



## **NATO: Remaining Relevant**

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The first Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Lord Ismay, had said the NATO was created ‘to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down’. Not many people imagined that such an organisation would survive the Cold War, and would remain relevant to the world today. Since 2001, NATO has been operating in Afghanistan and leading the security mission established by Resolution 1386 of the United Nations Security Council. However, with the exit of external actors and transfer from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) scheduled for 2014, the question returns: does the NATO continue to be relevant?

In this context, it is pertinent to understand how NATO has constantly evolved to remain relevant and, in the process, extending its global footprint in Asia.

The principal areas of NATO’s activity in the past decade have been outside the geographical regions of its member countries and areas beyond its original purpose or jurisdiction such as its operations in Afghanistan and Libya. When peace in the north Atlantic region spelt the end of NATO’s relevance, the organisation reinvented its purpose and redefined ‘security’. It initiated an expansion policy on membership and soon the expansion took a different form i.e. partnerships and alliances like the Partnership for Peace, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. With the economic crisis in Europe,

most member States of NATO have reduced their military budgets and this has significantly affected NATO's resource pool. It would now require more assistance and collaboration from its partnerships and non-member relations to remain relevant.

The announcement of NATO's exit in Afghanistan stirred much debate on the security situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia. A report by the International Crisis Group released on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2012 predicted the return of the Taliban, and spelt doom in post 2014 Afghanistan. Setting aside the widespread predictions of catastrophe and disaster, it must be understood that Afghanistan's security is of immense importance to South Asia, Central Asia and its neighbours; which is probably the reason behind the opinion that some kind of regional mechanism may be effective in securing stability and development in post 2014 Afghanistan. NATO's role in Afghanistan, as announced should remain purely for training assistance, which too shall be eventually phased out.

NATO's recent operation in Libya has drawn sharp criticism and is a clear indication that NATO cannot continue to survive by looking for potential flash points across the globe and intervene. As opportunities of military intervention are dwindling, and drawing more criticism than appreciation, NATO should sharpen its focus on its partnerships with non-NATO members. NATO has been actively engaging with Navies in Asia, particularly the Chinese Navy and the Indian Navy, in protecting some of the busiest maritime trade routes. Their operations have been crucial to contain piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Its Operation Ocean Shield in the Horn of Africa has been extended and welcomed by many nations. International organizations such as the NATO in conjunction with the concerned countries would be ideal to protect these trade routes.

NATO's engagement with India has been primarily with the Indian Navy, specifically the counter-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa region known as Operation Ocean Shield. A new area that NATO and India could work together is cyber security. Cyber security is a subject in which NATO possesses much expertise and has extensive resources. The 2010 Lisbon Summit and the New Strategic Concept of NATO recognise the latest developments in sophisticated cyber attacks and prioritize defence against cyber warfare. NATO has established multiple agencies that focus on cyber security and also offer assistance in research and training on cyber defence. In India, cyber security is an area of vulnerability. Earlier in 2012, over ten-thousand government email addresses including those of officials working in the PMO, ministries of

defence and external affairs as well as intelligence agencies were reportedly hacked. Therefore, to fill this security lacuna, India and NATO can collaborate on combating cyber warfare.

Along with cyber security, NATO should also invest in protection of the 'Global Commons' by forging partnerships with other nations and organisations like the United Nations. The 'Global Commons' comprises key domains such as the high seas, international airspace, outer space, and cyber space. It is considered as the connective tissue of the global economy, and is critical to the welfare of all nations. NATO will lose the handicap of being a region-specific organisation and gain more universal relevance by participating in the protection and regulation of the 'Global Commons'. Consequently, the international community will benefit from NATO's extensive military experience.

The time has come for NATO to make a transition from a mere military coalition to a security consultant. NATO must actively engage in collaborative efforts for capacity building in security and its various avenues, especially the protection of 'Global Commons'. The NATO's vision in its new strategic concept is to be a forum for consultations on global security. To achieve this vision NATO has to discard its 'trigger happy attitude' and render more responsible assistance – unlike its operation in Libya. In conclusion, NATO as an organisation will and must remain relevant. The key condition, however, is to diversify and focus on collaborations and partnerships, and protection of the 'Global Commons' in such a manner that NATO not only remains relevant but also provides the support that countries need in facing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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