NATO'S LONG-TERM DEFENSE PLANNING: WILL IT WORK?

by

DAVID JABLONSKY

Coalition warfare has always been a difficult business—one in which, as perceived by Napoleon, the whole is often weaker than the sum of its individual parts. "If I must make war," said this great military leader, "I prefer it to be against a coalition."[1] As one who had vanquished the majority of coalitions set against him over the better part of a quarter-century, he was certainly conscious, if only indirectly, of the myriad problems which could beset such an association of allies. Coalition leaders, naturally enough, have shown an even more intense appreciation of these problems. A century after Napoleon, the leader of the victorious World War I coalition could only look back with disgruntlement on his struggles with such deficiencies as incompatible goals, dissimilar military organizations and equipment, and inadequate staff coordination. "My admiration for Napoleon has shrunk," French Marshal Ferdinand Foch stated, "since I found out what a coalition was."[2]

Historically, coalitions have been created, as they were against Napoleon, because of perceived imbalances in the distribution of international power. For this reason, durability has not been the strong suit of these multinational associations, which have normally disintegrated as the common perception of the threat diminished. A more invidious yet equally common characteristic has been the failure of peacetime coalitions to foster detailed coordination among the military forces of member nations before the commencement of hostilities.[3] Indeed, coalition machinery has often been improvised only after a conflict has begun, in the case of the Western coalitions in the two World Wars of this century barely in time to avert catastrophe.[4]

Mindful of historical experience with coalitions and sobered by the ominous threat posed by the Soviet Union, the Western allies after World War II reached a consensus that there would not be sufficient time in the future for an ad hoc approach to coalition warfare. The result was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which emphasized organizational collaboration in anticipation of a military threat to any of the signatories of the treaty. This aspect of the alliance, combined with the political realities of the post-World War II international environment, committed the member nations to NATO's mutual defense more firmly than was stated in the explicit treaty clauses. "Joint military action of the members of NATO," one authority on international organizations has observed, "is not so much a promise of their treaty as a premise of their organization."[5]

That organization soon extended to such unprecedented peacetime structures as combined commands and common air defense programs. Today, there can be no doubt that Western preparations for coalition

warfare in Europe are light-years removed from any earlier efforts by other alliances. But are these preparations sufficient? As the alliance enters its fourth decade, more and more questions center on the ability of this unprecedented coalition of nations to prepare effectively for the common defense in a world altered drastically since NATO's inception.[6]

CHANGE AND RESPONSE

A driving force behind the change has been the altered strategic nuclear equation involving the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1949, the loss of its atomic monopoly did not mean the end of nuclear superiority for the United States; and in the following years, the American nuclear umbrella, under the rubric of "massive retaliation," emphasized broad deterrence rather than defense in Europe against the preponderant Warsaw Pact conventional forces. During this period, the "trip-wire" role of highly visible, forward-based alliance forces, particularly in the Federal Republic of Germany, was considered more important than the ability to function collectively and cohesively should deterrence fail. This thinking extended into the 1960s, a time in which, as Henry Kissinger observed, there was a tendency "either to turn NATO into a unilateral US guarantee or to call into question the utility of the alliance altogether."[7]

By that time, however, the Cuban missile crisis and the beginning of American involvement in Vietnam had become catalysts for dramatic change in the strategic equation. After the Cuban crisis, the Soviets embarked on a buildup of nuclear and conventional forces which would continue unabated to the present. And among the many important consequences of US efforts in Southeast Asia was the American reluctance under the strain of a "guns and butter" economy to match the Soviet nuclear increases missile for missile. Thus, by the end of the Johnson Administration, the term "sufficiency" had crept into America's strategic vocabulary; and the advent of "strategic equivalence" under the detente-oriented, Nixonian "Strategy for Peace" ensured that nuclear parity for the two superpowers would later become a fact of life. Clearly, the dynamics of a potential East-West confrontation had been irretrievably altered by these developments. Newly developed Soviet ICBM capabilities, hardened launching sites, and nuclear-propelled ballistic missile submarines guaranteed survivability to Soviet strategic forces. Soviet development of conventional forces capable of deploying to other than the European theater further damaged the credibility of a deterrent based on the trip-wire concept.

