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The Role of the NATO in Collective Security and how it has transformed and evolved over the years

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Abstract: *This paper is about how and for what purpose NATO as an organisation for collective security was established. To begin with, this paper says that NATO was established to counter and contain the communist threat in the shape of Russia. This was an era of the cold war. However, once the cold war was over and Russian disintegration happened in 1989, NATO didn't disappear but defined for itself a changing role in the changing world. It was because of this newly defined role that NATO survived and outlived its primary purpose. However, since the terrorists' attack on the twin towers on 9/11, NATO has further transformed to undertake military operations in areas that fall beyond its scope of operations. It has been seen as involved not only in military operations but also in humanitarian assistance in countries hit by natural calamities. Data for the paper was collected through secondary sources, including research papers and other collectable materials.*

Key Words: NATO, Security, Russia, USSR

Introduction

Throughout recorded human history, like-minded nations with shared goals have formed military alliances to balance a countervailing power or an emerging perceived threat. However, these military alliances have disappeared from the scene or have lost their importance once the purpose for their creation has been served or the perceived threat has disappeared. Importantly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed to counter the imminent communist threat, and the organisation outlived the demise of the disintegration of the USSR in the late 1980s. If longevity is the yardstick to measure an organisation's effectiveness, it can be said with an authenticity that NATO is a successful alliance, along with the fact that it successfully defended its member states against the expansionist communist Russia (Brooking Institute, 2001).

No doubt, wars are likely to happen and so need to be prevented. At its core, wars occur between states because they represent methods to resolve outstanding issues or calculated efforts to achieve ambitious designs of conquests. This complexity of the power game has given way to the increased quest for peace, resulting ultimately in the concept of collective security. Collective security may be defined as '*an institutionalised either universal or regional system, in which States have agreed by treaty jointly to meet any act of aggression or other illegal use of force resorted by a member State of the system*' (MWAGWABI, 2010). At its heart, collective security is primarily directed against any aggression against the member states, forming part of the collective security system and remaining unconcerned from any threat posed to any third party.

NATO was the product of the cold war. In the words of Lord Ismay, the first Secretary General of the Atlantic alliance, NATO stands

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primarily to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down. To begin with, the organisation had three fundamental objectives; to curtail the Russian territorial and ideological expansion, to facilitate the integration of nations whose ideas were based on capitalist principles and above all, to ensure the collective security of the member nations. The same was reiterated by the 2010 NATO's Strategic Concepts, which articulated the three objectives in these words for the North Atlantic Alliance; first, ensure a continuous and persistent commitment to agreed-upon terms of collective security; second, to work jointly in order to prevent and manage crises beyond its borders whose effects can threaten the security of the member states; and thirdly, strengthening security cooperation with countries in the neighbourhood as well as far off partners on challenges of common security challenges (Butora et al., 2014). Soon the relevance of these objectives was realised in the shape of revisionists that started threatening the peace and stability of Western Europe and started posing a serious challenge to the West's economic interests in the region; Russia also started expanding its influence into other regions, including the Middle East as well as Africa in the North. However, at the end of the 20th century, and especially the decades following 9/11, the new world has brought new challenges to the governments of the Alliance that can only be averted if they joined hands together and work together from the platform of the NATO.

What is North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Established in 1949, NATO remains perhaps the most significant institutional structure of US-Euro military cooperation to contain the threat posed by resurgent Russia. However, since its establishment, the alliance has undertaken many military operations and other missions even beyond the Euro-Atlantic region in the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia. Its headquarter is based in Brussels, where all decisions are made on the basis of consensus. It is important to mention here that member states are not bound to participate in every military operation and thus can opt out if they prefer to do so.

As long as the financial contribution is concerned, member states have to shoulder the financial burden for the military operations undertaken by NATO. Importantly, these financial contributions are not part of the budget that stands at three billion in the year 2022 to fund the alliance infrastructure. Much of the contribution to finance the military operations comes from the United States, which accounts for 70 per cent (Masters, 2022). Member states have committed 2 per cent of their GDP by 2024 for defence purposes from the platform of NATO. However, the US has often criticised the member states for not coming up to the expectations so long as the financial contributions are concerned with undertaking the military operations.

The Concept of Collective Security

Collective security is meant peace is enforcing mechanisms or systems based on respect for international norms and principles. However, it should be kept in mind it doesn't exclude the use of force against anyone that can threaten the peaceful environment of the world. Although the term collective security is ambiguous and unclear, the Kupchan brothers say that collective security means balancing as well as collecting more and more military power against any power that may pose a threat to peace (Xhambaz, 2017). In other words, collective security is a vital tool to ensure peace and stability. The concept of collective security rests on the foundation of institutionalised, regulated use of force of all against one who may behave in an unacceptable way (Kupchan & Kupchan, 1995). States whose policies are based on realism always tend to collect and gather more and more military might and weapons that may pose a serious threat to world peace, security and stability subsequently. To counter such a threat, it is important that peace-loving nations join hands together and counter any threat to peace through the mechanisms of collective security.

