



TORY REFORM
GROUP

www.trg.org.uk

Second Floor
29 Tufton Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3QL

Tel: 020 7222 4409

Fax: 020 7976 8331

Email: trg@trg.org.uk

Web: trg@trg.org.uk

In this paper, Nicholas Soames, the shadow Defence Secretary and bitter critic of the current government's defence policies, gives an overview of some of the salient issues about the role of NATO. It is an excellent, thought provoking, paper with unique insight and authority and challenges those who dismiss the importance of NATO in world security today

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The TRG 2004 International Lecture

To NATO or not to NATO

Hon Nicholas Soames MP



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The TRG 2004 International Lecture

To NATO or not to NATO

By Hon Nicholas Soames MP

The Tory Reform Group



The Tory Reform Group seeks to promote the One Nation values of social justice, political progress and prosperity for all, through open minded debate.

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Foreword

This is the transcript of the Tory Reform Group International Lecture delivered by the Hon Nicholas Soames MP in Autumn 2004 at Portcullis House, Westminster, London W1.

In this paper, Nicholas Soames, the shadow Defence Secretary and bitter critic of the current government's defence policies, gives an overview of some of the salient issues about the role of NATO. It is an excellent, thought provoking, paper with unique insight and authority challenging those who dismiss the importance of NATO in world security today.

We are very grateful to Nicholas Soames MP for his time and commitment to making this important contribution to the debate.

Alastair King, Chairman, Tory Reform Group

Hon Nicholas Soames MP

About Nicholas

Nicholas was born in 1948. He was educated at St. Aubyns, Sussex and Eton College. He is the son of The Late Lord Soames and grandson of Sir Winston Churchill. He is married with two sons and a daughter.

He was commissioned into the 11th Hussars and served in Germany and the United Kingdom from 1967-1972 and was subsequently Equerry to HRH The Prince of Wales KG.

He then worked for two years as a stockbroker before becoming Personal Assistant to Sir James Goldsmith in 1974, where he gained experience both in the manufacturing and service industries.

Nicholas spent nearly two and a half years on the staff of a United States Senator in Washington D.C. and then in 1977 spent four years as a Director with a firm of Lloyds Brokers.

His hobbies include reading, music, racing and country pursuits. He has travelled widely.

Nicholas' Experience

Nicholas contested Central Dumbartonshire at the 1979 General Election. He was Member of Parliament for Crawley from 1983 until 1997. He won the seat of Mid Sussex in 1997 and increased his majority to 6,898 in 2001.

Nicholas has specialist knowledge in the fields of defence, Europe, international affairs, trade and industry, aviation and the countryside.

He was Parliamentary Secretary and Minister of Food at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from 1992-1994 and he was Minister of State for the Armed Forces from 1994-1997. He has been a member of the Executive of the 1922 Committee.

He is a Member of the Council of the National Trust, a member of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the President of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, a Trustee of the Amber Foundation and he sits on the Council of the Royal United Services Institute.

In November 2003, he was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Defence; he is a member of the Shadow Cabinet.

To NATO or not to NATO

“Problems” with NATO

Since the end of Cold War, and particularly since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, NATO has often been marked out as an institution ripe for change in any review of international alliances. Some approach this in a sceptical way by treating NATO as being for all practical purposes a relic of the Cold War. The Alliance nearly did not make it in the 90s, they say. The question often asked is this: Who saved whom in the Balkans? Did NATO save the Balkans or was it the other way round? Or did NATO find some kind of purpose in the Balkans?

Post September 11 it became almost acceptable to ask what is the purpose and the role of NATO. Accordingly it has distressingly become necessary to restate constantly that NATO is, most emphatically, at the forefront of the war on terror and is not suffering from unmanageable internal tensions...and that it has not become the last rather than the first resort for security cooperation.

There are also those, however, who have always seen NATO as an Alliance almost above and beyond criticism. They argue that NATO is a vehicle that advances all our interests whether we are American, British, Portuguese or Bulgarian. NATO played the paramount role in winning the Cold war - so their line is, *“if it ain't broke do not fix it”*. Clearly, this is not a sensible way to approach a world of profound security uncertainty.