In the early 1960s, as the strategic nuclear scales began to balance, the strategic nuclear option in the event of Warsaw Pact aggression was increasingly brought into question. And, as doubts grew, the long neglected conventional and theater nuclear forces, the other two legs of the NATO triad, came under increasing scrutiny. Such scrutiny revealed serious command and logistical problems in dealing with the special requirements for future coalition operations. Despite these shortcomings, however, continued Soviet advances, particularly in conventional forces and theater nuclear delivery systems, forced the NATO Council of Ministers in 1967 to adopt the more credible strategy of "flexible response," which implied an expansion of conventional forces.

In an era of increasing political, financial, and manpower limitations, the Europeans were understandably unenthusiastic about this policy change.[8] Their past reliance on the US nuclear umbrella as the

---

Lieutenant Colonel David Jablonsky is presently assigned to Policy Branch, Plans and Policy Division, SHAPE, Belgium. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he holds master's degrees from Boston University and the University of Kansas and a Ph.D. in European History, also from the University of Kansas. He is a 1975 graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College. Colonel Jablonsky has held command and staff assignments in Germany, Vietnam, and the United States.

prime deterrent had afforded them the opportunity to pursue independent policies of economic and political development.[9] No NATO nation could now view lightly the reduction of resources occasioned by its increased allocation of men and materiel to the alliance. Consequently, there arose a general feeling among member nations that there must be a more efficient and economic use of the alliance's considerable resources. This meant not only encouraging the development of common tactics and doctrine among the disparate members, but also emphasizing greater standardization of weapons and equipment and greater pooling of national technological expertise. In fact, increased interoperability—the ability of one nation to use another's ammunition, components, or systems compatibly with their own—became a generally acknowledged need.

The recognition of these needs in NATO's changing environment of the early 1970s caused various examinations of the midterm defense requirements of the alliance. One important result was that NATO's midterm force planning system, the Defense Planning Review, was extensively overhauled in 1971 in order to ensure more thorough consideration of political, economic, and military requirements as well as scientific and technological advances. Under this revised system, two separate but interconnected processes operate. Force goals are adopted by NATO's Defense Ministers every two years after an extensive consultative process involving the nations, the NATO military authorities, and the International Staff. Based on an appreciation of the situation that NATO may face in the midterm, these goals represent a six-year target which countries are to use as the basis for their annual five-year force plans until the next force goals are adopted. How well these country plans meet the designated force goals is determined in a second process each fall from national replies to a NATO defense planning questionnaire and from subsequent multilateral discussions and examinations of these replies under the aegis of NATO's Defense Planning Committee. This annual collective consideration of each country's defense efforts has resulted over the years in the systematic exchange of information between alliance members "on a scale," as the official NATO handbook points out, "unprecedented in peace or even in war."[10]

Despite such progress, it was not until 1975 that the long-term implications of the new challenges, affecting periods of 10 to 15 years, were addressed. Based on studies initiated that year, General Haig, then Supreme Allied Commander Europe, instituted remedial programs to improve the readiness and reinforcement capabilities of NATO land forces and to "rationalize doctrine, tactics, and procedures so that those forces could fight together effectively and efficiently."[11]

At the same time, the US Department of Defense commissioned a series of studies by the Rand Corporation addressing various aspects of long-term actions deemed necessary in order for NATO to prepare for future coalition warfare. One of the leading participants in these studies was Ambassador Robert W. Komer, who had a well-deserved reputation from earlier duties in Southeast Asia for cutting through organizational red tape in order, as he put it, "to offset the inevitable tendency of bureaucracies to keep doing the familiar and to adapt only incrementally."[12] The primary need, as Ambassador Komer perceived it, was to provide credible deterrence and defense for the next decade at a cost which was politically acceptable to the NATO allies. In order to fulfill that need, Ambassador Komer and his associates believed that "a whole new dimension of alliance cooperation" must be sought by means of a long-term defense effort.[13]

