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Session IV: The Future of NATO: Cooperation and its Limits

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NATO's New Concept and its Existence in Asia: Relevance for China

Abstract: The anti-terrorist mission and then the Afghan war opened the door of Asia to NATO. Accompanied with its physical existence in Central Asia, there has been a psychological existence of NATO in East Asia for the purpose of counterbalancing China's rise by some countries from time to time. Both NATO's physical and psychological existences in Asia are of high relevance for China. China may become a valuable partner of NATO to ensure stability and well-being of Afghanistan as a neighboring country to Central Asia. But there are also some risks in the other wing of Asia, an East Asian NATO or a "NATO in Asia version" will injure Chinese and then Asian security interests.

China and NATO: An Overview

During the Cold War, based on its own "non-alignment and anti-hegemony" position on international affairs and then insisted its independent and self-reliant foreign policy, China opposed both NATO and WTO as the "military tools of struggling for sphere of influence between two big imperialist blocs". When the cold war ended and some Chinese scholars were talking about "NATO's death gradually" due to losing its adversaries, a "significant contact between China and NATO", addressed by a senior advisor in NATO, occurred in 1999.¹ A NATO aircraft bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade at the height of the Kosovo conflict which resulted in vehement protests from China. Although relations were eventually smoothed over under diplomatic efforts from both two sides, the incident certainly intensified the negative image of NATO in the mind of Chinese people and government, which made any future and further interaction between China and NATO "more problematic". Subsequently, Sino-NATO relations drop to their lowest levels till Chinese Ambassador in Brussels paid a courtesy call at NATO headquarters and met Mr. Robeson, then Secretary-General of NATO in 2002. This intercourse was regarded as a starting point to establish a normal and general engagement between two sides.

Since then, China and NATO maintained a low profile and ritual contacts. In recent years, when some senior officials including Assistant and Deputy Secretary-General of NATO visited Beijing, Chinese government treated in an unobtrusive manner. Even when the former and current Secretary-Generals indicated that

¹ W. Bruce Weinrod, *NATO and Asia's Changing Relationship*, A Journal of the East Asia Foundation, Vol. 3 No. 3, Fall 2008. www.globalasia.org

NATO is willing to improve China as its “global partner” and required more cooperation in global and regional security affairs, Chinese side still adopted the usual manner². The reasons of China took a low-key attitude to this goodwill from NATO are:

1. It will take more time for China to make a judgment on the nature and strategy of NATO in a “post-post-cold war period”, a “U.S.A-led aggressive military bloc” or a transforming security mechanism towards open and cooperative direction keeping up with the times. The manner and extent of China contacting with NATO is decided by this judgment.
2. China recognized that it is just because of “China’s growing international profile combined with NATO’s presence at China’s borders with Afghanistan and Central Asia”, NATO is ready to enhance the communications with China as a pressing need. This goodwill is a more pragmatic and tactical consideration than a strategic one.
3. To avoid stimulating Chinese people’s emotion, because the memory does not disappear as time goes by. A survey by a Chinese website shows, when Mr. Rasmussen appealed, at Munich Conference on Security Policy of this year, to China and some other countries for building a “Global Security Coalition” with more representativeness to resolve Afghan and other critical security problem, 72.5% of Chinese respondents think that China should “observe calmly and no reaction”, 14.0% think “ignore” is a right way and only 13.6% agree that “we should go with NATO”.

Commonalities and Differences: Values, Strategy and Instruments

In a word, current relations between China and NATO is could be concluded as “wary engagement and limited mutual-trust”. The reason is that two sides have commonalities and differences simultaneously on security concept, strategic options and the instruments.

Political Values: According to the Treaty, NATO is an exclusive organization *founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*. In the cold war, the confrontation between NATO and WTO was described as a war between the Democracies and Non-Democracies. In the view of Chinese government, its practice after Cold War esp. in the case of Kosovo conflict indicated that NATO strengthened its aggressiveness based on the “Democratic Peace Theory”. Unlike NATO, the security issue itself in China’s view has few political meaning. What China insisted is probably another principle that NATO

² Secretary-General of NATO, Mr. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer’ interview with Chinese correspondent in 2006 and 2008.

had advocated in its Treaty, *desiring to live in peace with all peoples and all governments*. This does not mean that China take no consideration on the domestic politics as an important factor in forming a nation's security concept and policy, but think it is not a decisive factor, should be put in an appropriate position.