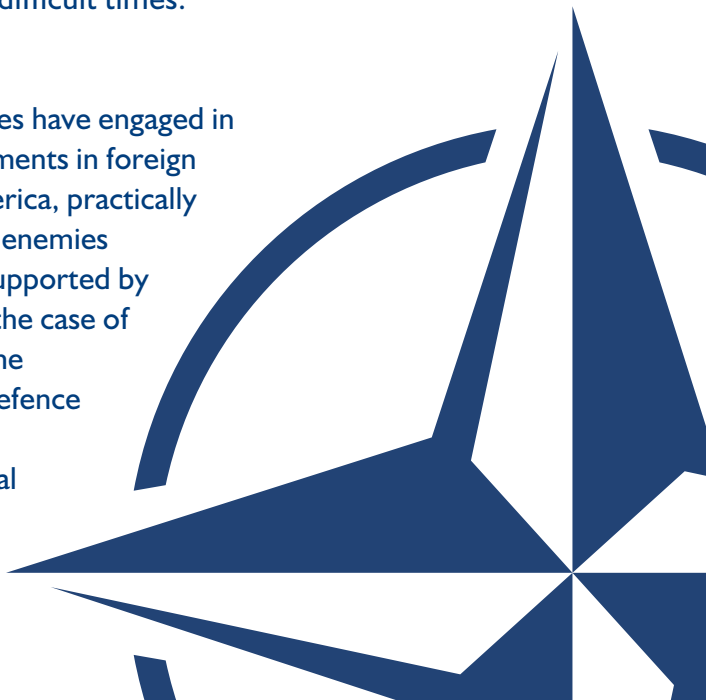
What is NATO?

NATO embodies absolutely the vital partnership between Europe and North America. The Alliance is deeply rooted in the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. Those values, embodied in the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Washington Treaty, underlie the unique character of the transatlantic relationship. Designed in part to transcend the old-fashioned balance of power in Europe, it has evolved into a deep-rooted institution with a commitment to democratic values that many aspire to, along with its unique military structure that has managed to weather many storms, including some very serious political ones between individual members.

So to NATO or not to NATO, that is the question?

Following recent profound disagreements over Iraq it is, of course, unclear how soon the transatlantic partners will be able to finally overcome their differences and to fully and practically reaffirm their basic common interests. There is clearly some way to go. For these are politically difficult times.

The leading member states have engaged in conducting major experiments in foreign policy: In the case of America, practically speaking, by taking on its enemies largely alone or at least supported by a minimalist coalition. In the case of the European Union by the establishment of an EU defence initiative at a particularly sensitive time. But the real question is this: given



this dangerous world in which we live and high level of threat we face, is it really sensible for member states to experiment with NATO?

Our Security Concerns

It goes without saying that in the last decade the most striking changes have taken place. The policy and security environment that I dealt with as a Defence Minister in the mid-nineties and the times we live in now could scarcely be more different. During the Cold War, our security environment had at least the appearance of some predictability. We knew our adversary, his aims and his capability. We understood the threat and developed an effective strategy to deter and eventually to defeat it, to see off communism and see the triumph of the liberation of Eastern Europe. Who would have imagined in 1989 that Poland, the Czech Republic or the Baltic states would now be members of NATO?

But today, in the great fog of uncertainties that marks the 21st Century, the threat is not nearly as well defined. The architects of this new threat ask for no parley and seek no armistice. They have no territory to defend, no population to answer to.

Thus we live in an age of great unpredictability, uncertainty and considerable danger where the proliferation of WMD, international terrorism and regional instabilities combined with civil strife, represent the new and urgent security challenges which we wrestle with and for which we must plan.

When discussing this new security background I see it as a context to provide a common framework for all. Not, as some would

describe it, an American projection of an American national view. Indeed, in its deeper sense, it is the common security backdrop not only for Britain and the United States but for all nations and peoples concerned with world order. It is this background that defines the war on terrorism, a war that knows of no front lines, knows of no boundary and, most dangerously of all, knows of no rules. It is against this background that our Alliance has to plan and to operate.

NATO today

Yet at this crucial time for our security NATO has encountered some serious problems. For example, In the Balkans where NATO has had remarkable success in Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are problems. Earlier this year for shameful reasons, NATO was caught off guard in Kosovo. Ethnic violence in the province nearly overwhelmed not only the United Nations' mission but also NATO peacekeepers in what some have referred to as a near collapse of authority. According to Human Rights Watch, KFOR (Kosovo Force NATO) "failed catastrophically" to protect the minorities. What does this say about the credibility of the Alliance?

On the opening day of the Istanbul summit, a sovereign Iraq was formally transferred to an Interim Government. NATO leaders willingly agreed to assist the new Iraqi Interim Government with the training of its security forces and tasked the North Atlantic Council to develop ways to implement this decision. The training is yet to start. What does this say about the Alliance?

While the world's attention remains focused on Iraq, the security situation on the other battleground in the war on terror in

Afghanistan has also deteriorated although it is encouraging that the elections seem to have gone quite well. In spite of the June pledge by 26 NATO member countries to expand and diversify ISAF (International Security and Assistance Force) in Afghanistan from 6,500 soldiers to 10,000 soldiers NATO has failed to meet its pledge, only scraping together a temporary extra deployment of 2,000 troops from Spain and Italy. The effects of these deployments are further limited by the fact that they are being confined only to Kabul. What does this say about the credibility of the Alliance?

