

**“Impact of the Iraq War on NATO Capabilities”**

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### *Introduction*

Today, as I begin to write this paper, the United Kingdom's Prime Minister declared in Baghdad that British troops would depart from Iraq by the end of May, 2009. Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that he would pull out all 4,000 British troops by May 31, 2009. In 2003, a full 45,000 troops from that nation had accompanied the U.S. invasion force of one quarter million military personnel. British casualties had totaled 173 deaths in the ensuing period, while U.S. deaths had mounted to 4,200 (*USA TODAY*). Clearly, NATO partners had contributed substantial capabilities to that conflict since March 2003. Just as obviously, all partners were re-examining the impact of the war itself on their own defense strength and were realigning their capabilities in ways that would fit a more limited set of objectives.

In a sense, the Iraq War was like a cue ball whose force upon impact sent many other billiard balls rocketing in unanticipated directions. This study will focus on five of those billiard balls, each of which constitutes one component of NATO capabilities. First, the War in Iraq weakened the capacity of the United States to lead effectively the alliance. Leadership capacity drained away particularly after the series of mistaken decisions made by U.S. leaders in the first year after the initially announced end of the mission on May 1, 2003. In the years to follow, huge commitments of money, personnel, casualties, and equipment further weakened the leadership capabilities of the United States. Second, the Iraq War diluted NATO unity and undermined the will power behind its significant post-Cold War military structure. This was true even though NATO had chosen not to supervise and oversee the war itself. Divisions within NATO became apparent in the lead-up to the war and continued for its duration through at least the end of 2008. Third, the War opened the door to Russian ambitions at a time when increasing oil prices made it possible for that ambitious nation, under the strong leadership of President Putin, to flex its economic muscles in various parts of its own region and even the wider world. NATO

capabilities indirectly suffered, for planning once again need to focus in part on containing Russian aggressiveness and its renewed search for greatness. Fourth, the Iraq War diminished the ability of NATO to contribute to political stability in countries in which it had taken on official responsibilities. Those nations included Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Bosnia. In each of those nations the NATO role had been in flux, but the alliance always had a portion of the responsibilities. The controversy over missile defense against nations like Iran and North Korea also fits into this picture of decreased capabilities. For the most part, the alliance had enough preoccupations that it threw this political football into the lap of the United States. Fifth, the War in Iraq weakened the ability of key NATO partners to do effective strategic planning in 2008, a year in which the surge and effective military leadership on the ground had significantly reduced the level of violence in the nation. Effective planning might have taken place had the discord that had accompanied the war not continued to simmer. In addition, the preoccupation of the United States with its own presidential election cycle magnified the planning weaknesses in 2008. A brief conclusion to the paper will highlight prospects for pulling the scattered billiard balls back into some sort of coherent pattern.

#### *Weakening of the U.S. Leadership Capability*

Confusion over the original goals of the war initially undermined America's leadership posture in general. In the early days of the war, there was a preoccupation with the search for weapons of mass destruction. Failure to locate such evidence reflected badly on the structure of intelligence gathering that include the CIA, Department of State, and Department of Defense. In addition, the American military had struck earlier than planned in an unsuccessful effort to knock out Saddam Hussein himself. There was also a decision made to begin the ground invasion before Air Force bombardment had sufficiently softened up the Iraqi military. Additional faulty assumptions were apparent to all

international observers in the early weeks of the war. U.S. leaders expected that Shiites would joyfully welcome the Americans and be thankful for their deposal of the hated Saddam. Similarly, there was a belief that civilians would welcome the American Army as a liberator and even cast flowers in their path. Pre-war build-up conveyed the expectation that the invasion could be accomplished with a minimum of casualties. Further, the prevailing assumption was that the Iraqi social order was weak, and thus any resistance would quickly fade away (Pelletière, 2007, pp. 6-25). These mistaken assumptions weakened the American leadership image in the world in the early days of the war.

