

POST-AFGHANISTAN NATO - QUO VADIS NATO?

AZ AFGANISZTÁN UTÁNI NATO - MERRE TARTASZ NATO?

Egy évvel a 2014. december 31-i kivonulási határidő előtt aktuálissá válik a kérdés: „hogyan tovább?” Cikkem során elemzem azokat a lehetőségeket, melyek a NATO-ra várnak, miután befejezi afganisztáni műveletei döntő többségét, véget vetve ezzel jelenlegi legnagyobb szabású feladatvállalásának. A határidő adott, a kérdés azonban, hogy milyen szerepet vállaljon a világ legerősebb (azonban olcsónak távolról sem nevezhető) katonai szövetsége, hogy megőrizhesse releváns helyzetét, még válaszra vár.

One year before the 31. December 2014. deadline of withdrawal the question of ‘What is next?’ is becoming a current issue. In the course of my article I will analyse the possibilities awaiting NATO after it puts an end to a significant majority of its operations in Afghanistan, thus finishing its largest current mission. The deadline is drawn, however the question, what role the most powerful (but not even remotely cheap) military alliance of the World may take in order to maintain its relevant position, is yet to be answered.

In 2001 the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France and the Afghan United Front launched ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ without proper U.N. authorization on the initiative of the United States claiming that it is a measure taken out of necessity of protecting the American homeland against possible terrorist attacks after 9/11. Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 adopted in 2001 the International Security Assistance Force was established with the participation of 42 NATO and non-NATO member states¹ with the objective of facilitating the idea of a democratic state in Afghanistan thus dealing with terrorism in the region.

At the Lisbon Summit in 2010 the members agreed with President Karzai (Afghanistan) that transfer of responsibility for Afghan security to Afghan National Security Forces is of primary importance.² A conference held in Bonn (Petersberg conference), 2011 also reaffirmed and facilitated the objectives envisaged in the Lisbon (2010) and Chicago summit declaration (2012) that have been the latest political steps towards the ultimate goal of withdrawing forces from Afghanistan. According to military experts a gloomy future is waiting for Afghanistan after NATO completes the gradual withdrawal from the region and Afghan armed forces will be left alone to handle the situation in the country.

It is beyond doubt an interesting question what will happen to Afghanistan without significant NATO support and contribution but another even more interesting question is ‘What will happen to NATO when it completes its largest current mission?’. A bit more than a year before the 2014- deadline drawn in 2010 I find the question of ‘Quo Vadimus?’ a current and important subject of analysis.

According to a recent analysis there are several options for NATO regarding the next few years or even decade. Among the possible ‘next steps’ there are peaceful ones and those that may involve military intervention as well. Here is a list of potential policies that can possibly be pursued by the greatest political and military alliance of the World:³

1) Waiting game:

The essence of waiting game is to stay put for a while until necessity for any kind of military intervention in NATO’s area of interest arises. 14 out of 59 participants of a survey (involving only experts) carried out by the

¹ <http://www.nato.int/isaf/structure/nations/index.html>

² http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm?mode=pressrelease

³ http://bosco.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/13/what_happens_to_nato_after_afghanistan

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Atlantic Conference⁴ in 2012 voted that NATO's primary goal should be the collective defence of Europe. Bosnia's stabilization was handed over to EUFOR and in the Balkans NATO is only present in Kosovo with less than 6000 troops. Though for some time it will keep the organization busy, it surely will not be enough to provide the ground for a primary mission. As long as the alliance overcomes current hardships in Europe it has the time to prepare for its next greater mission. The question that sets most minds into thinking is 'where'.

Recent conflicts between Syria and Turkey have been really harsh including inter-state artillery shelling claiming civilian lives and the shooting of a Turkish fighter jet that accidentally violated Syrian airspace. The latter kind of retaliation is hard for such infringements (that are quite common by both parties anyway) but I doubt it would be enough to invoke a full-scale war between the two countries. The reaction of NATO was quick and determinate: They deployed six Patriot missile batteries in Turkey for defensive purposes. Though the reaction is not among the most peaceful ones it is still a defensive measure and a NATO intervention is not likely as Iran immediately expressed that 'an attack on Syria would be regarded as a strike against Iran and its allies'. Another significant factor is Russia who will veto every U.N.S.C. resolution and since it also regards Syria as an ally it would provoke further oppositions that would deteriorate NATO-Russia relations which is not a current NATO goal either.

For similar reasons a war against Iran is unlikely: although the 'rouge state's' nuclear program is considered by Israel as threateningly quickly proceeding, a war against Iran would have unpredictable recoils: It may start at a tactical or strategic level but it would almost immediately involve political and economic effects as well. If the U.S. started a war together with Israel against Iran (it is possible only without U.N. authorization) then it would set Iran's allies into motion as well, let alone the effects of a war on crude oil prices⁵ (and American Stock Exchange). No wonder that the Obama Administration would like to postpone any open military engagement with Iran as long as possible.

