

**Report**

**NATO after Afghan Combat: Does  
the Atlantic Alliance have an  
Asian Future**

**October 09, 2012**



**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,  
ISLAMABAD**

## **NATO after Afghan Combat: Does the Atlantic Alliance have an Asian Future**

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), organized a public talk under its distinguished lectures series held on October 9, 2012 titled **“NATO After Afghan Combat: Does The Atlantic Alliance Have An Asian Future.”** The guest speakers for the talk were Professor Dr. Sten Rynning, University of Southern Denmark and Dr. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Royal Danish Defense College, Copenhagen.

The Chairman, Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Amb. Gul Hanif welcomed the guests and said that the 63 years old alliance of a ‘global’ NATO holds a dim future and faces a number of questions. He said that according to 1949 Mutual Defense Act of NATO, aggression against one is considered an aggression against all. He further stated that NATO is conducting security operations in Afghanistan and training Afghan National Army because the performance of Afghan forces is important to the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014 for taking care of their own security.

Professor Dr. Sten Rynning, University of Southern Denmark, in his presentation titled “NATO and Afghanistan” gave an insightful overview of NATO and US engagement and their future in Asia. He said that NATO and US commitment is a transatlantic bargain. The United States provides security, and gains influence; and in return Europe provides access, capacity,

and legitimacy, and gains security. He further mentioned that NATO's changing role is really depleting from regional defense to international security management. He stated that NATO has no future in Asia.

He explained that NATO is hampered by facile ideas and lack of command experience in expeditionary warfare. He further said that NATO has been a multilateral home for the ISAF, and a counter-balance to Americanization. In his opinion, he stated that NATO could be a powerful framework for stability, sustainability, and legitimacy in global dynamics.

While concluding his presentation he emphasized that NATO is no lean, mean fighting machine. For the future of NATO, he said that NATO without major operations will soon be a grand debate on a grand future. Regarding Pakistan, he said that Pakistan should go to Brussels, speak to NATO and make its presences felt in shaping NATO agenda, and engage with NATO. At the same time, it needs to start a multilateral debate with regional countries. He said that multilateral debate will not provide an immediate solution but a beginning for what the region needs.

Dr. Peter Viggo Jakobsen (Royal Danish Defense College, Copenhagen), in his presentation titled "Global NATO after Afghanistan" explained the concept of NATO and also highlighted NATO's role in Asia after Afghanistan. While defining NATO he said that it was a "Military alliance established to deter an attack from the Soviet Union on Western Europe." He explained that the impetus behind establishing NATO at the very beginning was to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down. He said that

preventing a renationalization of the European NATO members defence forces since 1989 has been a major stabilizing factor in Europe.

He said military integration in NATO has deprived all members, except the US, of the national ability to conduct major military operations for an extended period of time. For instance, UK and France could not have conducted NATO's 2011 Libya war on their own, which is a great military achievement. He further said that NATO rests on a quid pro quo bargain. According to which, US guarantees security against Russia, and in return US gains European support for US-led/desired military operations outside of Europe. He said that this is the glue that keeps the alliance together and it is further strengthened by the democratic values that the members share.

Regarding NATO's future in Asia he disagreed with his colleague and said that NATO has a bright future in Asia. NATO naval presence in Asian waters and security of important sea lines of communication (SLOCs) is only possible through deeper partnerships with interested and likeminded countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. While concluding Dr. Peter said that NATO will facilitate joint US-European operations despite lack of UN mandate that prevents collective NATO action. With the rise of China, NATO's importance will increase as China's rise will force much closer US-European cooperation.

