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## **Pondering NATO's future**

**By Stanley R. Sloan**

When the NATO nations meet in Strasbourg, France and Kiehl, Germany, early in April, their leaders will be surrounded by a variety of assumptions about their alliance. A number of ideas about the trans-Atlantic alliance have persisted for virtually the entire 60 years since the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. Some assumptions have developed more recently, particularly during the crisis in the alliance brought to a head by the policies of George W. Bush. Perhaps alliance leaders should start by questioning these assumptions.

The alliance has always been more than what goes on in and what is done by NATO. Granted, the North Atlantic Treaty contains clear statements of the values and commitments that give meaning to the relationship. However, NATO has never been given the mandate or the tools to deal effectively with all the security requirements of its member states. Most importantly, NATO does not provide the framework for the use of nonmilitary instruments of national power and influence. Increasingly, it is such tools that are required for dealing with contemporary security issues.

NATO and the United States do hard power, the European Union does soft power. Particularly during the Bush administration, but before as well, some observers argued that it would be logical for the EU to concentrate on "soft power," the ability to get other nations to do what you wish with friendly persuasion rather than forceful coercion. The U.S. and NATO, according to this perspective, should concentrate on the use of force to defend common security interests.

This seemed a logical division of tasks, but it was always a false dichotomy. The damage done by the Bush administration has not been completely repaired, but the Obama administration's approach to security, has helped re-fill the once-deep well of American soft power.

So today, even if NATO is not designed to deploy soft power, the United States is well-positioned to use its powers of persuasion once again with as much potential impact, if not more, than the EU. A balanced relationship, of course, would be one in which both Washington and its European allies made coordinated soft and hard power contributions to security.

It is increasingly conventional wisdom to observe that failure to stabilize Afghanistan could destroy NATO. Taking on command of the International Security Assistance Force took in Afghanistan took NATO well beyond its European confines. The allies

have found the challenges posed by terrain, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda daunting. However, the biggest challenge has been confronting the different attitudes that make the NATO effort anything but "united." Does this say more about the flaws of the alliance or the challenges of the mission? If Afghanistan is not stabilized, is it a failure for NATO? For the United States? For the EU? For the United Nations?

In any case, whether or not NATO will continue after Afghanistan will likely depend on much more than the outcome in the Hindu Kush.

It is reasonable to see the advent of the Obama administration as the potential salvation for the trans-Atlantic alliance. The posture the president and his people have taken toward international cooperation, multilateral institutions, allies and even dialogue with adversaries, has elevated the dialogue among the allies. But important problems will persist. Perhaps the most difficult will be an old nemesis in new clothing: burden-sharing.

There is no question that the United States has always carried the biggest load in the alliance. The Obama administration appears wisely to be lowering expectations about how much more military force the Europeans can bring to bear in Afghanistan, but Washington will not reduce the pressure for European contributions without caveats and more generous nonmilitary contributions.

The NATO summit in April probably should really be a NATO/EU summit because the future of the security relationship depends increasingly on coordination of efforts in the two institutional frameworks. President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to bring France back into NATO's integrated command structure removes one obstacle to making such cooperation more effective.

However, the most realistic conventional wisdom, and the apparent attitude of President Obama, is that the future of the relationship will depend on whether or not NATO and EU members are determined to make it work, rather than spending time debating how it should work.

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