More important impact by the differences on values between two sides lies in that China is treated as a non-democracy, which is against NATO's values and a meanie in nature. Therefore, declamations of stressing differences on political values excessively and efforts of expanding someone's political values rooted in their own experiences to somebody else would undermine certainly the mutual trust and increase the sense of insecurity.

A gratifying progress on NATO's political values principle made by an *Experts Report on the New Strategic Concept for NATO in 2020* issued recently. It paid more attention on the commonality of security concept and interests between NATO and non-NATO countries than the difference of political values, when it was talking about the Asian security situation in the evaluation:

*In the Asia-Pacific, the major powers, which include Japan, the Republic of Korea, China, India, and Australia, all view regional stability as in their interests and are generally supportive of international norms.*³

Once this viewpoint was adopted in the NATO's New Strategic Concept, this progress will be certainly helpful for NATO to build up an image of more pragmatic and cooperative in those non-NATO countries, and then provide a positive momentum for further contacts between China and NATO.

Security Concepts and Mutual Trust Building: when concluded the features of global security environment in the next ten years, the *Experts Report* considers that:

- *Conventional military aggression against the Alliance or its members is unlikely but the possibility cannot be ignored.*
- *The most probable threats to Allies in the coming decade are unconventional.*⁴

Fundamentally, this judgment is in line with China's "new security concept" that tabled to ASEAN Foreign Minister-level meeting in 2002. China emphasized that with the end of the Cold War, unconventional threat is taking the place of the traditional nation to nation rivalry and becoming the main challenge to international security. It involves military and non-military threats, domestic and international affairs, national security and international problems to security concerns. Only through the way of "cooperation security", which means "transcending category of unilateral security and pursuing mutual security by

³ *ATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement-Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

mutually beneficial cooperation”, can the international community is capable to meet these challenges and solve these problems.

It is easily to find this improvement between two sides on their definition of threats, in spite of their priority and the focus is not exactly the same.

NATO (NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement-Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO):

In the current day, uncertainty is magnified by such factors as:

- *The proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction;*
- *The ambitions of international terrorist groups;*
- *The persistence of corrosive regional, national, ethnic, and religious rivalries;*
- *The world’s increased reliance on potentially vulnerable information systems;*
- *The competition for petroleum and other strategic resources (thereby highlighting the importance of maritime security);*
- *Demographic changes that could aggravate such global problems as poverty, hunger, illegal immigration, and pandemic disease; and*
- *The accumulating consequences of environmental degradation, including climate change.*⁵

China (The Chinese Position Paper about the New Security Concept):

World peace is faced with threats, including:

- *The local wars and conflicts;*
- *The regional hot spots;*
- *The north-south gap;*
- *The international terrorist threat;*
- *The threat of ethnic separatism and religious extremist;*
- *The environmental pollution, drug smuggling, transnational crime and serious infectious disease.*

NATO may be aware of this trend of gradual mutual approach on the security concept, and therefore more actively seek to expand the consensus between two sides. When it evaluated current security environment, the *Experts Report* claimed that *Emerging global powers such as China, India and Brazil are asserting their rising influence in a peaceful manner.*⁶

Instruments: According to the Article 5 of Treaty, “that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.” the *Experts Report* reaffirming the “Collective Defence” as

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

NATO's Core Commitment. While China takes a stand of nonalignment on diplomatic and security matters opposing to any military alliance. It is a substantial difference between China and NATO. Surely, China's stand of nonalignment is understandable not only because of its historic experiences but its geopolitical position. Considering its scale and current international security situations, any security alliance comprising of China will result in a terrible imbalance.

