

Relations with Russia, and Afghan war dominated NATO talks

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28 NATO leaders met at the Lisbon Summit on 19-20th November. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to NATO's Lisbon summit heralded a new era in the military alliance's relations with its Cold War-era adversary, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has told RIA Novosti.

"It will certainly be a summit that marks a fresh start in our relations," Rasmussen said in an interview on the eve of the landmark meeting. "I hope in particular that NATO and Russia will be moving forward on missile defense cooperation."

NATO and its rationale

It is very important to remember that its 1949 founding documents clearly say that NATO is a defensive organisation, which would go into action only when one of its member states was attacked. It is known as collective defence. NATO (Atlantic Pact) was constituted to counter communism and the Soviet threat during the Cold War.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, NATO lost its raison d'être given that Western Europe and the United States were no longer threatened by an invasion from Eastern Europe. NATO thus had the choice between disbanding itself or developing a new reason for its existence.

Collective defence has been the principal reason many East European countries to become NATO members since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Other European countries also strive for its membership for the same reason.

NATO has celebrated its 60th year of its existence in 2009. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has gone through to transform itself and whether further transformation is necessary or not is the question. This question is really going to affect the relevance and the viability of the institution and perhaps the very future of the Alliance.

It is quite a paradox that although there is a tremendous overlap in membership between NATO and the European Union, very often European Union and NATO do not speak with the same voice. What NATO we can do, actually, to make this synergy actually a fact?

NATO's expanded role

At the NATO 50th Anniversary Celebrations in Washington in April 1999, the United States presented to the European states the attack on Yugoslavia as an example of the future role of NATO not as "defensive" organization with the following communiqué:

"This new alliance will be bigger, more capable and more flexible, involved in collective defence and capable of undertaking new missions, among which is the active commitment in the management of crises, including the operations of responding to crises. (Washington Summit Communiqué, (24/4/1999)."

It meant that NATO would project its military force to resolve crisis beyond its borders not only in Europe, but also in other regions, like the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Ocean.

NATO gives itself the right to intervene anywhere in the world for management of crises whenever it feels its interests are threatened, without consulting the United Nations. Thus a new NATO was born and got involved in Afghanistan in 2001 after 9/11.

Agenda of the Summit

As NATO prepares to respond to new challenges, -- cyber defence, energy security, terrorism, and piracy -- the main agenda of the Lisbon Summit was as follows

- NATO's third Strategic Concept since the end of the Cold War, defining the Alliance's strategic priorities for the next decade.

- NATO missile defence programme
- Relations with Russia
- Exit Strategy in Afghanistan

New Strategic Concept

NATO leaders reaffirmed the concept of collective defence stating that members are "to defend one another against attack, including against new threats to the safety of our citizens", without defining a geographical limit to its theatre of operations.

NATO leaders approved a new 'strategic concept', a plan for its development over the next decade. The concept calls on the alliance to expand its military focus from 'classic' war fighting to more complex issues of crisis management and conflict prevention.

The new concept would include improving cooperation with non-NATO countries and organisations such as the European Union and UN. However, in deference to Turkey's dispute with EU member Cyprus, the summit only said that NATO would make 'our contribution to create more favourable circumstances' for cooperation.

The consideration of strategic concept had also triggered off major reform throughout the entire Organization, which would take place over the time.

Missile defence in Europe

In the past, Russia had been fiercely critical of former US missile defence plans, seeing them as a direct threat to the credibility of its nuclear deterrent, and Moscow demanded that a previous blueprint be withdrawn.

Furthermore Russia has been wary of NATO's "encirclement. Russia in 2007 suspended the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty dating from the last years of the Cold War that limits NATO and Russian military deployments in Europe.

Suspension of CFE Treaty allows Russia to move its tanks and other defence equipment to its western borders and Poland and other Russia's neighbours deplored the suspension. It was believed that the suspension was in response to the US missile defence plan in Eastern Europe.

Missile defence cooperation with Russia

At the summit, Barack Obama and his NATO allies agreed to shield Europe's peoples from rogue rocket attacks with a screen of interceptor missiles as "a core element of our collective defence". This would allow in setting up an anti-ballistic missile screen by bringing long-range US missiles to Europe and creating a computer programme to link shorter-range European systems to it.

