



## Comment

### Is NATO listening?

#### A four act reminder for the hard of hearing in Brussels and Washington

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#### **Act I: President Karzai demands an end to NATO airstrikes and night raids on Afghan homes (again)**

Following a recent NATO airstrike that mistakenly killed a group of children and women in southern Helmand province, Afghan President Karzai has said that he will no longer allow such attacks on residential compounds. Karzai has previously condemned certain military tactics—such as night raids—only to draw back from them later. NATO says it only conducts airstrikes with Afghan government coordination and approval, but said (not for the first time either) that it would review procedures.

(photo credit: US army/flickr)



"In the days and weeks ahead we will coordinate very closely with President Karzai to ensure that his intent is met," NATO spokeswoman Maj. Sunset Belinsky said. However, on past evidence, little change in NATO military tactics can be expected as a result of this 'review', as indicated in Belinsky's qualifying remarks: "Coalition forces constantly strive to reduce the chance of civilian casualties and damage to structures, but when the insurgents use civilians as a shield and put our forces in a position where their only option is to use airstrikes, then they will take that option". So, the bottom line is that NATO puts the welfare of its troops above those of the citizens of Afghanistan that it is supposedly there to protect. And Karzai's call is treated as 'mainly symbolic' by Western officials who say privately that his presidential authority does not include veto power over specific targeting decisions made in the heat of combat.

Should NATO listen to Karzai and abandon night raids and airstrikes on residential compounds? Well, there are good reasons for doing so, even though this may increase the risk to NATO troops on the ground. And such risks are real enough, with NATO suffering 55 fatalities in May, making it the deadliest month yet for the coalition forces this year. However, without a change in tactics, Karzai argues that NATO forces risk being seen as an "occupying force" (the same phrase used by the Taliban to describe the international coalition) with

potentially even greater consequences for the wider security situation in Afghanistan.

While NATO was initially applauded for managing to significantly reduce civilian casualties from its operations—the UN estimate 440 Afghan civilians were killed by NATO or Afghan forces in 2010, and a further 2,080 were killed by insurgents—

there remains widespread anger among Afghans over the deaths of non-combatants at the hands of foreign forces. In addition, US commander General David Petraeus is widely acknowledged to have reversed some of the initial tactical safeguards introduced to protect civilians since these were unpopular with troops on

the ground. Since Petraeus took command in July last year, the [the number of US and allied airstrikes and night raids in Afghanistan has soared](#). Amidst the growing levels of violence, Britain's former ambassador to Afghanistan [described the current war tactics](#) as counter-productive and "profoundly wrong". If one of the end goals of the much heralded security 'transition' process is a sovereign nation, then the Alliance must begin to treat Afghanistan like one.

#### **Act II: African Union demands a ceasefire in Libya**

After initially backing NATO's involvement, South African President Jacob Zuma and the African Union (AU) have called for a halt to air strikes, arguing that the Alliance has overstepped its UN mandate to protect civilians. But following a meeting between Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, to discuss the Libyan crisis, a [NATO press release](#) curtly stressed that the Alliance's "Operation Unified Protector was in full compliance with the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973". And the next day [NATO announced](#) that it had extended its mission in Libya by 90 days, continuing a campaign that began in March.

Under the proposed AU 'roadmap for peace' everything would be on the table, including the place and position of Gaddafi, although he would

not be required to step down from power as a prerequisite for further dialogue concerning the prospective cease-fire. Abdul Ilah al-Khatib, the UN secretary general's special envoy on Libya, has also been quietly shuttling between Tripoli and Benghazi, trying to broker a ceasefire and talks. In contrast, Rasmussen has constantly asserted that any ceasefire must be 'credible and verifiable' and Western leaders (now including Russia following the G8 summit) interpret this to

mean the prior departure of Gaddafi.

(photo credit: Crethi Plethi /flickr)



Should NATO listen to the AU? With

sizeable defections from the Gaddafi camp and NATO and the rebels now scenting victory—Gaddafi's "reign of terror is coming to an end" Rasmussen said in a speech in Bulgaria—the temptation is to sideline the AU's role in searching for a solution. This would be a mistake, however. If progress is really being made in Libya, why are Britain and France sending attack helicopters? Why did [General Sir David Richards, the chief of the UK defence staff, call for NATO to bomb infrastructure](#) in Tripoli? As NATO escalates in word and deed, all parties acknowledge that there is no military solution to the crisis. Nor are there any guarantees that Gaddafi's departure would suddenly bring peace and end the many conflicts in Libyan society.

