

EUCOM TASK FORCE

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U.S. European Command and NATO'S Strategic Concept: Post-Afghanistan and Beyond

Conclusion

Regardless of how the conflict in Afghanistan (along with NATO's role, presence, and draw down) is resolved, one consequence will be to increase the importance of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) both in Europe and for the entire transatlantic community. Whether Operation Enduring Freedom and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) produce a stunning victory in which Afghanistan emerges as a stable state under the rule of law with a viable government or a rocky withdrawal in the midst of continuing violence with no clear solution in sight, NATO nations will have long tired of that war. Fortunately, the Lisbon Summit with a 2014 end date has eased domestic political pressures over Afghanistan. However, that relief is by no means permanent.

Given the coming defense spending reductions that could be dramatic, and as publics weary of dispatching their soldiers to a foreign and dangerous war, on the whole, NATO has or will become more introspective, less willing to use military force except in direct defense along the lines of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and in most cases unlikely to commit forces to an expeditionary conflict without a threat that could activate Article 5.

EUCOM will thus be pivotal in keeping direct links with and access to NATO and European militaries in order to maintain, or in some areas strengthen, a partner's security capacities and capabilities despite the downward spending trends; extend an all-of-government approach in which other

The Atlantic Council's Strategic Advisors Group and the Institute for National Security Studies at the National Defense University launched a project in 2010-2011 to assess the future roles, missions and tasks of the United States European Command and how it relates to NATO. The study assesses in particular how the new NATO Strategic Concept and other initiatives launched at the November 2010 NATO Lisbon summit might impact EUCOM and its future. The study brought together leading experts from the United States and Europe for three workshop discussions in Washington to inform the production of a series of issue papers offering recommendations for EUCOM. The views expressed in these papers are those of the authors themselves and do not necessarily represent the views of EUCOM, the National Defense University or the Atlantic Council.

American assets can support these capacity building efforts; and serve as a surrogate or institutional memory for sustaining minimum levels of military capability in mission areas such as high-intensity conflict that are likely to be substantially reduced by these draw downs.

This means that EUCOM will have to sustain and in some cases strengthen direct military-to-military relations at various levels of command and especially at the highest echelons. It is through these relations that the viability of NATO can be enhanced even as force levels decline. However, for these

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relations to work, it is very likely that more, rather than fewer, flag and general officers will be needed in Europe, as majors and colonels are simply not seen as replacements for generals and admirals in ministries of defense and NATO parliaments.

This also means that even more dramatic EUCOM reorganization and reshaping will be needed as the war in Afghanistan winds down.

NATO's Strategic Concept

The Strategic Concept approved in Lisbon in late November 2010 by NATO heads of state and government is indeed comprehensive and thorough in moving the Alliance forward in dealing with 21st century challenges and realities. Among them are the geopolitical realities that make major war between states far less likely than the types of conflict being fought in Iraq, Afghanistan, and against al Qaeda and other religiously ideologically motivated terrorist groups. And the concept reorganizes the threat spectrum to include cyber, missile defense, and disasters whether acts of man or nature as part of NATO's mandate. The most significant foundations of the Strategic Concept identify NATO's principal tasks as collective defense; crisis management; and cooperative security. And in the final paragraph, number 38, "An Alliance for the 21st Century," the concept reaffirms the firm commitment "to preserve its effectiveness as the globe's most successful political-military alliance."

The reference to a political-military alliance is crucial as that phrase recognizes that NATO is no longer solely a military alliance directed against a military threat disbanded two decades ago but has formally and in writing agreed to consider larger challenges, dangers, and threats beyond the well-defined order of battle of the former Soviet Union and its military formations.

The major shortcoming of the Strategic Concept (and clearly there are many other important aspects of it from reform to technology assessment to enhancing partnerships that are noteworthy) is the absence of priorities. The concept makes the mandatory call for sustaining resources for defense. However, no plan or delineation of where those limited resources should best be applied is presented.