This time the leaders have invited Moscow to link its own defensive systems to the grid. And Russia had accepted the invitation. That decision met with thunderous acclaim, with Medvedev calling it 'historic' and German Chancellor Angela Merkel naming it a 'milestone'.

However Russian President said many details of the shield plan were still uncertain and that the scheme would "only be peaceful when it is universal". And he warned: "Our participation has to be a full-fledged exchange of information, or we won't take part at all."

He also wanted his country to be included in decision-making, something which is a red line for the US and NATO's former communist states.

Many strategists believe that if NATO wants to be relevant at the 21st century, NATO-Russia relations need to improve substantially and both sides must take into account any historical sensitivities in bridging differences. That seems to be the only way to move ahead for peace and security in the world.

Afghanistan

The next challenge on the NATO summit agenda was Afghanistan. On 20th November, the 28 NATO leaders joined Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the 20 other countries (Australia included) which

sent troops to Afghanistan. The UN Secretary General was also present at the meeting.

France's new defence minister, Alain Juppe, said this week Afghanistan was a trap for allied troops, adding that French forces would not withdraw fully until Afghan authorities had the situation in hand.

The US is wary of giving the impression that the original aim of invading Afghanistan in 2001 - to deny al Qaeda a base to launch more terrorist attacks on the West - will be achieved by then.

"I think that, seen retrospectively, we underestimated the challenge and our operation in Afghanistan didn't have sufficient resources, and yes, that was a mistake. We'll make a positive announcement in Lisbon that the handover is about to begin," NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told Portugal's Renascença.

More than 2,200 Allied troops (including 654 US troops) have been killed in the nine-year-old war launched by the United States after the September 11, 2001 attacks to root out al-Qa'ida leaders and overthrow their Taliban protectors.

Canada said this week its 3,000 troops will end their combat mission next year, with 950 remaining to train Afghan troops, and Germany announced it will begin withdrawing in 2012. The Netherlands also is winding down its combat presence.

Prime Minister David Cameron has insisted British troops will quit their combat role in Afghanistan by 2015, whatever the security conditions or progress made in tackling insurgents. That would begin next year with an unspecified but small number of areas transferred to Afghan control.

Exit strategy from Afghanistan

The draining of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan prompted an exit strategy and prompted NATO would retreat in future from explicit commitments to a global defence role - role of world's policeman.

NATO leaders agreed that allied troops would cede responsibility for security to Afghan forces by the end of 2014. Afghan forces will start taking the lead in security operations in some districts and provinces next year starting from July, gradually spreading throughout the country.

A transitional period has been established from July of next year until the end of 2014 by which time, it is hoped, NATO combat operations will end, but a senior US official said US forces would not commit to ending combat missions within that time frame.

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai was in Lisbon, where he signed a long-term security partnership with NATO.

NATO's secretary general said the Taliban would not be allowed simply to wait for foreign forces to leave, saying NATO would remain committed. NATO would stay "as long as it takes", Rasmussen said.

Meanwhile on 13th November, Afghan President Hamid Karzai surprised the NATO US commander in Afghanistan General David Petraeus when he said the United States must reduce the visibility and intensity of its military operations, especially night raids that fuel anti-American sentiment and could embolden Taliban insurgents.

Karzai's remarks came as the international military coalition has stepped up pressure on insurgents at the same time that Karzai has set up a peace council in hopes of reconciling with the top echelon of the Taliban.

To many Americans, it's obvious Karzai don't have American troops to fight against the Taliban and it's time to bring US troops home.

Conclusion

The two-day summit has been billed as one of the most important in the NATO's history, as it seeks to update its strategy to face new security threats of the 21st century.

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.



Robots to rescue wounded on battlefield

FORT DETRICK, Md.: A robot being tested now may soon have the ability to rescue wounded Soldiers under fire without risking additional lives. The Battlefield Extraction Assist Robot, or BEAR, has been tested over the past year by Soldiers at the U.S. Army Infantry Center Maneuver Battle Lab at Fort Benning, Ga.

The BEAR can be controlled remotely by a motion-capture glove or specially-equipped rifle grip. A warfighter could use the equipment to guide the robot to recover a wounded Soldier and bring him or her back to where a combat medic could safely conduct an initial assessment.