Whilst it is true that there is a worrying lack of readily deployable and sustainable forces, it is also true that there is an unacceptable lack of political will among some European Governments. It is quite unacceptable that the Secretary General of NATO has to beg for a helicopter, a plane or a brigade. Indeed on many occasions the Secretary General has expressed his frustration about the Alliance's total inability to supply even a small number of helicopters and medical units to Afghanistan in spite of the fact that the request was made months before.

So are the odds stacked against the Alliance? Squeezed in between the political ambitions and complications of some of its member states and the realities on the ground, is NATO becoming less than a well co-ordinated, well organised, cohesive and effective military Alliance?

Istanbul

The package of measures and initiatives agreed in Istanbul amount to an ambitious and concentrated Allied response to today's security challenges. It provides Europe and North America with a platform for cooperation in addressing them, including:

- Aiding Afghanistan
- Increasing involvement in Iraq
- Evolving engagement in the Balkans
- Improving capabilities and making them more functionally operational
- Combating terrorism
- Deepening partner relations
- Extending relations with south-eastern Europe
- Developing the Mediterranean Dialogue, and
- Launching the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

This is an elaborate plan and a critical one too. Critical to future security in both the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond it. And it absolutely must be delivered.

Other Challenges

There are other challenges that we must face head on. There are profoundly serious problems regarding other European countries' inability to make a full and effective contribution to NATO's military effectiveness. The unacceptable persistent gap in military capabilities between the US and her European allies must be narrowed rather than continue to widen. Whilst this is not a new problem, it constantly harms our interoperability and our effectiveness beyond that which is manageable for operations. It is essential that the usability gap between the US and Europe must be narrowed. Currently there are some 1.7 million Europeans in uniform, providing about 170,000 combat soldiers, of which between only 40,000 to 50,000 could be used for robust combat



operations at any one time; even these lack the strategic assets to do very much.

For major sustained operations, the lack of key assets and capabilities such as command, control, communications and computers capabilities (C4), intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, fast sea and air lift, adequate force protection, suppression of enemy air defences, and precision-guided munitions and combat search and rescue (CSAR) would make operations ever more risky for Europeans the higher up the intensity scale and the greater the distance over which European forces could be deployed.

All of us, Europeans, partners, allies and friends and colleagues have got to think carefully and honestly as to the huge importance of the transatlantic link as an essential and workable part of our security. Is it really sensible for our future to be in strategic rivalry? Do we want to create counterweight or a strategic cooperation? Is our future to be one of competitive blocks? Or is it in a strategic cooperation?

Britain's main task must be to push with our likeminded allies and friends to create urgently capability sustainability and usability. We must not allow some of our friends to be seduced by new bureaucracies, new political committees or most fatally EU *only* arrangements outside NATO while the question of capability remains expensively and dangerously unanswered. Today if we were in Government I would call upon those European countries whose defence spending is woefully inadequate to make the financial commitments necessary to contribute to the defence of Europe and

to do so in a way which complements the capabilities we so desperately need. As for the structures already in place it is vital that the EU-NATO relationship is built on the Berlin-plus arrangements through a strategic dialogue, supported by political and operational transparency to achieve effective cohesion and coordination.

Our North American allies and the United States in particular have a responsibility towards NATO too. What does NATO represent to the security of the United States. Is NATO an alliance or some kind of restraining framework that the US could do without?

Our American allies have to understand that there are limits to which the allies will go simply to preserve the harmony in the alliance. Insisting on treating the alliance as a toolbox, a foolish and offensive strategy, rather than drawing on its integrated military structure makes it possible for some European allies to make unfortunate judgements about American intent in the Alliance as superficial. These questions have to be answered and answered plausibly.

The Future of NATO

NATO today is a remarkable forum: 46 countries in the European Atlantic Partnership Council; an astonishingly successful partnership with 30 countries in the Partnership for Peace; a working dialogue with seven Mediterranean states, and the most effective military alliance with 26 countries. There is truly no more impressive network of such multilateral relationships.

NATO remains today the world's most powerful and most important military alliance. It took 55 years to build and has never

failed us. It is well worth the hard work and effort to preserve it, to empower it and not to undermine it.

We are living in an “age of uncertainty” and we are being and continue to be confronted with many new security challenges but we are not condemned to be the victims of circumstances that lie beyond our control. We can indeed shape the future. Today, the Balkans are no longer the “powderkeg” they once were. What counts is that we have the will to make a difference. What counts is that we have the instruments to make a difference through NATO and a tight network of trusting Partnerships. With these instruments, we can indeed shape the future and preserve our common interests and our common values.





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