It is because of NATO's collective security commitment, some Chinese scholars concerns about how does NATO define its adversary and threats in future. A rational attitude of "*minimizing the likelihood of miscalculation on the part of potential adversaries*" is certainly welcomed by those Chinese people who support to improve the contacts and engagement with NATO.

According to *Report*, NATO is increasing its concerns on energy and cyber security, which might be the prior strategic objectives very probably in the New Strategic Concept. In view of China's heavy dependency on imported energy and its supply lines, energy security would be a potential field of cooperation between two sides. Meanwhile, considering the exaggeration on China's "strategy and capacity of launching the cyber attacks" by some media intentionally or not, to determine carefully where the threats are from and more dialogues with non member state become particularly important for NATO.

Moreover, China is also concerning about NATO's reform on its internal decision-making mechanism. The *Experts Report* reaffirmed also the Article 4 of "*to consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.*" Undoubtedly, NATO's choices and missions will be more sophisticated once it adopts a more democratic decision-making process avoiding its interests of the whole fall victim to one or several big power's self-interest.

NATO in Asia: its Limits for Regional Security

More and deeper Cooperation with more non-NATO States for its Mission in Afghanistan.

To make its mission in Afghanistan, "the largest ever attempted by the Alliance", a success is one of the most important tasks of NATO in the next 10 years. But the reality is that NATO has to take more careful and comprehensive political way to end the war and ensure the success of state- rebuilding in Afghanistan. When difficult to finish fully tasks in accordance with the objectives designed in *Bonn Agreement* by NATO itself, China and other Asian countries are going to be regarded as the stakeholders to play a indispensable role not only in their own interests.

By the lack of high mutual trust and the substantial security cooperation between two sides, it is now difficult for China to meet NATO's specific requirements, especially such as opening bordering porch and providing logistical support, etc. But it is helpful for NATO to keep China, some other countries and SCO, in which China plays an important role, into a framework of resolving Afghanistan problem properly. If so, NATO would win a lasting security regional environment, reduce its costs and concentrate on its political and civil mission there.

Any effort of indicating, encouraging or supporting to the so-called "Asian version NATO" will lead to complication of the region's security situation.

Cooperation in Afghanistan has driven NATO's relationships with Asian countries have developed rapidly in the last few years. Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan and South Korea are making direct and indirect contribution to the Alliance's effort there. This cooperation between NATO and its "partners outside region" gives no cause for blame essentially, but the problem is that it fired an imagination of building a Asian NATO in this region, which inflates especially in the recent when regional situation is complicated and Sino-America relations is likely to be in a difficult situation.

Some countries in this region intent to use NATO as an additional venue to raise international, particularly United States of America, awareness of the Asian security situation, esp. the most serious concern on "China's rise". But the differences of culture, history and geopolitics between Europe and Asia are telling that any effort of transplanting NATO model into Asia will gain nothing but making more troubles.

NATO is careful enough on this imagination and define the main threats of Asia are: *The two primary sources of instability are longstanding -- the rivalry between India and Pakistan, and the dangerous government of the People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK). The DPRK's nuclear weapons programme warrants particular attention.*⁷ While it is evident that the resolution of these two problems is inseparable from China's cooperation and the so-called Asian NATO dose not help matters at all.

Conclusion:

The financial crisis is drawing a new world map not only in the economic sense. According to the logic of power from wealth, how to cope with challenges brought by new emerging powers to existing international order is becoming a prior topic for these policy-makers in Washington, Tokyo and Brussels. U.S.A is "coming

⁷ Ibid.

back to Asia” and renewing its security alliance with Japan frequently pointed to China and Russia, the security situation in Asia Pacific region is going to a new round of tensions. For NATO, a “most successful international security mechanism in the world since the end of World War II”, a “regional organization facing global challenges”, its new role and impact on current international security situation will be shaped by its new Strategic Concept. The next 5 to 10 years from now on would be a critical period for both China and NATO, which will decide that a peaceful transition of international order is possible or not. If there is a NATO with more democracy internally and cooperation externally after the forthcoming summit in Lisbon, China’s insecurity will be reduced certainly. Thus, closer and effective engagements between two sides and then the strengthening force toward peace are predictable.