From the spring of 2003 until the summer of 2004, American administrators managed political and economic life in preparation for resumption of Iraqi control. Paul Bremer was the symbol of that leadership group and in fact the guiding force within it. A number of assumptions and decisions made in that year turned out also to be faulty and contributed to the growing negative view of American leadership. First, looking to Afghanistan as a parallel, the American leadership on the ground assumed that tribal leaders held power in Iraq. Thus, working with them alone would solve many problems. In reality, the Ba'thists under Saddam had already broken the power of these chieftains. Second, the decision was made to disband Saddam's army and send most of them home, as it was expected that they would be disloyal to any new Shiite-dominated regime. In fact, this put them out of work and created a large group of disgruntled former military members who then were tempted to join the resistance to the Americans. Third, de-Ba'thification became the hallmark of policy. It was assumed that the Ba'thist Party members were exclusively Sunni and should be kicked out of major positions in government and education. In fact, many Kurds and Shiites had joined the Ba'thist Party in order to obtain employment. Thus, de-Ba'thification was a policy that alienated members of each major ethnic group and drove some into opposition to the Americans (Pelletière, pp. 56-77). In these ways, America's image as an effective planning agent in the post-Cold War period became tarnished.

Certain American political decisions about governance in Iraq in the period before its January 2005, elections also went against the grain of actual ethnic and political conditions. For example, since the local leaders connected with the Ba'athists were all suspect, attention turned to seven Iraqi expatriates as those more deserving of leadership positions. Thus, the formerly U.S.-based Chalabi became an early favorite of the America for an Iraqi leadership position. Similarly, Kurd leaders with Iranian connections like Talabani and Barzani also became popular with the American team. Bremer also replaced former administrator Jay Garner's plan for an Iraqi-based Provisional Government with an American-Based Governmental Authority. These arrangements would last until the January 2005 elections generated locally-based leadership. Basically, the seven expatriates would rule in that interim period in conjunction with a twenty-five member Council. That Council would include 13 Shiites, 5 Sunnis, 1 Kurd, 1 Turkoman, and 1 woman (Pelletière, pp. 78-103). All of these plans emphasized American control rather than Iraqi. In addition, the make-up of the Council reinforced ethnic divisions instead of creating frameworks in which members of several ethnic groups would have to work together.

All of the above evidence from the 2003-04 period of American intervention and management of Iraq creates a collective picture of American confusion. As such, the leadership capability of America as NATO's main player came into question. Another, quite different blow to American capabilities was the enormous expense connected with the war. As the United States increased the deficit in order to finance the war, its leadership stature became even softer. Further, money spent in Iraq was unavailable for other defense, collective security, and alliance projects. It is only possible here to focus on select evidence, as the topic is so large. In all stages of the war, defense spending continued to climb. For example, it jumped between 2004 and 2007 from \$405 billion to \$524 billion (Pease, 2008, p. 268). Then, in 2007, President Bush announced his new strategy of surge. After all of the expense in

Iraq, the situation in late 2006 was indeed very grim. Terrorist incidents multiplied, and both Iraqi and allied casualties mounted. However successful the surge turned out to be, it certainly drained financial resources away from other defense projects, at exactly the time when Afghanistan was becoming a much more explosive terrain. The surge that was announced called for five more brigades that included deployment of another 21,500 troops. In spite of this commitment of new troops, the next summer was a time of a very high number of American casualties in the war. In June 2007, one hundred twenty-six American soldiers lost their lives, and it went into the record books as the second worst month for U.S. forces in the war. By that month, allied military capabilities in Iraq were at extremely high levels. Those military capabilities included seventy bases, thirty-eight supply depots, eighteen fuel-storage centers, and ten ammunition dumps (Simon, accessed in *Foreign Affairs* on-line on December 12, 2008). If those physical capabilities could not generate more positive results after four continuing years of war, then doubts about the outcome continued to skyrocket. As they did, confidence in American leadership capacities continued to erode.

Although plans in 2008 solidified for an eventual date for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, still major new capabilities continued to receive attention and budgetary commitments. One such project was the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO). The new equipment offered the benefit of jamming communications devices and thus reducing the number of deaths through IEDs. This program would be a significant contribution in light of the fact that 70% of the combat deaths in Iraq resulted from the IEDs. Costs, however, were very high. The total budget for such devices in FY 2009 was \$4.5 billion, but \$16 billion was actually spent. Planning for FY 2010 centered on a figure of \$3.5 billion (Anonymous, accessed in *Defense Daily* on-line, December 12, 2008).