THE LONG-TERM DEFENSE PROGRAM

For such an effort to be successful, however, Ambassador Komer concluded that it had to emerge as a concrete program and not as simply another alliance report quickly consigned to oblivion in the NATO bureaucratic maw. The new program would

not be an attempt to encroach upon jealously protected national plans, but instead would emphasize improving the coordination of those plans and securing agreement on alliance priorities. Where possible, it would encourage the pooling of some national efforts into common programs. In addition, it would concentrate on only a limited number of functional areas where problems for the NATO coalition were most pressing, rather than dissipate the focus in a comprehensive effort which would strain the finances as well as the attention span of the alliance.

The London Summit

If the program were ever to progress beyond the conceptual stage, however, the most pressing need was government sponsorship. In 1976, the highest level of support emerged with the advent of a US President-elect who had been provided background papers by Ambassador Komer during the campaign and who believed that a "thorough review of NATO's strategy and force posture . . . should be mounted as a matter of urgency."[14] As a result, Ambassador Komer was tasked in early 1977 by the new Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, to develop initiatives for the Carter Administration in dealing with NATO. One of these initiatives was the Long-Term Defense Program, which came to be called simply the LTDP.

The preliminary staff work and coordination for the program were completed by early spring. On 10 May 1977 at the London Summit of the North Atlantic Council, President Carter not only reaffirmed the US commitment to NATO, but also urged a political consensus on the need of a new alliance defense program extending beyond the midterm of five to six years.[15]

As a result of the London Summit, the NATO Defense Ministers, meeting under the auspices of the NATO Defense Planning Committee, set about identifying the major defense concerns and then selecting the specific areas for coordination through long-term programming (covering 10 to 15 years).[16] Within the overall ministerial guidance, four major concerns were identified. The first was to improve NATO's ready forces in terms of combat capabilities, flexibility, and responsiveness. Based on this first concern, five LTDP areas were created: *Readiness; Air Defense; Electronic Warfare; Maritime Posture;* and *Communications, Command, and Control*. The directive also expressed concern for improving the ability to build up these ready forces in periods of tension and, once hostilities commenced, to sustain the forces in combat. Consequently, three more areas were added to the LTDP: *Reinforcement, Reserve Mobilization,* and *Consumer Logistics*. Another concern involved the need to achieve a more effective use of available resources, resulting in *Rationalization* (coordination of the planning, research and development, and production processes for systems, materiel, and weapons among alliance nations) as the ninth area of concentration for the LTDP. Finally, there was concern over the need for *Modernization of Theater Nuclear Weapons*, hence the tenth LTDP area.[17]

This last area did not continue as an integral part of the LTDP because a task force under the NATO Nuclear Planning Group was requested to propose a theater nuclear modernization program and proceed independently through other channels. In the remaining nine areas, however, the Defense Planning Committee created task forces composed of alliance rather than national representatives, which were directly subordinated to the Executive Working Group, an existing steering committee at NATO Headquarters under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary General. This arrangement allowed the task forces a relatively free hand in addressing problems from a collective alliance viewpoint, unburdened by either political pressures from member nations or by NATO bureaucratic insistence upon standardized results. Consequently, the individual task force reports, published in March 1978, were wide-ranging, detailed surveys containing substantive recommendations, which in many cases looked more clearly at mid- and long-term needs than any

cooperative alliance efforts had done previously.

The Washington Summit and Beyond

On 18 and 19 May 1978, the alliance Defense Ministers selected a broad range of the task force proposals dealing with the priority areas and recommended that support for the proposals should be sought "at the highest political level."[18] This was forthcoming at the Washington Summit of the North Atlantic Council, hosted by President Carter on 30 and 31 May, when the alliance leaders approved the recommended programmatic remedies for conventional force deficiencies in the nine non-nuclear LTDP areas.[19] A month later, these decisions were translated into 123 major long-term conventional force improvement measures.