The U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command's Telemedicine and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC) has helped fund the development of Vecna Technologies' humanoid BEAR, and has funded integration of AnthroTronix's iGlove and M-4 rifle grip controller into the Fort Benning testing.

Gary Gilbert, who manages TATRC's medical robotics portfolio, said the assessments from the Battle Lab provide a key link between research and actual robots that can be used in the field.

"Our goal with the Battle Lab testing is to get the technology in the hands of the Soldiers, either through simulations or live exercises, and derive from their feedback what tactics, techniques and procedures are appropriate for deploying it," Gilbert said.

"These [Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures] can then serve as the basis for developing real-world operational capability needs and requirements," he said. "It's only once we know how we'll successfully use these technologies that you'll see them put into the field."

A computer simulation of the BEAR was created in 2009 for use in the Battle Lab's One Semi-Autonomous Forces (OneSAF) combat operations simulator. An initial series of platoon-level assaults and clearing operations in both wooded and urban terrain were executed in OneSAF, including casualty extractions using both conventional litter rescues and rescues with the BEAR.

The AnthroTronix remote control systems were integrated with the simulation in December of 2009. In June of this year, the BEAR and AnthroTronix controllers underwent live characterization studies with Soldiers observing their capabilities in both urban and wooded terrain.

The BEAR is a multi-modal, high-degree-of-freedom robot that can reach out with its hydraulic arms to lift and carry up to 500 pounds; complete fine motor tasks with its hands and fingers; maneuver with a dual-track system; stand up and balance; and use cameras and sensors.

The robot gained national media attention when it was featured in Time Magazine's Best Inventions of 2006. Successive versions have increased its capabilities.

While the initial control of the BEAR is via a remote human operator, work is underway for more complicated semi-autonomous behaviors in which the robot understands and carries out increasingly higher-level commands.

AnthroTronix's iGlove gesture-recognition device can control robots remotely through simple hand signals.

The iGlove is a low-cost, universally compatible control device that has been available commercially since 2009 as the AcceleGlove. The company plans to develop a new version with more accelerometers and a digital compass so the user could instruct a robot to disable an improvised explosive device or travel exactly 300 yards west, for example, using signals from the glove alone.

The Mounted Force Controller is another robot-controller device that can be mounted on an M-4 rifle so a Soldier does not have to put down his or her weapon to use the device.

Noted AnthroTronix Chief Technology Officer Jack Vice, a former Force Recon Marine, said, "One of the most promising outcomes of the Battle Lab simulations and live testing was the fact that warfighters only required minimal training to learn to operate both the iGlove and MFC. Additionally, in comparing the iGlove to traditional controllers, warfighters favored the simplicity of the iGlove mode switching, in which they simply reached out and touched the human joint to control the corresponding robotic joint."

Vice added that "TATRC support has enabled us to fully integrate the controllers with Joint Architecture for Unmanned Systems software, gain invaluable feedback from Soldiers, and develop new control methodologies as we integrate the controllers with high-degree-of-freedom robots such as the BEAR."

For these projects, TATRC has leveraged funding from the Tank Automotive Research Development and Engineering Command, the Joint Ground Robotics Enterprise, the Robotics Systems Joint Project Office, the Army Research Lab, the Small Business Innovative Research Program and Congressionally Directed Research funds.

"The Battle Lab testing process has great potential for overcoming the numerous barriers to transitioning research prototypes or new and emerging technologies to operational systems," Gilbert said. "Even our initial simulation and live operational assessments point to significant research challenges ahead in developing and fielding unmanned systems for combat casualty care. But this is the technology of the future."

"If robots could be used in the face of threats such as urban combat, booby-trapped IEDs, and chemical and biological weapons, it could save medics' and fellow Soldiers' lives," he said.

Source: defencetalk.com

The quest for an Afghan settlement

S. IFTIKHAR MURSHED

THUCYDIDES, the historian of ancient Greece, believed that peace is only a short-lived armistice in a natural state of perpetual war and this has been the doleful experience of Afghanistan. The country has bled and continues to bleed from the wounds inflicted on it by external aggression, internal conflict and ethnic strife. Ever since Ahmad Shah Abdali founded the kingdom of Afghanistan in 1747, its people have been the victims of relentless violence. After Abdali's death in 1773, his kingdom crumbled and spurred rivalry between imperial Britain and Russia which played itself out as the "great game" of the nineteenth century. The last three decades have been particularly violent and Afghanistan became the only country in the world to be invaded and occupied twice by super-powers.