The figures cited above are, of course, very selective. However, they demonstrate the enormous increase in overall defense funding at critical points in the war, some of the costs associated

with the “surge,” and an illustration of one current new program that will require funding as long as American troops remain on the ground in Iraq, and probably after their departure as well. All of these projects demonstrate a strengthening of U.S. capabilities in Iraq itself. However, they seriously deny budgetary resources for other arenas and thereby draw the attention of the NATO leader away from growing alliance needs on other fronts.

### *Dilution of NATO Unity*

From the outset, the War in Iraq has countered the efforts of the alliance to integrate effectively and harmoniously the ten new members admitted between 1999 and 2004. In 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland became full members. Then, in 2004, the organization extended that status to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania. At the same time, dissension among the senior NATO partners continued to bubble from 2002 through the end of 2008.

As early as January 29, 2002, leaders of NATO became critical of American intentions towards Iraq. On that date, President Bush first used the “Axis of Evil” label for Iraq, Iran, and North Korea during his annual State of the Union message. Germany, France, and the United Kingdom immediately expressed disagreement with the utility or applicability of such a descriptive phrase (Thompson, 2004, p. 135). In fact, that disagreement reflected a more longstanding set of differences over American labels. The U.S. State Department had earlier listed six states as sponsors of terrorism. They included Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, and Libya. The department added Sudan to the list in 1993. European alliance partners had expressed discontent with that list and even with the demonization of the targets as “rogue states,” or later “states of concern” (Rees, 2004, p. 172).

Tensions within the NATO structure also emerged over the issue of obtaining a U.N. Resolution to sanction the war itself. Initially, the U.S. endeavored to get the U.N. to firmly enforce its own earlier resolutions on Iraq's continuing military buildup. In his speech to the United Nations on September 12, 2002, President Bush told the body that they risked irrelevance if they failed to enforce those earlier resolutions. After much persuasion, the U.N. finally did pass a "tough new disarmament mandate for Iraq." At the Prague NATO Summit during the next month, the U.N. Resolution received support from that alliance as well. President Bush then asked NATO to provide military assistance in support of an invasion of Iraq. While the military organization had been willing to play a role in the Afghanistan War, they chose not to make such a commitment to the upcoming war against Iraq (Thompson, p. 141).

However, when the time for war approached, the United States was unable to obtain support of the United Nations for it. This made all the difference for NATO partners who were at the time considering whether to grant their support for such an operation. Many senior alliance partners were unwilling to back a war that did not have the sanction of the U.N. behind it. In fact, one poll done in Europe in late 2002 revealed that there was majority support for such a war that had the backing of the U.N. but majority opposition if it did not (Thompson, p. 137). The result of all the politics in this heated, tense period was further alienation of much of Europe from the United States. An additional consequence was reinforcement of the inclinations of the Bush Administration for a unilateralist policy.

Additional tension within the alliance developed over the Turkish issue at the beginning of the war. The Bush Administration hoped to convince Turkey to permit its territory to be used for an invasion of Iraq from the north. However, Turkish leaders worried understandably about the very real possibility of an Iraqi retaliation. This issue led to a vigorous debate within NATO, an alliance in which Turkey itself was a member. At one point Bush lobbied European leaders to consider earlier Turkish admission to the European Union (EU) as a reward for becoming part of the Iraqi invasion path

(Thompson, p. 141). On February 10, 2003, Turkey itself invoked NATO's Article 4 that called for consultations in case of perceived threats against the "territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any ally." When phrased in those terms, France, Germany, and Belgium all said no. Thus, the use of Article 4 to protect Turkey was dead through use of the veto (Terzuolo, 2006, p. 119). One analyst (Michta, p. 111) described this veto as a blocking action that "effectively paralyzed NATO and was a shot across the bow of the alliance."

The split within NATO over the Iraq War became popularized as a division between the "old" and "new" Europe. Poland, one of the "new" European alliance partners, accepted major responsibility for oversight of an occupation zone south of Baghdad. In doing so, they sent 2,400 of their own troops to the conflict. By the end of 2004, they had sent a total of three rotations to the combat zone. One positive result for them was modernization of its military. They also had received a crash course in working under NATO procedures (Michta, 2006, p. 37). Surprisingly, the country that provided the second highest number of troops in the Polish administered zone was Ukraine, a non-NATO country. "New" NATO members that also provided assistance in that zone included Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia. Additional assistance came from Spain, Denmark, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Norway, and the United States (Terzuolo, p. 121). In general, however, the "old" European nations such as Italy, Spain, Denmark, and the Netherlands preferred to confine their primary assistance to training new Iraqi police units (Thompson, p. 141).

