

## Canada still needs NATO--but NATO needs change

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There has been much grumbling among NATO members in the last few years. Those, like Canada, who are fighting in NATO's first out-of-area war in Afghanistan complain about those who aren't and those who restrict their soldiers' roles with caveats. Others worry that the threats of present-day terrorism or cyber-attacks are not best met by a military alliance of Western democracies that was created to check the expansion of Soviet Communism more than 60 years ago. The new members, still fearful of Russia, cling to Washington, while some of the older members look to the European Union as far more important than the old alliance.

Because of these complaints, and because of a desire to become more effective and to stay relevant, in July 2009, NATO ordered a strategic review and appointed a high-powered panel under former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright to assess what needs fixing if the alliance is to function better. A Canadian contribution to that review process, *Security in an Uncertain World*, has just been released. There is no doubt that its writers believe that NATO continues to matter to the world and to Canada; there's also no doubt that they are not happy with the state of the alliance.

First, there is Afghanistan. While there are no direct complaints in the report that Canada is carrying the can for many of the other members, there are two telling pie charts that show that Canada has contributed 7% of all non-US troops but suffered 24% of all non-U. S. casualties. That is, of course, because the Canadian battle groups took the lead -- and thus paid the price -- in very dangerous Kandahar province. The lesson: More equitable burden-sharing is needed. All NATO countries must accept their share of the military and materiel costs. Commitments, in other words, must be supported by resources.

In truth, Canada historically has not been the best-positioned NATO member to carp that others are not doing their part. The Trudeau government slashed its military contribution to the alliance by half -- and did it without consultation. The all but total withdrawal from Europe announced by the Mulroney government in 1993 was similarly arbitrary in its execution. But in an alliance that makes decision by consensus, the principle that all must be bound to honour alliance commitments is the right one. Canada, like the Germans and Portuguese, must do its duty.

But the real reason for NATO to continue and for Canada to remain in it is that the world is not safe. Terrorism today is sporadic, but it is dangerously effective and will likely grow in intensity. Failed or rogue states cannot be permitted to offer safe havens to nihilistic zealots, and only NATO (certainly not the UN) has the potential will and ability to take them down. Moreover, Putin's Russia continues to flex its (somewhat atrophied) muscles and China, rapidly becoming a military and economic superpower, remains a one-party dictatorship. Prudence demands a watchful eye on these not-quite-peaceful undemocratic regimes. Canadian national interests in peace, trade and a free international community cry out for a world without threat. NATO is the best indicator that Canadians remain willing to do their share to create and protect it.

Then there are the Americans. Without NATO, Canada would be locked into a bilateral continental military relationship with the United States. They may be our best friends, but propinquity poses difficulties because of history and the imbalance of power. We don't want to be on our own, nor to be alone with the Yanks. NATO offers a multilateral forum, one place we can get together with our friends to try to rein in or encourage Washington when necessary, to persuade the U.S. that others' views must be heeded. That is worth a great deal.

But NATO needs change. It cannot continue as a Eurocentric alliance that forgets Canada on policy questions and infrastructure funding. We're here, we matter and we want to be heard. Sometimes we have good points to make and useful contributions to offer, Afghanistan being a case in point. Just as important, NATO should be looking less to countries like Georgia and Ukraine as candidates for admission, both risky choices that unnecessarily goad Moscow, and more to links, not membership, with Australia, South Korea, Japan and India, democracies that can bring a clearer focus on ways to deal with global threats.

It is also time to put some thinking into developing the alliance's civil support functions. Separate nationally-directed provincial reconstruction and training teams in Afghanistan sometimes seem only to have fostered balkanization. Co-ordination must be the watchword.

NATO admittedly is far from perfect, but it's there. If it can be made to function better, it can continue as our best hope for peace and democracy well into the 21st century.

*J.L. Granatstein writes on behalf of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. He participated in drafting *Security in an Uncertain World*, produced by CDFAI and the Conference of Defence Associations Institute.*