With close to 900,000 people having fled Libya since the conflict began, a solution will likely be found within an African framework. The AU, warts and all, provides such a framework. Cynical or not, Gaddafi has made a ceasefire gesture. The best way to protect Libya's desperate civilians is for NATO to reverse its mistaken policy of taking sides. As in Afghanistan, the imperative is to find a political and humanitarian solution to the conflict, and stop waiting for a military breakthrough that seems unlikely to come. The Alliance should unconditionally promise a ceasefire at least for a significant window during which AU-brokered negotiations could start.

### **Act III: The Russians want guarantees that missile defences in Europe are not directed at them**

During his recent [visit to the United States](#), the NATO Secretary General devoted much of his air-time to the NATO-Russia relationship. His key point was that by working together, NATO and

Russia can enhance security well beyond their own borders. He reiterated in a [Chicago Tribune op-ed](#) his belief that "missile defence offers another great opportunity to advance our relationship with Russia". "There are many difficult technical, legal and political issues still to be solved", Rasmussen added "but we are making good progress". Well, that is not quite how the Russians and Americans see it.

A top Obama administration national security official [said](#) Russia and the United States are struggling to move beyond "old thinking" to resolve the long-running dispute over the planned European missile defence framework. NATO insists there should be two independent systems that exchange information, while the Kremlin favours a joint system with full-scale interoperability and demands NATO to guarantee that the system would not be aimed against Russian targets.

A recent meeting of Russia-NATO Council ambassadors failed to break new ground on the stalemate, and after meeting with President Obama at the G8 Summit, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said it might need the better part of a decade to do so. "This issue will be solved in the future, maybe in 2020, but we should lay the basis for the work of a future generation of politicians, we should create the right foundation", Medvedev said. This pessimistic outlook was shared by a [report](#) released at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly spring session in Bulgaria, which concludes that the two sides' fundamental vision for the system remain far apart, and there appears to be little hope that an agreement will emerge.

(photo credit: openDemocracy/ flickr)



Should NATO listen to the Russians? Given that failure to resolve the dispute could endanger NATO's 'reset' with Russia and lead the Kremlin to bolster its nuclear arsenal, a freeze on missile defence deployments in Europe would certainly buy some valuable time. The proposed Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defences is unproven, unnecessary and requires uncosted

additional resources at a time when Alliance defence budgets are facing deep cuts. It needs to be recognised on all sides that missile defence systems are themselves 'old thinking', exacerbate divisions within Europe and hardly represent a good example of Rasmussen's call for 'Smart Defence'. Diplomacy and engagement can defuse tensions with North Korea and Iran—the supposed main source of ballistic missile proliferation concerns—and smarter, cheaper and more effective military solutions are available if a real threat ever emerges.

#### **Act IV: Within NATO (and beyond) the call for an end to Tactical Nuclear Weapons is growing**

According to a [report](#) published by the Dutch-based NGO IKV Pax Christi in March, half of all NATO member states are seeking scenarios to change the current deployment situation of US tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) currently based in Europe, while ten others would not object to a change. Only three states identified in the report would prefer to keep the current forward deployment (and one other member state expressed no opinion at all). All of the 24 countries that see the possibility of withdrawing the US weapons from Europe have concerns that would need to be addressed before the weapons can go, namely: replacing the 'burden sharing' represented by these weapons by more practical demonstrations of transatlantic solidarity; some form of reciprocity (transparency or confidence building measures) from Russia; and recognition and respect for the specific concerns raised by France.

Outside of NATO, the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), among other coalitions and individual Non-Nuclear Weapon States, has for decades

been raising concerns about NATO's 'nuclear sharing' policy. At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, for example, the NAM advocated for these concerns to be addressed in the final document action plan and proposed specific language calling on the nuclear weapons states to "*withdraw nuclear weapons stationed on the territories of non-nuclear-weapon States in accordance with article I and II of the Treaty*".

Should NATO listen to those voices advocating a break with the nuclear 'status quo' within the Alliance? There has never been a better time to do so, with NATO currently undertaking a nuclear posture review process—the so called 'Deterrence and Defence Policy Review'—and seeking ways to engage with Moscow on the Russian arsenals. Several NATO countries are expected to use the consultation processes to call for an end to the forward deployment of US TNW in Europe and the adoption of a nuclear posture that is fully in compliance with NPT agreements. An April 2011 '[non-paper](#)' issued by ten NATO allies, for example, proposes several transparency and confidence building steps that NATO and Russia could undertake to break away from the long standing impasse on this issue. However, there is no shortage of other proposals emerging that point towards NATO keeping up a credible nuclear deterrence capability without US nuclear bombs stationed in Europe (see the 'Nuclear Weapons' section of this edition of the *Observatory*). For NATO to significantly reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons, as part of a new, smart defence and deterrence posture, fit for purpose in a world of new security challenges, the advocates of change must be heard and acted upon.