German opposition to the war was forceful and continuing. In late 2002, that opposition was partly linked to the re-election needs of the Schröder governing coalition. However, there were deeply rooted philosophical differences behind German opposition as well. German leaders were very skeptical about the inclusion of Iraq in the anti-terrorist campaign. In their view, the U.S. unilateral decision to switch from a war on terrorism to a war on Iraq "has caused major tensions with its European allies."

They were not even certain that acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iraq would pose a substantial security threat to the United States (Rees, pp. 176, 181, and 212). As the tensions between the “old” and “new” NATO members continued to bubble, President Chirac of France chided and berated the smaller nations who supported the U.S. and who really would not technically enter NATO until 2004 (Michta, p. 111). However, their path to NATO membership was on course during 2003. Therefore, his threats bore more meaning about the likelihood of completing the membership process for the European Union. As Germany and France pulled back from the embrace of the War in Iraq demonstrated by the “new” Europe, they began to speculate about the day when the EU’s European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) would become a real alternative to NATO (McGuigan, 2007, p. 158).

As the Iraq War became more and more of “an all-out test of NATO’s internal consensus” (Michta, p. 110), the threat to alliance capabilities became more and more real. A number of serious observers began to wonder if internal alliance conflicts over Iraq would permeate other areas of NATO cooperation. For example, would there be any damage to “intelligence sharing, force transformation, and small counter-terrorism operations.” These were significant considerations, for all of Europe felt much more vulnerable in light of the original 9/11 attacks. On the threat from al Qaeda, the alliance was united, and the need for cooperation in transforming defensive capabilities was paramount. However, the Iraq War was another matter entirely, and it eroded the harmony that had developed in the late fall of 2001.

#### *Encouragement of Russian Ambitions*

As the twenty-first century dawned, Russia was struggling to catch up. The final years under Yeltsin had been riddled with problems. They included the economic break-down of 1998 and the Second War in Chechnya that would last until 2001. However, as the baton passed to President Putin in

2000, the leadership for a more active and vigorous role was in place. While Russia expressed sincere sympathy and firm support for the United States after 9/11, its approaches on the Afghanistan and Iraq components of the battle against terror were very different. For example, Russia raised no objections when the United States sought to use the “stans” as launch pads for the invasion of Afghanistan. President Putin saw Russia’s enemy in Chechnya as very similar to the American enemy in Afghanistan. It was even possible for Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to permit American usage of bases at, respectively, Manas and Karsi-Khanabad. The other Central Asian players were willing to grant over flight rights. In contrast, Russia joined the German-French opposition to the War in Iraq. Thereby, they hoped to help make Russia and the EU into more powerful global actors. As President Putin watched the United States make use of its enormous hard power in Iraq, he also resolved to increase the same ingredients of power in Russia (Newton, 2007, pp. 192, 198).

It was also true that American preoccupation with Iraq gave Russia an opening to bid again for great power status (McGuigan, 2007, p. 163). As the price of oil increased in the years after the beginning of the Iraq War, Russian leaders began to dream and plan about a larger role for themselves in world politics. They became increasingly critical of western policy on issues such as Kosovo, NATO expansion, the possibility of any American bases in Central Europe, Kaliningrad, and nuclear strategy and policy (Hesli, 2007, 252-254). One analyst (Baev, 2008, p. 160) thought that Russia might exploit the vacuum left by American leadership to take more forceful action on its border in an effort to protect Russian minorities. Baev had Georgia in mind, and that proved to be prophetic in light of the brief war of August 2008. However, action on behalf of the Transdniestrian Russians in Moldova was another possibility. Demonstrations of Russian Air Force power in the Baltic region also fit into this picture, as the plight of Russian minorities and symbols in the three Baltic states was a principal concern.

