

New CER working paper

WHAT FUTURE FOR NATO?

By Stanley Sloan and Peter van Ham

What is NATO for? With war looming against Iraq, seven new members set to join the Alliance and a growing transatlantic gap in military power, NATO's role as the world's most effective military alliance is at stake. The Prague Summit on 21-22 November must provide a clear answer. But American and European views on NATO's future are diverging sharply.

Americans stress that NATO can only survive if it accepts the 'new missions' of tackling international terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Europe must improve its military capabilities and prepare to operate 'out of area' – or America will simply not take it seriously.

Europeans feel that America is sidelining NATO. Washington first decides its global strategy, and then looks for European political support and specific military contributions in an ad hoc manner.

NATO's role in an Iraqi war – for instance in organising a post-Saddam peacekeeping force – will be a litmus test. Can NATO remain relevant if, after Afghanistan, it also does not play a role in Iraq? Can the Pentagon overcome its aversion to 'war by committee'? Will Europe support NATO to go so dramatically 'out of area'?

Stanley Sloan and Peter van Ham, two senior security policy analysts, analyse NATO's predicament – and suggest two very different futures for the Alliance. Sloan makes the case for deep NATO reform. He calls upon America to curb its unilateral instincts and on Europe to beef up its 'hard power' capabilities. NATO must go 'global' to deal with security threats wherever they emerge. And NATO's command structure should shift from a geographic to a functional focus.

Peter van Ham argues that the divergence between the US and Europe in 'strategic perspectives' is here to stay – and that consequently NATO's role as a meaningful defence alliance is finished. As a result, Europe must learn to stand on its own political feet, for example by developing a European Strategic Concept. Strengthening the EU's foreign and security policy would be more fruitful than complaining about America or pretending that institutional tinkering will revitalise the alliance of old.

Note for editors:

1. Stanley Sloan is founder and director of the Atlantic Community initiative. Previously he was senior analyst for the Congressional Research Service and the CIA.
2. Peter van Ham is Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.