



When NATO leaders meet in Wales in September, they should do more than deliver statements and adopt declarations stitched together from well-polished clichés. The world does not need to hear how important defence is to the allies (though most spend a lot less than 2 per cent of GDP on it); how vital NATO remains in a challenging international environment (though members avoid using NATO’s tools, even where they might help); or how NATO’s door remains open to new members (except for those who want to join).

At some point, unity in vacuity does more harm than good to European security; better to have a proper argument about NATO’s future. NATO leaders should take this chance to thrash out in private three key issues. These are what to do; with whom; and how.

NATO allies face an enormous range of security problems, yet generally they look to other organisations, not NATO, for solutions. Post-Afghanistan, no ally seems keen on large-scale expeditionary warfare in a NATO framework. Led by the UK and France, NATO intervened in Libya in 2011 but did little to tackle the subsequent mess. In Syria, despite every atrocity, NATO stayed on the sidelines. The allies sent Patriot air defence missiles to protect Turkey, but looked to the UN to resolve the Syrian conflict and the EU to deal with refugees in neighbouring countries. As violent jihadis have advanced through Iraq, the US has sent 300 advisers to help the government, but NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen has said

that he sees no role there for the alliance (even though Iraq shares a border with Turkey).

Farther afield, the economic interests of NATO members would certainly be damaged by territorial conflicts in the South or East China Seas. Most European governments, however, are either content to leave the US to deal with Asian problems, or see EU soft power as their contribution in the region; NATO’s capabilities are not part of their toolkit for Asia.

The one area in which NATO should unarguably have a role is territorial defence. Russia has put European geopolitics back on the agenda, by annexing Crimea, interfering in Eastern Ukraine and almost certainly supplying the missile that shot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. The German defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen, told Der Spiegel on June 11th: “Russia cannot be allowed to become our opponent”. But Rasmussen rightly thinks that NATO should be ready to respond in

kind if Russia wants to behave as an adversary: the alliance cannot protect its members by pretending that Russia is currently a friend.

So NATO leaders should start by agreeing that they must be able to mount an effective defence of members' territory, including against Russia. But they should also agree that in a globalised world security threats may not only arise from the country next door, and that NATO capabilities should be used wherever that is the best way to contribute to allies' security.

With whom should NATO carry out its missions? The EU is an obvious candidate: NATO and the EU have 22 members in common (out of 28 in each organisation). But co-operation is inadequate. The dispute between Turkey and Cyprus is a serious obstacle. The summit should agree that if all 34 countries in the two organisations share objectives, they should then make effective and efficient use of capabilities, not pursue inter-institutional or bilateral rivalries. Sometimes it will make sense to have a single, EU-led operation with military and humanitarian aid and development components; but sometimes the EU and NATO will need to mount separate but complementary operations.

The summit should also decide what to do about enlargement. In June 2014, NATO foreign ministers agreed that "NATO's door remains open and no third country has a veto over NATO enlargement". But the last new members to join the alliance were Albania and Croatia in 2009; and none of the remaining applicant countries is making much headway.

The accession or not of the three Balkan aspirants – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro – would have little impact on European security. Georgia and Ukraine are different. The compromise devised in 2008 between supporters and opponents of letting them in was about the worst possible: NATO said that the two countries would become members, but without giving them a deadline or a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Russia's response was to invade Georgia and recognise the independence of its breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On one view, this proved the madness of extending NATO's Article 5 defence guarantee to countries that could not control their territory and might be invaded by Russia; others argued that if Georgia had already been a member of NATO the invasion would never have happened.

Despite Georgia's major contribution in Afghanistan, foreign ministers again decided in June not to give Georgia a MAP but a "substantive package ... that will help it come closer to NATO". Ukraine's membership aspirations were not

mentioned at all; indeed, President Obama said in March that neither Georgia nor Ukraine was "currently on a path to NATO membership". This repeats the mistakes of 2008. Instead of accepting that Russia can veto NATO membership for its neighbours by invading them, the alliance should invite Georgia, where there is overwhelming popular support for membership, to join.

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Ukraine's case is more difficult. Though support for membership is rising, there is not a clear-cut national majority in favour. NATO leaders need to decide whether to follow the advice of Zbigniew Brzezinski and agree with Russia that Ukraine will be sovereign but neutral, regardless of what the Ukrainian people want; or whether to work with Kyiv to create the conditions for it to join NATO, if that is the popular will. But leaving Ukraine's eventual status as a subject to be fought over will only damage European security.

Only after deciding what to do and with whom should leaders talk about the capabilities and methods NATO needs. Most allies, except the US, need to spend more on defence. But simply spending 2 per cent of GDP without analysing requirements will not be enough. Putting more forces into Poland and the Baltic states offers them useful reassurance. But Russia's new style of warfare in Ukraine, using special forces, local militias and covert weapons supplies, backed up by an unrelenting propaganda barrage aimed at domestic and international audiences, should get NATO thinking. Before it gives up the counter-insurgency skills acquired in Afghanistan, it should ask itself whether 500 of Putin's 'little green men' could really "end the existence of Latvia as a unified state", as one Russian commentator claimed. Could NATO fight, let alone win, an information war of the kind Russia has mounted against Ukraine? The machine gun made the bayonet charge obsolete; the aircraft carrier reduced the battleship to a supporting role; NATO leaders should spend time in September thinking what the next game-changer might be, and how to ensure that it disrupts NATO's adversaries more than the allies themselves.

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