

Post September 11, 2001, NATO has redefined its threat perceptions. It is drawing up a new "military concept" to define its role in the fight against global terrorism. In a meeting held in Brussels on May 30, 2002, NATO began a process of preparing a package of measures to be agreed in the upcoming summit in Prague in November 2002, to make itself "relevant for threats and security challenges that may lie far beyond the borders of Europe."

The September 11, 2001 incident in New York has also affected the nature of NATO-Russia relations and NATO's future agenda. The formation of the NATO-Russia Council to replace the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) heralds a new era of cooperation between the two, and could be seen in the context of increasing dependence of Western countries on Russia's support to solve global problems affecting them at large. Unlike the PJC, the newly formed Council will provide Russia a role in NATO military planning and operations as long as no NATO member state dissents. However, Russia still lacks veto over the decision making in the said council, and its inclusion could more ably be described as of a mere consultative nature.

According to the Declaration by heads of state and government of NATO member states and the Russian Federation in Rome, Italy on May 28, 2002, the NATO-Russia Council will focus on all areas of mutual interest identified in the Declaration. This include: joint cooperation in the struggle against terrorism; crisis management; non-proliferation; arms control and confidence building measures; theatre missile defense; search and rescue at sea; military-to-military cooperation and civil emergencies; and new threats and challenges.

The main focus, thus, remained on the joint struggle against terrorism from "Vancouver to Vladivostok" as described by the NATO's Secretary General, George Robertson on May 28, through application of a "multi-faceted approach".

Mr. Robertson described the establishment of NATO-Russia Council as an "exercise in collective self interest", while the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, described it as "partners in the face of this new (terrorism) threat." British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, described the cooperation as more than symbolic and that "it could make an enormous difference in the war on terrorism."

NATO, therefore, is working to make itself relevant for threats and security challenges that may lie far beyond the borders of Europe that it guarded during the Cold War. At the NATO Defence Ministers Conference on Capabilities on June 6, 2002, in Brussels it was decided that they should draw a new "military concept" to define its "military role in relation to terrorism", and put an end to the identity crisis. The final statement on the capabilities said, "[We] are committed to providing NATO with the capabilities to carry out the full range of its missions. This requires the further adaptation of our defense and military means, especially in the light of the evolving security environment, and review, as necessary, of our structures, and allocation of resources, including within common-funded military budgets. Last September's attacks against the United States, and the clarity they brought about the threat posed by terrorism, have increased both the urgency of this adaptation, and the importance of those aspects relevant to new threats." The joint statement also said, "NATO must be able to field forces for its missions that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives. The range of actions which NATO will be able to take in the future in response to terrorism and other challenges will depend on the success of our efforts to modernize the Alliance's military capabilities."

Although Russia and NATO continue to have divergent views on many international issues, but there are some areas where Russia-NATO cooperation can occur. For example, fight against international terrorism, and eliminating weapons of mass destruction, are increasingly becoming the driving force

behind NATO's future role. In the context of these two issues, the West views South Asia and the Middle East as a troubling spot plagued with both the problems: the simmering conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir; and the worsening security environment in the Middle East are of great concern to them.

NATO and South Asia

With respect to Pakistan and India, NATO's fears are based upon the political tensions prevailing between the two, that has the potential to escalate into a military confrontation, with the possibility of a nuclear exchange. Moreover, the West fears that any future instability in Pakistan could culminate either in the shape of a civil war, or the rise of rightist elements – at best Islamists - at the helm of affairs, which could affect West's war on the fight against international terrorism. Since Pakistan is a de facto nuclear state, there are fears of disruption of the nuclear command and control and their possible shifting in irresponsible and unsafe hands. All the three areas mentioned are on the list of areas of co-operation in the NATO Russia Council. Thus, Russia's and NATO concerns were explicit during the Rome summit, when NATO members immediately used their combined weight to urge India and Pakistan to "de-escalate and to resume talking."

However, the West has an understanding that Pakistan's President, Musharraf's sincere efforts at curbing LOC infiltration, banning religious militant outfits, and West's demand of closing down alleged mujahideen training camps will backlash if an obdurate and obstinate India do not reciprocate Pakistan's sincere gestures. Part of any answer, beyond the negotiations, is an international military presence to help ensure peace and enforce a settlement.

The recent offer by the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, during his South Asian visit in June this year, to place US and British troops to monitor LOC was spurned by India. Nevertheless, this could be viewed as the Westerners attempt to place peacekeeping observers to affect a solution of the Kashmir dispute. There is a possibility of placement of NATO troops on LOC if both countries agree to such an arrangement, or at least the troops will be derived from the NATO countries.

Russia's stakes in the South Asian region are quite high. This was evident at the CICA summit held in Almaty from June 3-5, where President Putin tried to bring India and Pakistan on the negotiating table. For Russia, this was a chance to reassert its role as a major power in the region by offering itself as a mediator. Although this effort did fail at Almaty, but nevertheless the possibility exists as Russia is at good terms with India. Both the US and Russia have converging interests in the region. The earlier US proposal in June to jointly monitor the LOC with British troops was rejected by India. Such a presence would have helped NATO in monitoring China, as well as increase presence in the near abroad of the Caspian Sea region. As regards Russia, its main objective is to align itself with the West, apart from playing an important regional role. However, any future role played by Russia in South Asia could be detrimental since it is a "strategic partner" of India. Although Russia took a bold initiative by mediating between both the countries at the CICA conference in Almaty in June 2002, but Russia's foreign ministry continued to unequivocally support India's position vis-à-vis "cross-border attacks". Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Losyukov's statement in Moscow on May 30, 2002, that the "Russian side supports the position of India" and that "Pakistan must take the first step in calming the situation" and ending "cross-border attacks" is an ample proof of this. Trampling on the right of self-determination for Kashmir and labelling it as a renegade secessionist movement would help in equating Chechnen movement as a rebellion, which could give Russia a free hand in crushing the indigenous freedom movement. Russia has strategic relations with India, and Pakistan might turn out to be at a disadvantageous position in case Russia wants to take a firmer action on the Kashmir conflict.