Overall, the American preoccupation with Iraq provided Russia with an unexpected opportunity to expand the power of the state at home as well as the scope of its influence in the “Near Abroad.” Such an opening for Russia, of course, coincided with the unique leadership of President Putin, a man who at times seemed bent on restoring Russian greatness. This thrust matched the sentiments of many Russian citizens who had felt a clear sense of letdown in the wake of the Cold War. In a way, there is a certain parallel to the Vietnam Era. During that war the United States was also bogged down in a far off place. The Soviet Union, which had been humiliated during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, resolved to catch up to the United States in nuclear capabilities. As American defense capabilities were drained away to support the air and guerilla conflict in Southeast Asia, Soviet spending was free to flow to its nuclear arsenal. President Nixon acknowledged as much early in his first term when he asserted that the nuclear balance had become one of “equivalence” and the goal for the future “parity.” Finally, the emergence of Leonid Brezhnev as a strong leader after the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968, is another striking parallel to Russian leadership under Putin in the early twenty-first century. In both historical situations, both NATO and the United States were left in weakened positions.

#### *Diminished NATO Capabilities for other Missions*

The NATO partners were not only preoccupied with difficult questions regarding participation in the War in Iraq. They also had taken on a number of other missions prior to that war, and at least one new major initiative sprung up several years after the start of the war. First, beginning in the fall of 2001, the alliance began to play a principal role in the war and stabilization of Afghanistan. For several years, NATO had supervisory responsibility for various regions of Afghanistan. However, in October the organization took over management of operations in the entire country. The only exception included a portion of the American contingent that worked on its own. Second, at the start of the Iraq War, NATO

still had major responsibilities, along with the United Nations, in Bosnia. The Dayton Accords of 1995 called for them to administer the peacemaking process. In 2004, NATO handed off those responsibilities to the European Union, but NATO members were of course still deeply involved in the EU mission.

Third, duties in Kosovo were vital as well, for NATO, the UN, and the EU jointly managed most matters in that republic after the 1999 bombing campaign. Even after the declaration of Kosovo independence on February 17, 2008, that tri-polar administration continued. Fourth, a new issue that emerged after several years of war in Iraq was the American-proposed missile shield initiative for Europe. While this was not a NATO project, it did command much time and discussion from the strongest alliance partner. In addition, there were discussions about making it a NATO program after several years. The hypothesis of this section of the paper is that the involvement in the Iraq War was costly in terms of the attention, commitment, and capabilities that alliance partners could devote to those four important initiatives and missions.

### Afghanistan

NATO had played a key role in the struggle in Afghanistan starting in December, 2001. In that month the military force received the name of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and reporting responsibilities were to the North Atlantic Council in Brussels (Saikal, 2006, pp. 525-534). The next major step occurred on October 5, 2006, a date on which NATO took major control over the whole ISAF operation. The number of forces increased to 36,000, and 37 countries were taking part in the operation. Every NATO member played a role in at least one of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Both France and Germany were willing to participate in this operation, in part to compensate for their lack of involvement in Iraq. A number of the "old" European partners took on very specific responsibilities. For instance, Italy took the lead on reform of the judiciary, Germany on training of the police, and the United Kingdom on counter-narcotics. The American involvement was, of course, very

heavy and centered in part on supervision and training of the Afghan National Army. The expectation was that this multi-faceted operation would bring some stability and the chance for development to each part of the entire country (Saikal, pp. 525-534).

Economic costs to the participating states were also very high. By June 2007, the total package of economic assistance to Afghanistan since 9/11 had amounted to \$26.8 billion. Nations that had attended the London Conference in 2006 had pledged nearly forty per cent of that amount, and so that huge portion of the total amount was expended in 2006 and after. Specific areas designated for receipt of the assistance included health, the economy itself, the private sector, infrastructure, security, refugees, women, schools, and media (NATO 2007a). NATO also took on more political responsibilities after October 2006. The organization created the new position of Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. This office became operational on August 24, 2006, and Daan W. Everts from the Netherlands was the first representative. Another new office was that of First Representative, and Hikmet Cetin from Turkey was the initial appointee (NATO 2007b). Both of these new offices focused on the non-military part of the ISAF mission. Selected important concerns of the two representatives were the secure delivery of goods, improvements in the police force, better courts, and enhanced border control with Pakistan. This new NATO machinery could build on the foundation of political development achieved by ISAF alone in the previous five years (NATO 2007c).