Article 5 of the Treaty primarily dealt with collective security by agreeing that "an armed attack against one or more of them… shall be considered an attack against them all" and that following such an attack, each Ally would take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force" in response (Grady,

2002). Since its erection in 1949, the primary threat to the member nations came from Russia and its allies in the shape of the Warsaw Pact. In other words, NATO was the creation of the cold war and was aimed at exclusively containing the communist expansion. However, the big question mark is that after the disintegration of the USSR and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, what is the relevancy of the NATO, or how do the US and its allies justify the continuation of organisations like the NATO. People often argue that it is one of the tools of the capitalist West to ensure its supremacy and dominancy and punish those who don't subscribe to their ideals, norms, values and political interests. Importantly, NATO has been seen as most active when it comes to the defence of the US interests in comparison to other states of the alliance.

Are NATO's objectives limited only to collective security? It needs to be made clear that NATO has always defined its objectives as more than just collective security against any external threat or aggression. Furthermore, the evolution of NATO has gone through three different stages; the cold war era, the one after the end of the cold war and the era followed by the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the United States that resulted in the death of some more than 3000 civilians. Each phase and era brought different but unique challenges with it for the alliance, and so NATO responded to these challenges accordingly (Akram, 2009). In the beginning, NATO was used, to be more specific with words, as a foreign policy tool against resurgent Russia. In other words, the North Atlantic alliance was subordinated to American foreign policy objectives, and so many questions were raised over its benefits to other member states.

During the high days of the cold war, when the USSR was yet to be disintegrated, and the Berlin wall was yet to come down, NATO showed its interest in advocating more positive and constructive political changes while also reiterating its desire to avoid war and must work hard to live in an environment of peace with all the people and government (Yost, 1998) irrespective of their ideological commitments and affiliations. The North Atlantic alliance also believes in the charter of the United Nations.

However, since the dissolution of the USSR in 1989, one could see a marked change in the foundational approach of NATO by promoting an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the alliance took a new direction and embarked on new projects reflecting a greater strategic commitment to mutual cooperation and crisis management over collective security, embracing the East through its Partnership for Peace (PfP) measures in 1994, putting an end to the war in Bosnia in the year 1995, strengthening its foundations in Europe in 1996, and bringing in to include new members (Brooking Institute, 2001). In May 1997, the NATO-Russian Act signed in Paris reiterated this commitment in the following words;

NATO and Russia will work together to create a long-lasting, inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic region based on the values of democracy and cooperative security, thanks to an ongoing political commitment made at the highest political level. Assuming that the security of all members of the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible, NATO and Russia will cooperate to help establish a common and comprehensive security system in Europe based on shared values, commitments, and behavioural norms that are in the best interests of all member states. (Yost, 1998).

Though the spirit of mutual cooperation was the result of the disintegration of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin wall, what the policy makers miss is the historical patterns of mutual suspicion, rivalry and, above all, the conflict of interests in different parts of the world. At the same time, NATO is sticking to its traditional institutional structure as well as reaffirming its core objectives of collective security and how NATO would undertake the newly defined mission to work in an atmosphere of cooperation. This is a question that is hard to answer in the given situation.

However, by the end of the proxy war that had engulfed the entire world, the US and its allies in the alliance were faced with a threat not from within but outside Europe. Europe today is comparatively at peace. Furthermore, the nature of the threat has changed too. These threats include weapons of mass destruction. Terrorism and religious extremism, climate change and possible disruption of energy

supplies. What most of the policy experts believe is that in future, the members of the alliance would not face the threat of aggression against what they thought to be their physical borders and territorial integrity but to their common economic stakes and political concerns. What is suggested is to transform the alliance from collective security to the protection of collective but common interests of the member nations (Brooking Institute, 2001).

America and its allies in the NATO alliance share the common norms and values of democracy, liberty, the rule of law and free market economies. The NATO members have time and again shown their commitment to defending and protecting against all possible threats. These nations are tied together by these lofty ideals and principles, and the platform of NATO must be used to protect them at any cost.

For the first fifty years, NATO has carried out a range of security-related activities, including peace and stability operations, effectively. However, once the cold war was over, the organisation was faced with certain new and unique challenges. As mentioned earlier, the organisation's primary objective at the time of its creation was to curtail the communist threat. However, after the disintegration of the USSR, the collapse of the Berlin wall and the withdrawal of many Eastern European countries from the Warsaw Pact, NATO was challenged with the question of existential. As the organisation has been unable to satisfactorily identify a threat/danger to defend against, the very need of the Atlantic Alliance is questioned.