The acceptance of the LTDP was an important milestone; but, as the major architects of the LTDP realized, the events in Washington were only the beginning of a long and complex task, the key to which lay in effective follow-through.[20] Consequently, the Secretary General appointed various NATO military and civilian authorities as monitors for the nine LTDP areas in July 1978. The monitors were required to render annual reports to the Secretary General which would candidly examine their respective areas and make recommendations for remedial action where progress was lacking. These reports would be based on national replies to an additional LTDP section of the planning questionnaire used in the Defense Planning Review. Unlike that midterm planning system, however, no time was allowed for discussion and examination of the LTDP questionnaire replies by NATO civil and military authorities and the nations before the monitors published their reports.

THE LTDP AND LONG-TERM PLANNING

The LTDP is a remarkable step toward greater NATO cooperation. By agreeing to incorporate this program into their national defense plans, the NATO nations committed themselves to the primacy of correcting some of the more immediate deficiencies within the functional areas of the LTDP. An equally important product of the program, however, is its demonstration of the advantages of programming advice from NATO headquarters on decisions concerning defense matters beyond the existing midterm NATO defense planning cycle. The absence of this guidance in the past had left a perplexing vacuum for those nations without their own long-term planning systems, yet at the same time had intensified centrifugal tendencies of the alliance by allowing nations which did possess such systems to rely solely on their individual long-range assessments of military needs.

Cooperation and Complexity

One of the most visible advantages of this centralized direction is the LTDP effort associated with the development of weapons and equipment for the alliance. In every LTDP area, the Conference of National Armament Directors, a sub-element of the Defense Planning Committee, is pursuing long-term cooperative programs designed to improve military effectiveness while at the same time providing equitable economic and industrial opportunities for as many alliance nations as possible. These programs range from the development of common families of anti-armor and air-delivered weapons to cooperative research efforts in such areas as electronic countermeasure-resistant communications and tactical data processing support. Where one nation has already developed a system, other nations are in some cases joining in the production effort. For those systems not yet developed, the Conference of National Armaments Directors has assigned to appropriate countries the research and engineering tasks. The potential of these programs for eliminating duplicative efforts and costs as well as unanticipated requirements has not been lost on the NATO nations.

Grappling with the LTDP has brought home to all concerned that centralized

direction is required to orchestrate the complex actions which this venture into the long term requires. Some LTDP measures, particularly those involved in a technical area such as *Communications, Command, and Control,* have skilled manpower requirements which must be worked out equitably in Brussels. Other measures, such as those dealing with forward storage sites for trans-Atlantic reinforcements, require common funding. Finally, as alliance nations have discovered, LTDP measures are joined in a web that, for the most part, defies compartmental examination. For example, measures designed to harmonize national logistic efforts in the functional area of *Consumer Logistics* also call for the examination of Allied Command Europe requirements arising from the development of plans under the *Reinforcement* area. These plans depend in turn on such varied measures as those involving ammunition provisions for forward-based forces under the *Readiness* area, call-up procedures by European nations in the area of *Reserve Mobilization*, and mine-clearing capabilities under *Maritime Posture*.

The Midterm Planning Connection

The LTDP experience has also pointed out the need to establish a harmonious working relationship between long-term planning efforts and the midterm planning process. Most nations would find more comfortable a system of long-term planning that evolved from the current nationally oriented, midterm planning machinery, rather than retaining a "special identity" as the LTDP has by virtue of its centralized functional direction. The architects of the LTDP believed, not without justification, that this unique control was essential if the program was to maintain its momentum during the follow-up implementation phase. But it has led to an additional reporting requirement which most of the nations now believe is largely redundant with the present reporting system required by the Defense Planning Review. More important, many of the nations object to the lack of opportunity in the LTDP reporting system for multilateral consultations and consensus building, which form the backbone of the midterm process.