All of this activity by the alliance came with increased risks. Casualties were one possible danger for all nations that were part of the mission. As the violence skyrocketed in 2007 and early 2008, many of the member nations imposed "caveats" over their operations. The caveats ruled out certain types of dangerous missions or violent geographic areas of Afghanistan (Lugar, 2007, pp. 11-16). The risk of retaliation by the Taliban and the al Qaeda terror network was also a concern. Might NATO members become sites of retaliatory terrorist attacks, since they had now involved themselves so fully in

Afghanistan? Might Iran retaliate economically due to its skepticism about NATO activity in Afghanistan? Some alliance partners such as the Baltic states felt a certain vulnerability to Russia on energy matters. Russia had utilized oil politics earlier in an effort to exert political leverage over Ukraine, and it could happen again. Since Russia had been willing to use force against Georgia in August 2008, smaller states near its border might have lingering concerns.

Thus, the alliance commitment to Afghanistan was considerable and the risks many. However, the capabilities to deal with each aspect of the problems outlined above were severely compromised by the huge commitment to the War in Iraq.

### Bosnia

From 1995 until the end of 2004, NATO had the principal responsibility through SFOR for implementing the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia. The ten new NATO members admitted between 1999 and 2004, played an important role in this operation. That made sense since they were close to the geographic area in which the activity was taking place. Such proximity was indeed one rationale for their inclusion in NATO in the first place, since a political vacuum in that area may have been partly a reason why the Serbs had dared to engage in war there in 1992. Some of these nations actually became involved in Bosnia when they were Partners for Peace, prior to their formal admission to NATO. Further, after the European Union took over the operation through EUFOR in December 2004, the same NATO members continued on with their former missions. In fact, by the end of 2005, all ten new NATO members had played a role in the Bosnian mission at some point after 1995 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2004). Thus, their involvement both preceded and followed the start of the Iraq War.

Contributions of these members were focused and significant. A 250-member Slovenian Air Force unit flew helicopters and planes into Belgrade in late 2002 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005a). Slovakia contributed a small helicopter unit in the same year (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

Slovakia 2005b), while Hungary contributed a light cavalry regiment to assist in hostage rescue as well as in search and rescue missions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005c). Czech airmen operated helicopters in investigative flights over Bosnia, and they transported military material. A unit of eighty Czech soldiers supplemented the Austrians in protecting the base at Tuzla (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic 2005). They were also involved in rooting out corruption and in defeating organized crime. Some of these achievements came under the SFOR heading and some EUFOR, but in both cases NATO provided the basic skills, infrastructure, equipment, and experience.

Once again, a major mission that engaged most alliance partners took place simultaneously with the planning, beginning, and consummation of the War in Iraq. While stability for the most part characterized Bosnia, the involved nations were genuinely cross-pressured among all of these new obligations. How could they contribute meaningfully and fully to Bosnia while engaged in Afghanistan and tugged towards Iraq?

### Kosovo

In 1999, NATO took the unusual step of engaging in a bombing attack to protect Muslims in the Kosovo Republic against their Serb attackers. Prior to the NATO bombing campaign, there had been an effort to obtain a supporting resolution from the United Nations. However, Russian and Chinese opposition prevented the potential resolution from incorporating language that would call for use of force against the Serbs. In light of that resistance to the possibility of forceful U.N. action, the United States and United Kingdom switched the discussion to NATO. Eventually, the alliance approved flyovers of the Serbian border and finally the bombing campaign itself under the label Operation Allied Force (OAF)(Hendrickson, 2006, pp. 94-105).

Upon conclusion of the bombing campaign, the United Nations took responsibility for management of Kosovo. However, it was NATO that provided the 17,000 troops for the KFOR

contingent. A third group was the EU, and that organization provided 1,800 persons who engaged in subsidiary functions such as training of the police (Štěpanovský, 2008, pp. 18-22). Altogether, 34 nations were assisting in Kosovo by mid-2008. A unique feature of KFOR has been its inclusion of so many troops from the new NATO partners. As in the Bosnian case, this inclusion helped to silence those critics who had criticized European nations for not doing more in Balkan conflicts. For example, the three Baltic nations all assisted in Kosovo after joining NATO in 2004. Estonia contributed a platoon to a police unit working in Priština (SME 2005). Both Estonia and Latvia contributed to protection of the economically significant Mitrovica area in the northeast (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005d). Lithuanian troops operated in Urosevac and aided in the transfer of law and order functions from military to civilian units (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005e).