Since 9/11, NATO has adopted a new role for itself by taking up multi-dimensional responsibilities. In the year 2003, NATO took command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan to wipe out Al-Qaeda. However, importantly the alliance undertook operations outside its defined area into another continent. This was also reflective of the fact that the alliance was determined to undertake a functional rather than geographical approach to address the security concerns. Moreover, in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, NATO provided significant assistance on humanitarian grounds. The crux of the matter is that not only one can see a change in the role

of NATO as time went on, but also the expansion in the scope of the role by adopting a more global approach and going beyond European borders (Akram, 2009).

Experts argue that the nature of possible conflict in the future may be much different. New issues are expected to be intra-national; may arise from narrow nationalism; other issues such as the spread of weapons that can cause destruction at a huge level, disruption of the energy supply, and aggressive bloody wars in other areas (Valvis, 2017). To deal with these emerging regional and global threats, the direction of NATO's security activities has shifted significantly in accordance with the alliance's strategic doctrine. The organisation is now on the path to establishing relations with non-member states on the principles of collective security. For this purpose, new forums and frameworks have been developed to institutionalise this new honeymoon between member and non-member states. This new role of NATO focuses mainly on producing and sharing benefits and fruits of collective security.

What NATO's concept of collective security is most seriously critiqued is that it poses a significant challenge to the United Nations Collective Security system. In the first place, it questions the jurisdiction of the UN Security Council's responsibility for collective security. Member nations have been seen to have abandoned or compromised global collective security systems in favour of regional security systems. For instance, at the time of invading Iraq in 2003, the US and its allies bypassed the collective security regime, the UN Security Council. This double allegiance or divided loyalty has given way to many questions as well as challenges in terms of collective security systems.

NATO, no doubt, has played an active role in protecting its member states against any aggression from non-member states. However, it can be specifically called an organisation for a regional security system, thus posing a challenge to the global security regime. This can question not only the credibility of regional security organisations like NATO but also questions the role of the UN Security Council in ensuring peace and security.

Although the Organization for the collective security of the capitalist block had

transformed a great deal when the cold war between the two giants came to an end, the USSR suffered a defeat in disintegration by shifting its focus on other issues like terrorism, extremism, weapons that can cause destruction at mass level and protecting western values of democracy, liberty and marked based economies; there is no doubt that the alliance stands firm to fulfil the purpose that it was established for, the concept of collective security. Earlier, when the Russians were given a humiliating defeat in Afghanistan at the hands of Islamist fighters, there were talks of disestablishment of the alliance as the immediate threat that it was erected for had disappeared. They thought that the alliance had lost its relevance and should no more its energies and resources on it.

But all these calls fell on deaf ears of those who were at the helm of affairs. The newly inducted countries, including Turkey, Norway, and Spain, are leaning toward a NATO that is more into collective security, and so they want it to focus more on it than other purposes. While on the other hand, the American policymakers and some other smaller member nations want the alliance to concentrate on strengthening and working for the promotion of western values of democracy and other related norms. There are many others who would favour a North Atlantic alliance that provided for uniting around some pre-defined interests that were owned by all and belonged to everyone. These common interests measure against controlling the proliferation of weapons that can cause destruction to human society and the ecological system, even across the physical borders of Europe.

Earlier it was feared that the possible expansion of the NATO might trigger a harsh response from confident Russia, leading to a neo-cold war that the world could hardly afford in terms of its consequences. NATO's enlargement and further expansion to include Georgia and Ukraine in its membership are seen by Russia with suspicion. It is feared that this enlargement would draw new dividing lines between the two rival camps, leading to serious political and economic consequences. As the legacy of the cold war complicates the relations, anything that may result in the expansion/enlargement of NATO is viewed with objection by Russia (Akram, 2009).

As feared, the NATO expansion was responded to with a hard rebuttal from Russia. Russian attack on Ukraine is to counter not only NATO's expansion but also to send a strong message that it would not allow the alliance to cross the line that it has drawn. Russian attack on Ukraine may be a new beginning of a neo-cold war whose scope may expand to other countries.

There are many who criticise the very role of NATO as it questions the role that the United Nations has been erected for. In other words, the alliance of NATO is a parallel system to the UN that often contradicts the role of the latter. However, despite all these objections and reservations, NATO continues to exist as well as expand as time goes on. It has not only expanded in membership but also in role and scope.

Conclusion

Founded in 1949, NATO was meant to counter the perceived Russian threat of the cold war. The communist bock led by the USSR responded by forming the Warsaw Pact, whose membership reached Eastern Europe. However, the exact role of NATO has evolved and changed with the changing challenges. This role can be divided into three distinct stages. First, the formative stage to contain the communist Russia that it did effectively. Next is the post-cold war era, where the focus was shifted from collective security to common interests even beyond Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization adopted a different role in the wake of 9/11 when Al-Qaeda blew up the twin towers in the US. By the end of the cold war, many in Europe and the West thought and predicted the demise of the alliance as the threat that it had been formed for had been eradicated, and it was no more advisable to spend so much on security. However, NATO has not disappeared even after the disintegration of the USSR and still continues to play an active role in ensuring the collective security of the member nations.

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