For EUCOM, the Strategic Concept is an opportunity to expand the command's influence and importance in Europe even while faced with force and budget reductions. The command sets its missions to conduct military operations;

build partnership capacity; and bring a whole of government approach to its area of responsibility. The issue for this paper is how these interactions should proceed based on a post-Afghanistan world, however defined.

Afghanistan and the Future

The conflict in Afghanistan is entering its tenth year. Last December, the Obama administration released its latest assessment on Afghanistan. However, with the NATO summit agreeing to a deadline of the end of 2014 for turning all security responsibilities to Afghan control, the Obama review was very supportive and reinforced that aim with the intention to begin some of that transfer next year that will allow the United States to begin force reductions. Administration statements since that time reconfirm that intent.

Three general scenarios frame the possible outcomes in Afghanistan, although a number of wild cards remain that would have a profound effect, including what happens in Pakistan; with Iran; and even North Korea should another war break out on that peninsula. First, NATO could succeed leaving Afghanistan relatively stable with violence contained, the rule of law established, and a central government capable of working with provincial and local governments and leaders keeping the country whole and generally under control.

Second, NATO could withdraw with conditions still uncertain in terms of political control, the capacity of Kabul to govern, and the ability of Afghan security forces to cope with new responsibilities, and with questions as to how Afghanistan's neighbors will deal with these conditions.

Third is the scenario of the failure of Afghans to assume security responsibilities; the inability of Kabul to govern; and a political disintegration in the provinces in which more territory resorts to Taliban and warlord control. This will not be a Saigon moment of 1975 with the final evacuation from the embassy rooftop, but it will be seen as a defeat.

While I personally am not sanguine about the future of Afghanistan, in large part because of the absence of effective government in Kabul, the inability of Afghans to look after their own security (especially the police), and political disintegration in Pakistan, the conclusion of this paper is that the outcome in Afghanistan is really not relevant to European Command and its role in Europe because no matter what happens, NATO nations will have lost the incentives and even disposition for out of area operations. Further, defense

will have a lower national priority. Hence, EUCOM has great opportunity to exploit these conditions as an organization that can mitigate these trends through closer relationships.

If NATO can claim success in Afghanistan, after expressions of relief, spending on defense and the importance of maintaining relatively larger forces will decline possibly dramatically. If there is uncertainty over the outcome, NATO members will have no interest in doing more regarding security. And if there is outright defeat, members will have to worry about dealing with their electorates and not learning lessons about future interventions.

It is also hard to see how wild card events will change these reactions outside some unforeseeable crisis. Military attacks and conflict with Iran are unlikely to rejuvenate European intentions regarding defense. An implosion in Pakistan would seal Afghanistan's fate and not stimulate NATO to do more. And should war break out in Korea, NATO states would not be in a mood even to mention Article 5 or indeed raise that distant prospect.

What Should EUCOM Do?

How might EUCOM react to a post-Afghanistan world no matter how defined? The starting point is how U.S. defense strategy is likely to change post-Afghanistan. My sense is that there will be an overall reduction of between a quarter to a third in budget appropriations with attendant impact on force structure and capability. How competently and sensibly these draw downs are accomplished likewise will shape the future force structure and not for the better. In general, the United States would be well advised to keep a lower level of highly capable forces prepared for the kinds of conflicts being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq and against al Qaeda.

The consequences of this decision would lead to emphasis on crisis management and building partnership capacity as well as shaping the operating environment to maintain influence and access. Fewer forces needed for so-called high-intensity combat against opposing armies, navies, and air forces would follow and some of these capabilities could transition to reserve or lower readiness levels with a set period of 6-18 months to be brought back to full capability on the grounds no threat is likely to manifest itself in that time frame and probably for a lot longer.

If the United States is serious in continuing the transformation to 21st century needs, then major revisions to the Unified Command Plan (UCP) are vital. My recommendation is to consolidate, reorganize, and streamline the UCP including the component commands. For geographic commands, we should move to five: Southern Command and Central Command would stay largely intact, although component commands would be streamlined. Pacific Command would become Eastern Command. Northern Command would be expanded to take on the force provider missions of Joint Forces Command. And European and Africa Commands would be incorporated into Western Command. In essence, Western Command would resemble EUCOM prior to the formation of Africa Command.