Bulgaria and Romania performed different sorts of missions. In Prizren they assisted in protection of minority enclaves, patrimonial sites, and freedom of movement. Bulgarian engineers also worked on deactivation of mines and unexploded ordnance in the same general area (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005f). Safety of returning Serb refugees in the border areas was also important, and Lithuanians, Czechs, and Slovaks all contributed in that project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia 2005g). From July 2005 until December 2006, Czech troops actually had command responsibilities of the multinational brigade Střed. That unit included 1,600 troops with the responsibility of protecting the central hub of Priština (Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic 2006). These 500 Czech troops ended up being involved in a number of unexpected missions. For example, they presented school programs on the dangers of land mines, worked to protect the forests against illegal tree cutting, and endeavored to stop drug trafficking through the region (iDNES 2006).

In spite of all of this activity, Kosovo surprised the world by declaring independence on February 17, 2008. Serbia denounced the declaration and took the case to the World Court. Others worried

about the impact of this example of independence on Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Cyprus, the Basques in Spain, Chechnya in Russia, Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and Romania, the Albanian minority in Macedonia, and even the Bosnian Serbs. There may have been a link to the Russian war in Georgia six months later. Would all of these events and fears have taken place if NATO had not been so preoccupied in Iraq? Certainly, improved strategic and alliance planning in Kosovo might have made the process less tumultuous.

### Missile Shield

In 2007-08, the American-proposed missile shield program moved to the center of the stage. The proposal entailed the emplacement of ten anti-missile interceptors in Poland and an accompanying radar site in the Czech Republic. This proposal, which could be linked to NATO in future years, created a storm of controversy. Public opinion polls in the Czech Republic consistently demonstrated opposition to it, and both the communist and social democrats called for the holding of a referendum on it (iDNES 2008a). Public protests by various groups took place both in Prague and at Brda, the proposed location for the radar site. Polish elections resulted in a new social democratic government that was very critical of the plan. In particular, Russia registered sharp objections and discussed the possibility of locating new weapons systems in Kaliningrad that would counter the missile shield, even though it would not target Russia. Iran, the main rationale and target for the missile shield, was stirred up as well.

In spite of all of this turmoil, the Polish and Czech executive leadership agreed with the proposal in the summer of 2008. In the Polish case, the August invasion of Georgia by Russia may have been the determinative cause, for Polish acquiescence followed within a few days. In the Czech case, Secretary of State Rice took part in a formal signing ceremony in July with her Czech counterpart Karl Schwarzenberg. Various Czech leaders defended this decision by pointing out the role the United States had played in the creation of their state in 1918, the extension of Marshall Plan aid after World War II (iDNES 2008b),

and the fact that the shield would protect all of Europe (iDNES 2008c). In September, it was the turn of the Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Minister of Defense Vlasta Parkanová to sign the counterpart SOFA Agreement. That understanding established the rules for control of the base, ownership of the land outside the base, and security both within and without the military installation (iDNES 2008d). With the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, many of these political forces emerged again in case there was a chance of overturning the American proposal. However, the continuation of Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense suggested that continuity might be the hallmark of the near future.

All of this controversy took place when the attention of American leaders was divided. Commitment to the surge in Iraq came at about the time that the missile shield proposal emerged. The spike in violence in Afghanistan also coincided with the extended conversation about the missile shield. The declaration of independence in Kosovo occurred at just the point when formal discussions among the American, Czech, and Polish leaders about the shield were becoming very serious. Thus, one can conclude that those other crises, especially the series of events in Iraq, prevented the sharp focus and careful planning that was needed on the missile shield proposal. The resulting confusion and tension over the proposed set of sites was, in part, another cost of the heavy focus on Iraq.

#### *Assessing the Costs of Iraq to NATO in 2008*

Throughout 2008, it was possible to see very clearly how the involvement in Iraq worked at cross purposes to other NATO commitments and strategic planning. In January and February, military officers and Department of Defense officials warned about the dangers of troop cuts in Iraq. Both General Petraeus and Secretary Gates warned that it would be wise to take a pause in troop cuts later in the summer. They were concerned that Iraqi violence might heat up again, after the surge that started

in early 2007 had considerably calmed the situation (USA TODAY, 2008b). Pressure also built up to do more in Afghanistan because of the increasing violence there. For example, the Canadian Parliament voted to extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan until 2011, as long as NATO overall supplied more troops and equipment to support its forces in the flammable south of the nation (USA TODAY 2008c).

