unique and every one of them can contribute with something new and different. This is where I see a huge space for using this variegation and richness. Alliance should use the determinateness and a long-term specialization of every nation to the profit of the whole alliance. Outstanding reputation for Slovak Republic was earned thanks to Slovak sappers, who were helpful in demining of many hectares of mine fields, e. g. its neighboring country, Czech Republic, has a superb anti-chemical troops etc. This is the path that Alliance should follow - to fold up a huge mosaic from little parts. This mosaic would be highly professional, specialized, capable of being exerted anywhere in the world immediately and all that executed with all the member countries involved in it. All because it is very important, that every single citizen of a



member country realizes the purpose and relevance of the Alliance, not only in the past, present and future.

I hope that the future of the Alliance will correspond with my visions at most.

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Where is NATO heading? What is lying in his future and what assignments should it be on? All of these are serious questions, which keep bothering many politicians and analysts through out all the years since cold war has ended.

Collapse of bipolar system of international relations has disrupted the traditional view of NATO's aims - seeing it as an organization of collective security arrayed against the socialistic military bloc also known as Warsaw pact and its main leader, the Soviet Union. Communistic system didn't turn out to be viably, Soviet Union lost the fight for world domination and Warsaw pact, which has lost relevance, as a grouping of countries was dismissed.

In the aftermath of these events NATO and its future came to question again. Against whom and what exactly will NATO be protecting its members? Right after the fall of bipolarity many idealistic theories about the future occurred. Most of them hoping that right after the end of bipolarity a new, safer world will come to life, world of peace and multilateralism, world that has no need for an organization such as NATO.

This mindset is perfectly exemplified in this joke: „What does NATO stand for? Now Almost Totally Obsolete. “

Needless to say that this opinion is well- founded. Former enemy, which caused the need of the protection of member countries, exists no more and traditional military threats pointed to the NATO members are minimal in the present time.

Anyways NATO did not defunct nor was it marginalized. The other way round historical changes after the year of 1989 caused a call for transformation of NATO and its duties. And that is how it is possible to witness NATO intervening in territories that do not come under clause 5 of North-Atlantic treaty (Kosovo, 1999). Also the alliance is engaged in peace missions in many critical regions of the world such as Balkan, or Afghanistan (again not under clause 5, which allows NATO operations only on its own territory).

It is obvious that present NATO is different from NATO of yesterday. Still debates on its transformation are unceasing. It is said that there are new, asymmetric threats, which present world has to face and it is crucial to find out how NATO is supposed to deal with these threats. This issue was main topic of NATO Summit in Riga agenda held in November 2006. The same count also for the NATO Summit in 2008.

Transformation of organization that consists of 26 members and is still looking to increase the member count is not an easy process. It is long term and complex process, in which all member countries have to find the answer to following questions:

- What's the main aim of the alliance?
- What are the instruments of the Alliance and how they should be used?
- How is the Alliance frame- work limited?

Existing trend by far gives us the answer on third question. NATO in the present time in comparison to times of cold war isn't bound to any region. Clause 5 is not substantiating anymore, nowadays majority of alliance operation are known as out-of-area operations.

As for the first question speaking of new role of Alliance, pragmatic would ask in this way: "Who or what is currently the enemy of NATO or its member countries as the former enemy doesn't exist anymore? Why do member countries still need protection? You might raise an objection, that by peace-missions lead by NATO, you cannot talk about an "enemy". Yes, that is true but on the other hand let us not forget that according to basic NATO document it is a grouping of collective security and protection and if one protects someone or something, he at least has a clue who or what enemy is.

9/11 events helped to define the "enemy" of the Alliance in a remarkable way – those are asymmetric threats and especially terrorism among them. You may find also spreading weapons of mass destruction, failing states and other problems among the problems.

But still it comes to question how to solve these problems and how to oppose these threats. Threats that are less foreseeable and predictable than standard threat of military attack lead by foreign country or countries. Relative to the fact that the biggest threat is represented by non-state figures, it is not possible to oppose them with army forces – considered being the tool of politicians, are used to withstand foreign armed forces and not a trickle of so called terrorists who use completely different warfare tactics. If NATO is to be effective when facing these threats the whole alliance has to exert all military and non- military forces, civil forces inclusive. But when talking about NATO transformation in this way, when it is not completed and answered in a proper way yet, it may be considered as walking on a thin ice. It is a matter of future Alliance character and also is deeply connected with the issue of transatlantic relations meaning the cooperation between NATO and European Union.

The question is whether NATO is supposed to remain a solely military organization or if it should get transformed to a military- civil structure. Answer to this question in my opinion also determines future structure of NATO- EU relations. European Union nowadays strengthens its position in military field. Expression of this trend is European security and protection policy and also every single aspect of its activities. Most noticeable peace missions lead by the European Union. From the US (considered being the most important NATO member) point of view, EU has started to compete with NATO since Saint – Malo Summit and has also started to intervene in the sphere of NATO's influence. Of course, at the present state of military capacity in Europe when comparing it with USA and understanding EU as a non- military and not a security assemblage, NATO dominates this sphere. But USA is afraid that EU might start to rear its head in the future, what would mean lowering the legitimacy of NATO's existence. That would lead to lower effectiveness of NATO as a tool of driving USA's hard bargain not only among the member countries, but also in those parts of the world, where NATO acts as a peacemaker.