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 29 December 1979 to February 1989 triggered a fierce liberation struggle the successful culmination of which contributed to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The last battle of the Cold War was thus won and fought by Muslims for the so-called free world. The decade-long war was unique in the sense that it was a completely decentralized conflict fought in hundreds of war theatres through the length and breadth of 647,500 square kilometers of rugged Afghan terrain. There was no central figure - no Mao Tse Tung, no Ho Chi Minh, no McArthur or De Gaul around whom the people could rally. The nation-wide jubilation and the nationalist upsurge that invariably marks such a triumph were therefore absent from Afghanistan. Instead the war-hardened local commanders consolidated themselves in their respective areas and the fighting continued transforming itself from a heroic war of liberation into an ugly contest for power. The hope of peace became as illusory as a mirage in the desert.

Moscow-installed Najibullah regime which ended with the latter's ouster on 28 April 1992. The Pakistan-brokered settlement through the Peshawar and Islamabad accords of 1992 and 1993 proved disastrous because Burhanuddin Rabbani, the ethnic Tajik leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami, refused to step down as president of Afghanistan after his term expired in July 1994. Consequently the writ of the government was confined to Kabul while mujahideen commanders

of ordinary citizens were at their mercy. It was against this backdrop of chaos and anarchy that the Pashtun-dominated Taliban movement emerged. In the last week of August 1994, Mullah Omar set out with forty-five followers from a madrassa in Maiwand, Kandahar, to punish a commander who had molested a local family. It was neither ideology nor religious fervour that accounted for their subsequent success. It was the war-weariness of the populace

However, it was not through force of arms but the persuasiveness of their message that the Taliban were able to triumphantly sweep first the eastern and then the western part of Afghanistan. It had been claimed that Kabul could sustain a siege for more than a year but its surrender to the Taliban came virtually overnight on 27 September 1996 with only 200 casualties.

The reaction of the US to the Taliban soon after they had taken Kabul was one

However instead of engaging with the Taliban the international community isolated them and, as a consequence, Afghanistan became the breeding ground for terrorist outfits. Five years later the fateful 9/11 attacks occurred prompting the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the destruction of the Taliban regime. Nine years into the conflict, the 47-member coalition forces have been unable to quell the insurgency despite the overwhelming

reconciliation process initiated by President Karzai. It is likely that the decisions of the summit will be reaffirmed in US policy review on Afghanistan scheduled in December 2010.

For his part, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force and US Forces in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, has crafted his counter-insurgency strategy on the four interlocking elements of "clear, hold, build and transfer." The last of these poses the formidable difficulty of who to transfer to particularly in the Pashtun belt which is overwhelmingly dominated by the Taliban. By the end of this year, NATO will have trained approximately 150,000 troops and 100,000 police. But the officer class is predominantly Tajik and Uzbek who belong to the minority ethnic groups.

There has however been an effort to recruit more Pashtuns but these are from the minor tribes in the smaller provinces. Traditionally the Afghan officers have been from the Ghilzai tribes of the eastern provinces of Khost, Paktika and Paktia which are collectively known as the greater Paktia region. The problem arises here is that the dominant influence in this region is that of the Al Qaeda-supported Haqqani network. Similarly, there has been little effort recruit Pashtun soldiers from the Durrani tribes who are preponderant in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul.

In the final analysis, it is the quest for national cohesion in a heterogeneous population that defines the Afghanistan problem. Peaceful coexistence among its ethnic groups led by the Pashtuns has been alien to the Afghan experience. The key to durable settlement in Afghanistan is that the future dispensation and the security forces must be in accordance with the ethnic map of the country. Any other arrangement will be unstable and only prolong the agony of the Afghan people.