Some of the NATO partners experienced increased risks in a number of theaters. For instance, NATO units in northern Kosovo received enemy fire exactly one month after the declaration of independence (ČTK 2008). Demonstrators took over temporarily a U.N. courthouse, and there were many injuries and burned automobiles (DPA/AP/Reuters 2008). On the same day, a Czech soldier lost his life in an attack on a convoy in Kandahar Province in Afghanistan (SME 2008). Ironically, the next day the first of 3,200 marines committed to the south of the country began to arrive. A full 2,300 of those would be based in Kandahar Province itself. In part, this deployment was a response to calls like the one noted above from Canada for more assistance, as a condition for continuing their own mission (USA TODAY 2008d).

All of these developments made NATO's critical April 2008 Summit in Bucharest of great importance. From the American perspective, the top priority would be obtaining more commitments from the alliance partners for Afghanistan. At the previous Riga Summit in fall 2007, the United States had asked for 3,000 additional troops from the partners. The inability of alliance members to come through on that request was the event that led American to put another 3,200 troops in the southern part of the country. At the time of the Bucharest meeting, only the French had promised to commit another 1,000 troops (USA TODAY 2008e). The conference also endorsed the U.S. missile shield proposal and outlined a scenario in which it could be linked to additional missile shields elsewhere (AP 2008). However, clearly the Bush Administration was disappointed that the allies were not willing or able to do more. That may have caused Secretary Gates to suggest that American forces might take

over more authority in situations where they were currently under NATO command (Washingtonpost 2008). At that point in time, the U.S. had 14,000 troops operating under its own command and 17,000 under the supervision of NATO.

Concerns at the Bucharest spring conclave were on target, for the following summer was very violent in Afghanistan. On one occasion, nine American troops lost their lives in an extremely bold attack on their base in northern Afghanistan (Wall Street Journal 2008a). The death of a Danish soldier in the same month hit that nation hard, as he was the sixteenth military person of that nationality to lose his life in the Afghan conflict. Perhaps, the fact that the NATO Secretary-General was the Dane Jaap de Hoop Scheffer kept that country from talking about a pull-back of troops (DN.se 2008). In part, the United States blamed some of the increased violence on al Qaeda forces operating out of western Pakistan and thereby increased its attacks there (Wall Street Journal 2008b).

At the end of 2008, it was apparent that the uncontrolled situation in Afghanistan was the primary current example of the costs of the extended and enormous commitment to Iraq. Much of the post-election defense policy discussion in America centered on striking a balance between gradual withdrawal from Iraq and steadily increased commitments to Afghanistan. Maintaining stability and strength in both arenas was indeed a dicey proposition.

### *Conclusion*

The opening section of this paper presented the image of a pool table on which Iraq was cue ball that had struck other billiard balls forcefully and sent them rocketing in many directions. In effect, the focus of this study has been on the direction of eight of those affected balls. All of them are central to NATO's strength and future possibilities. The Iraq War weakened American leadership capabilities of the alliance, diluted the unity of the alliance itself, and encouraged Russian ambitions and willingness to

exploit the alliance's weaknesses. Involvement in Iraq also compromised and weakened four other NATO or NATO-related projects. The situation in Afghanistan threatened to spin out of control in 2007-08. Smaller alliance partners found it difficult to keep up more than a decade of contributions to stability in Bosnia, in light of so many other cross-pressures. Kosovo declared independence early in 2008, and that set off a round of repercussions and fears. American leaders had little time or resources for effectively managing the controversy over the proposed missile shield in light of all the other commitments. Finally, the 2008 discussion about reassessment of strategy was complicated by the considerable costs that the Iraq War had already incurred.

The challenge for NATO and American leadership will be to restore some sense of a pattern to those scattered billiard balls. There is a clear need to create a mosaic out of them that has order, coherence, plausibility, and even appeal. While this impelling need challenges the incoming American presidential administration, it also becomes a mandate for all of the NATO partners. Lacking strategic planning that incorporates the impact of the Iraq War on these other priorities, both the alliance and its designated national leader will continue to flounder and even spin into disarray.

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