Against this background, EUCOM could consider these recommendations:

- Expand the mission statement to include preparing for military operations; partnership capacity building; all of government capacity in keeping with NATO's Strategic Concept of collective defense; crisis management; and cooperative partnerships.
- Assess the actual need for flag and general officers in carrying out the partnership, influence and relationship building tasks. Because EUCOM is structurally different from other commands because of NATO and the presence of 27 allies, flag officer requirements must be viewed from that perspective rather than an efficiency driven exercise.
- Assume the lead in the knowledge and learning revolutions regarding education and training, especially as partnership capacity building is emphasized and to keep a latent capability for high intensity warfare in residence.
- Assume the lead in experimentation regarding organization of forces in which mixed units manned by American and NATO allies can be evaluated. As forces draw down, this approach can keep some level of competence among the allies.
- Continue to reorganize the EUCOM staff in keeping with both the U.S. missions (conduct operations); partnership building; and all of government along with NATO's collective defense; crisis management; and cooperative partnerships.

J codes would be ordered as follows:

- Military operations and crisis management would replace and draw on much of the old J-2/ J-3/ J-5/ EUCOM Plans and Operations Center (EPOC) staffs.
- Partnership building and cooperative partnerships would draw on some of the old J-3/J-5 and linked with J-9.
- All of government would become the role of J-9.
- J7/J-8 would become the Assessments Directorate with the responsibility for conducting self-assessments for the command.
- J-1 and J-4 would become the Support Directorate.

Other stand-alone organizations would be folded in accordingly. Note that this organization could easily support Africa Command with the second four-star serving as both Deputy EUCOM and in essence Commander Africa Command. The alternative given the downgrading of component commanders to the grade of o-9, is to elevate the Deputy Commander EUCOM back to o-10.

Conclusions

The second decade of the 21st century will bring even greater challenges than the first ten years. Economics have experienced tectonic shifts from both crises and the diffusion of economic power and production. Politically, democracies are faced with far greater numbers of simultaneous challenges and crises, many of which have no obvious or consensus-obtaining solutions. Strategically and ideologically, the West has not learned yet how to cope with al Qaeda and other radical “isms.” Culturally, it is not certain the second and third generation citizens of European and North American states, particularly from Arab and Muslim societies, have been fully integrated and made part of these nations.

Meanwhile, violence and “war” have shifted from the protection of national sovereignty from existential attack emanating from the Cold War to protection of individual

citizens from harm. This means that traditional war-fighting roles of armies, navies and air forces in Western states to fight and defeat comparable or similar adversaries has also changed, although the ability to wage these traditional wars cannot be ignored or allowed to dissipate to a point where the expense of rebuilding that capability will exceed national treasuries.

Against this background, including NATO's latest Strategic Concept and the battle in Afghanistan, EUCOM's importance is likely to grow qualitatively while the resources and manpower committed to it will shrink quantitatively. This means that EUCOM needs to continue a root and branch analysis of this “new, new” world and what the implications are for the command. That assessment should start now, even though it may be future commanders who ultimately are responsible for implementation.

Some of the recommendations, such as not automatically cutting flag and general officers for the sake of efficiency only, and dramatically streamlining and incorporating component command staffs directly into EUCOM, will be seen as counter-intuitive. Regarding the latter, a former Naval Forces Europe commander slashed his staff from about 1400 to less than 400, which brought not only great savings but also greater morale, as fewer staff meant more important assignments and work could be distributed and greater responsibility given down the chain of command. Of course the inherent tensions with service staffs in Washington who are force and resource providers should not be trivialized.

In the last two years, EUCOM has undergone significant reorganization and realignment with excellent effect. Returning EUCOM to its former role of serving as a principal supporter of NATO has been a necessary and very important step, especially as the war in Afghanistan has entered a new phase. But the coming months and years are certainly going to introduce even greater demands and pressure for responses and anticipatory actions by EUCOM. Now is the time to start!

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