### **Question/Answer Session**

The presentations were followed by a question/answer session. While answering the question whether NATO has succeeded in Afghanistan, the

panel replied that it depends on numerous things, if the impetus behind participating in Afghan war is to keep US happy then yes, NATO has succeeded in it, but if it comes to bringing regional stability then it has not been very successful. Regarding NATO's legal obligation and whether NATO was forced to go out and participate with US in war against terrorism, the panel replied that there was no legal obligation, it's all about politics. The Article 5 of the Treaty clearly states that in case of emergency, if you have time and resources come with whatever stuff you have available. It's a question of politics and political burgeoning. Of course with many European nations of NATO, each capital sits and make their own decision on case to case basis and also based on their national interests and political aspirations.

Concerning the question of economic stability of Afghanistan, Dr. Peter replied that it would be certainly in European interest to come out and promote trade and economic growth. The geopolitical factor is also important.

A guest praised the panel for such insightful presentations and commented that NATO is not going anywhere and that it will be there for the foreseeable future. He commented that organizations do not dissolve themselves, and they find new agendas, new reasons, and new rationalization to perpetuate themselves. After the Soviet threat was over, it is peace within Europe, then after that the Partnership for Peace with the Central Asians, and now the out-of-area operations. Regardless how we like to look at the operations in Afghanistan, it's going to be very difficult for

anyone to say this was a success or failure. The next message is we (NATO) will be doing new things in Asia which will not be military. He further said that our perspective is that a powerful alliance like NATO, sometimes willingly, sometimes unwillingly, will follow the US agenda, sometime in Afghanistan and then South Asia, and then New Zealand. This is what we call perpetual war. With all this, Pakistan is now trying to build regional alliance in order to fend the mischief coming from the West.

Regarding the question relating to what lessons have NATO learned in Afghanistan; and issues from cyber to arms, Prof. Dr Sten replied that this region has plenty to go around in terms of powerful nations engaging each other in building alliances. There is no reason to engage NATO in it because what this region needs is multilateral engagements. NATO is not the solution to South Asia's problems, its part of it. But where NATO can make a contribution is in regards to getting people to talk about issues that are of concern to them and have widely different views including cyber, which is an obvious threat to all established states and organizations because they all are vulnerable electronically. Why not start a dialogue on it? NATO has experience in these matters and it could help multilateral policies. In terms of lessons learned in Afghanistan, NATO's lessons are in the strategic context and that is it must connect more widely to partners, to international organizations like UN and must do crisis management more comprehensively. NATO should solve the problems politically. Dr. Peter said that one of the lessons that have been learned by NATO, and certainly US, is that NATO is not a very good vehicle for fighting real wars and certainly not

a ground component. Afghanistan is the good war and Iraq is the bad war because of UN.

Regarding the question of Pakistan's role after 2014 once the foreign troops finally draw down, Dr. Sten replied that Pakistan's true post-2014 engagement must consist of convincing the Taliban to find their own leadership and also define their own political future within Afghanistan, and making Taliban central to whatever deal making will be going on, given that the Karzai era is now running out and the need to re-make the institutions post-2014. In other words, get the Taliban involved in a way that generates Taliban legitimacy within Afghanistan.

He further said that this is not happening, the relationship between Pakistan and Taliban is too close and the Taliban are seen as a fighting machine to Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda. This is a difficult moment. We understand that Pakistan has interests and it wants to make sure that those interests are taken into consideration at the grand negotiation table that is now under definition. Unless it did not refrain from picking winners, then it will be in trouble, and that's what happened to NATO. They ended up in picking winners even though they didn't want to do it. If you don't want to pick winners, you want to support the process of political institution building in Afghanistan and that's what Pakistan should be doing.

Dr. Peter while replying to the question of Pakistan's role after 2014 once the foreign troops finally draw down said that if you want peace and stability in Afghanistan, there are two things that need to come into play,

first of all you need to create a setting where all the national players within Afghanistan actually sit down and negotiate the shape of new Afghanistan. Secondly, the neighboring countries support that process positively and play their roles positively.

Ambassador Gul Hanif, concluded the talk by thanking the speakers and the guests.

*Prepared by:*

*Saba Aslam  
Research Fellow*