However, if the LTDP has posed problems for the midterm planning cycle, it has also offered a way around the impasse encountered in any attempt to extend that planning cycle into the long term in one fell swoop. The impasse stems from the fact that the current force planning process in NATO begins with an appreciation of what is considered to be the probable midterm situation. To project that appreciation accurately into the long term would be an extraordinarily difficult undertaking. As the allied nations realize, it would require the identification of all long-term military considerations likely to affect force and equipment structures not only in NATO but in the Warsaw Pact as well. To add to the problem, the Defense Ministers would also have to agree upon long-term political, technological, and economic trends affecting NATO force development when they produce their guidance.

These constraints, as well as the LTDP experience, suggest that a more feasible course is to provide long-term planning guidance for selected functional areas and to season this guidance with informed predictions of political, technological, and economic trends. Such an approach does not, of course, guarantee universal acceptance even if future projections prove accurate. Actual attempts to implement programs in the LTDP area of *Readiness*, for instance, find some nations hedging on previously agreed long-term commitments to anti-armor weapon purchases because of new budgetary constraints. Other nations are citing constitutional impediments as reasons for not improving national responses to the NATO Alert System.

The Domröse Approach

A concrete proposal for implementing such a selective planning process was eventually aired in 1979 by the SHAPE

Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, Lieutenant General Lothar Domröse. In an article published in October of that year, he called for a pragmatic extension of the current NATO planning procedures out as far as 15 years in certain functional areas where it appeared possible to look ahead "with a reasonable probability of success."[21] Other areas could then be added and managed on a consultative basis with the nations. The key to this evolution would be NATO guidance which, General Domröse was careful to point out, nations would be bound to accept only "as a conceptual structure for national military planning."[22] The result of the process, he concluded, would be a coherent management framework within which the most immediate and essential long-term planning requirements for the NATO coalition could be assembled for analysis and response.

The NATO nations agreed with such an assessment. In the spring of 1980, the ministers of the alliance adopted the essence of General Domröse's approach as a means "to extend NATO's defence planning progressively into a longer [period of time], with the goal of achieving closer coordination at both the national and international level in setting alliance objectives and in allocating resources for defence."[23] In general, such a selective planning process, using input from military, political, economic, and technological spheres, is now working for the LTDP.

CONCLUSION

The Long-Term Defense Program is helping to redress some of the more immediate conventional force deficiencies of the alliance. What may turn out to be the greatest effect of the program, however, is the stimulus it has provided for the extension of NATO's coordinated defense planning beyond the midterm. The limited cooperative forays into the long term under the auspices of the LTDP have clearly demonstrated the advantages to be gained by developing more coordinated claims on the defense resources of the alliance through centralized NATO planning guidance. At the same time, the LTDP has been a factor in national preferences for an evolutionary, consensus-building extension of the current midterm planning process.

As NATO enters the 1980s, however, the time required for the gradual evolution of a comprehensive, long-term coalition planning process appears prohibitive. And yet a faster alternative does not seem possible. The extraordinary alliance cooperation engendered by the LTDP will be difficult to sustain. In any case, to depend on it as a cornerstone for a speedy and comprehensive expansion of the NATO Defense Planning Review System beyond the midterm is to ignore recent experiences with the LTDP as well as the nature of the North Atlantic Treaty. One solution, of course, is to seek greater integration on the political and economic levels, but a move toward some type of political federation is hardly likely, at least in the near future.

In the meantime, the alliance is getting on with the business of further developing its own concept of long-term planning. That the nations perceive the need for such a concept has been amply revealed by the LTDP, which shows that changes can and do take place within the cumbersome, pluralistic body of NATO. Comprehensive changes, however, will not be easy under the present structure; and it may be many years, even decades, before an optimal coalition posture emerges from the current attempts to extend defense planning beyond the midterm. But this should not deter the members of the North Atlantic alliance. During World War II, General de Gaulle was informed that what he was proposing would require 50 years to accomplish. "All the more reason," the general replied, "for starting now."[24]

NOTES

1. Napoleon Bonaparte, as quoted by Norman J. Padelford and George A. Lincoln in *The Dynamics of International Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 402.