The above mentioned hotspots of international military relations draw a lot of attention from NATO, but in the current circumstances they probably will not be the scenes of NATO's primary mission.

If the 'waiting game' theory proves to be true then the next step is quite unclear but it will probably take place in those parts of Africa where the Arab Spring had a more violent effect, and where pure violence (just like always) has not bred any real solution.

2) To turn East:

Another theory suggests that NATO will regain its original role as a protective shield for Europe against Russia, which step by step starts to regain its military potential and has recently leaked information about installing missile systems in Kaliningrad, its Southern exclave (NATO installed batteries of patriot missiles in Poland as well). It may have some truth but I think it is not probable either. Russia in itself is surely not ready to challenge NATO in Europe. Though it carried out a few military reforms it will take at least a decade to settle the problems of its corruption-infested army. The other and more important reason that makes a possible Russian missile threat the subject of doubt is that it provides the Entire European Union (and those who are not members as well) with gas⁶ (it covers about 40% of the market) and it has no particular interest in the involvement of any direct military campaign against its own clients (at least concerning the next couple of decades). Though NATO partly has its original goal, I do not think that this goal can regain its primary importance, thus providing a cohesive objective for the coalition.

⁴ http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/14/expert_survey_the_future_of_nato

⁵ <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article-bd.cfm?piece=982>

⁶ <http://www.euractiv.com/energy/geopolitics-eu-energy-supply-links-dossier-188354>

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3) New Security Threats:

Non- American NATO members are often criticized for not having the proper means to address 'new and emerging threats'. It is true that this aspect of security requires a lot of development in Europe especially now that Russia has successfully applied cyber warfare against Georgia⁷. These kinds of so called denial of service attacks (DDoS) are not yet common, and in case of Georgia, European countries (Poland; Estonia; the Ukraine)⁸ could provide technological support by 'mirroring' web pages blocked by Russian hackers but are we prepared for a full scale cyber-attack? This is only one of the 'new and emerging threats' that requires 'comprehensive approach' as often reiterated by NATO officials (even in Lisbon Summit Declaration⁹). Since these threats are relatively new, European NATO member states have to spend a lot of energy and resources on developing these capabilities. Though it takes a lot of effort I do not think it will keep the whole mechanism of NATO in motion as it is only one and a relatively new segment of security and the coalition still has to address the long-existing ones. Furthermore, the expertise needed in this case is less military (in its traditional sense), it is rather technological.

4) Go Global:

The 90's and early 2000's were the times of Partnership for Peace and NATO enlargement in Europe and after the end of cold war it provided a primary aim for NATO which meant that it could remain relevant. According to 'Go Global' theory NATO should reconsider its policy of membership adoption and look further than its present day boundaries. Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeyer suggested that NATO membership should be granted to every country that has a stable democratic political system.¹⁰ It would certainly give NATO a whole new primary aim for at least five years but would a global expansive policy lead to success in the long run? Hasn't history shown us examples that empires (though NATO cannot be called one, as it lacks the proper cohesion from many aspects that is required for the above mentioned title) which pursued an excessive and long term expansive policy sooner or later collapsed under their own weight? A growth at a scale mentioned by the two American politicians would enlarge NATO in size but at the cost of its relatively strong cohesion.

5) Slow fade:

According to George Will¹¹ NATO is dying. He predicted the same thing in 1999 on the 50th anniversary of signing the Washington Treaty. He claims that the original goal of NATO does not exist anymore and the alliance is losing its real importance and relevance in the post-cold war World. He may be right in the long run if we consider that spending less and less on defence expenditures has become a tendency popular with Western countries but at this moment I doubt that in these circumstances the most powerful alliance of the World (with the greatest military potential) will be simply put on a shelf to gather dust. In the volatile situation created by the Arab Spring it is only a matter of time until military intervention is needed in order to establish a humanitarian and democratic political system.

ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan will open a whole new chapter in NATO's history. It has to cope with both conventional and non-conventional difficulties of the modern World and it has to find a role that will make it possible to maintain its relevant position.

⁷ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/08/22/you-ve-got-malice.html>

⁸ <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2008/08/civilge-the-geo/>

⁹ http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm

¹⁰ <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61922/ivo-daalder-and-james-goldgeier/global-nato>

¹¹ http://bosco.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/18/george_will_thinks_natos_dying_thats_what_he_thought_in_1999_too

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Kulcsszavak: NATO, biztonság, védelem, fenyegetések

Keywords: NATO, security, defence, threats

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