NATO and the Middle East

With regard to the Middle East, there are two major problems inviting the world's attention: Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on ethnic nationalism; and the US declaring Iraq and Iran as forming the "axis of evil".

With respect to the Palestinian issue, serious differences exist between the US, and other NATO members including Russia. The EU and Russia resents the way the US is handling the Middle Eastern problem, and extending all out support to Israel. The most recent rift emerged when the US President Bush came out with his "vision" of the Palestinian solution, envisaging a must-change in the leadership of the Palestinian Authority (PA). However, Russia and other major European countries came out strongly against the said US Plan. There are bleak chances of NATO being involved in any kind of a limited or all-out operation in the conflict due to the fact that neither of the two major concerns of NATO – terrorism and weapons of mass destruction – are not a threat, as the hapless PA has neither the WMD, and their struggle is mostly through small arms. To the contrary, it is Israel which possesses the WMD, but since it is a junior partner of the US in the M.E, therefore it does not pose a threat to the US interests. Moreover, the violence stemming out from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is largely confined within the boundaries of Israel.

As regards the US definition of Iran and Iraq forming an "axis of evil", the US, and the EU along with Russia are wide apart on this issue. The US think that both countries are producing weapons of mass destruction, and could prove to be detrimental to Israel and the US security in the near or distant future. However, the EU and Russia have constructive engagement linkages with Iran, and are totally against a military solution to deal with Iraq and Iran. Russia had close economic relations with Iraq in the Cold War era, and even in the post-Gulf War of 1991. The Russian interests stems from the Soviet era debt which Iraq owes to the successor Russia, and in preserving its interests in ensuring future oil contracts with Iraq, and lucrative Food for Oil contracts.

Although Russia understands the seriousness of Bush regime in overthrowing Iraq's regime, it will only acquiescence if its economic interests are guaranteed in any future change in Iraqi regime. With respect to NATO, the US has unequivocally stated its intention to go alone in attacking Iraq. Thus, NATO could be sidelined in this action. According to a report appearing in the New York Times, on July 5, 2002, the US is in an advanced stage of planning to launch an attack against Iraq involving about 250,000 air, land and sea based forces to topple Saddam Hussein. Thus, there is a high probability that the US might sideline NATO and opt for a unilateral action.

With regard to Iran, reaching an understanding with Moscow on policy towards Iran may prove more complicated. Russia might agree with the US that Iraq is a rogue state, but that is not the case with Iran. For Russia, Iran remains an important geopolitical partner in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Moreover, Russia is earning a good chunk of foreign exchange by selling conventional weapons to Iran. The US concerns over Russia-Iranian relation stems from their nuclear cooperation, which the US claims is meant for producing weapons of mass destruction. There was scathing EU criticism of the US defining Iran as forming an "axis of evil". Iran is an important trading partner, and the EU has agreed on June 17, 2002, to sign the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Moreover, EU remains Iran's biggest trading partner with EU exports to Iran totaling 5.2 billion Euro. Thus, NATO will not be able to play any role in the US-Iran enmity. Moreover, the US will not contemplate to overthrow Iran's populist government single handedly. However, Syria may become a victim of either the US or an Israeli aggression in the near future, since President Bush has asked Syria in his recent speech on June 24, 2002, that it "must choose the right side" in the war on terror by "closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations."

Thus, it is pretty much obvious that the present US policy in the Middle East is aimed at overthrowing all those governments that it considers to be unwilling to fulfil the US interests, and which threatens the security of Israel. Therefore, in pursuance of this policy the US actions are increasingly becoming unilateral. The successful war it waged in Afghanistan has added impetus to this unilateralism.

This unilateralist approach is not only visible in targeting Iraq in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but also in the case of issues like the Kyoto Protocol and International Criminal Court (ICC). The US soldiers have been involved in the indiscriminate killing of Afghan and Iraqi civilians and could be tried by the ICC. The ICC will try all those involved in the ethnic genocide of people anywhere in the world. And this will certainly include all US personnel. The US opposition to ICC therefore becomes obvious.

The newly adopted US military doctrine of preemption, which allows for the US to attack any country on its own assessment, amply speaks of the US unilateralist approach. Although NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history, however, its help was limited only to provision of few AWACS. In the post-Sept 11 incident, NATO has a realization that it needs to improve its capabilities, especially the European members of NATO. This need becomes more urgent in the wake of increase in the defense budget of the US amounting to US \$48 billion, which exceeds the total defense spending of the 12 EU countries forming NATO. Also getting European Governments to spend on defense is a tough sell. Amid tight budget ceilings regulating their common currency, they all find spending on health and education more popular with voters. Also, the constructive engagement policies of the EU are not in unison with the aggressive US policy in the Middle East, so multilateral action is non-existent. The US is ready to take unilateral action in its national interest, and also because it is difficult to convince all members of the EU to do so. Although Britain might be an exception, but that too seems to be back firing because of the Britain's internal politics. Russian interests, on the other hand, are inclined towards economic benefits, and for a major political role in the world affairs, albeit a weaker a military role. So the new Council will not help in any way towards a multilateral approach.

While NATO-Russia Council may be willing to accept the US position in South Asia, a multilateral opposition to unilateralist US policies in the Middle East is all too evident.

---Nadia Mushtaque
Adnan Ali Shah