2. Ferdinand Foch, as quoted by Robert L. Rothstein in *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), p. 125.

3. Before World War I, for example, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire made increasing and wide-ranging commitments of assistance to each other without the concomitant establishment of cooperative institutions and

procedures necessary for efficient planning and coordination (Gordon A. Craig, *War, Politics and Diplomacy* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966], p. 47).

4. Churchill's call for Anglo-Soviet cooperation during World War II, for example, made no attempt to disguise its expedient nature. "If Hitler invaded Hell," he stated, "I would make at least a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons" (Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951], p. 370).

5. Inis L. Claude Jr., *Swords Into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organization* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 245.

6. See, for example, Robert Strausz-Hupe, "NATO in Midstream," *NATO Review*, 25 (October 1977), 3-8; John J. Clark, "Is the NATO Alliance Structure Appropriate for the 1980s?" *Military Review*, 59 (April 1979), 25-34; and Thomas A. Callaghan, "The North Atlantic Treaty's Fatal Flaw," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, 24 (October-November 1979), 144-50.

7. Henry A. Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 12.

8. Robert Kennedy, "NATO Defense Posture in an Environment of Strategic Parity and Precision Weaponry," Military Issues Research Memorandum (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 30 December 1976), p. 3.

9. Raymond H. Ottoman, "NATO in the 1970's," Air War College Professional Study, April 1970, p. 65.

10. *NATO Facts and Figures* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1978), p. 115. See also Stephen S. Goodspeed, *The Nature and Function of International Organization* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 630, who concludes that the NATO force program procedures are "unique since never before, either in war or peace, have partners in a military arrangement agreed to exchange detailed military information and submit their own national military policies to the scrutiny of each other." For a survey of the current NATO force program system, see *NATO Facts and Figures*, (1978), pp. 111-15.

11. Alexander M. Haig Jr., "NATO and the Security of the West," *NATO Review*, 26 (August 1978), 9.

12. Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 1973), p. xii.

13. Robert W. Komer, "NATO's Long-Term Defence Programme: Origins and Objectives," *NATO Review*, 26 (June 1978), 12.

14. *NATO Standardization: Political, Economic, and Military Issues for Congress* (Washington: GPO, 1977), p. 52.

15. "Carter Remarks to North Atlantic Council," *NATO Review*, 25 (June 1977), 23.

16. H. F. Zeiner Gunderson, "The Higher Direction of NATO," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, 23 (August-September 1978), 19.

17. "The Long-Term Defence Programme—A Summary," *NATO Review*, 26 (August 1978), 29-31.

18. *NATO Final Communiques 1978* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1979), p. 13.

19. Ibid., pp. 15-20.

20. The need for effective follow-through on the LTDP was a constant theme in Ambassador Komer's proposals concerning that program and appears to be based, in part, on his experiences with the US civilian and military bureaucracies in Southeast Asia (Komer, *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing*, pp. xii, 151). See also the remarks by two prominent members of the Carter Administration concerning LTDP follow-through and momentum: Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Balance and Security," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, 24 (February-March 1979), 54; and George S. Vest, "Review of U.S. Policy in Europe," *The Atlantic Community Quarterly*, 17 (Fall 1979), 322.

21. Lothar Domröse, "NATO Long-Term Planning: The Challenge of the Future to the Alliance," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, 24 (October-November 1979), 121.

22. Ibid.

23. "Defence Planning Committee Final Communique," *NATO Review*, 28 (June 1980), 32.

24. Charles de Gaulle, as quoted by Sir Peter Hill-Norton in *No Soft Options: The Politico-Military Realities of NATO* (London: C. Hurst, 1978), p. 157.