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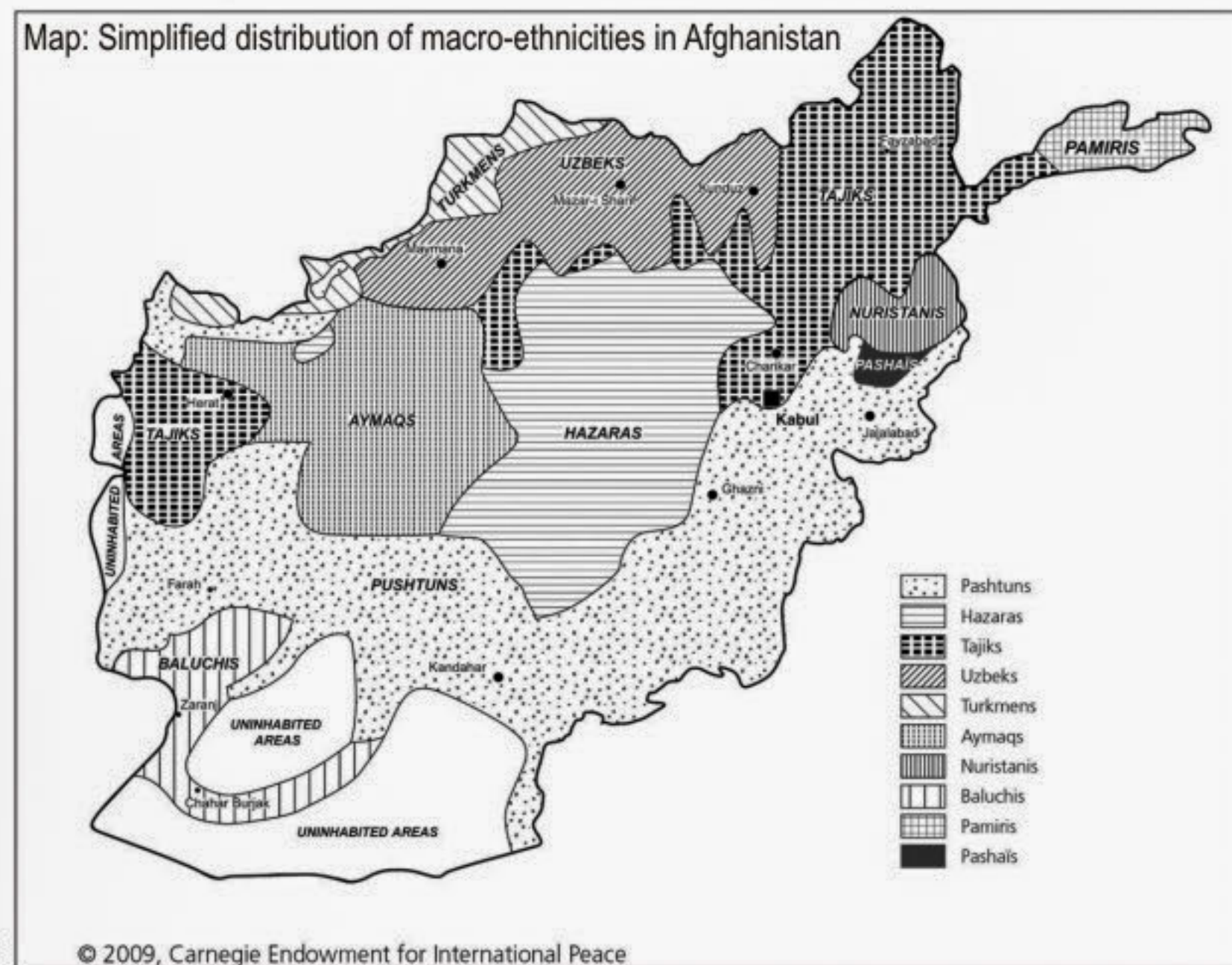
The settlement of the security forces in Afghanistan must be in accordance with the ethnic map.

established warlord zones in the rest of the country.

The warlords were a law unto themselves and imposed their own arbitrary fiat in the areas they controlled. In Kandahar, the main road to Herat on the one hand, and to Chaman in Pakistan on the other, had toll posts and barriers at virtually every kilometre, where local commanders exacted fees and whatever other extortions they decided upon on any passing traffic. The lives and honour

which made them welcome any force that could deliver them from the hands of brigands. They hungered for the restoration of peace and the semblance of an honest administration no matter how harsh its system of justice.

The local commanders who surrendered to the Taliban brought with them substantial quantities of weapons and ammunition. With each success the ranks of the Taliban swelled with veterans who had fought against the Soviets.



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