

## Opinion/Letters

## Where is NATO heading?

By Xinhua writer Yi Aijun

WASHINGTON, — When NATO leaders meet this weekend in Lisbon, Portugal, they will certainly have an array of headaches to sort out: Afghanistan, a new strategic concept, nuclear deterrent, and so on.

But a bigger question is looming too: Where the 61-year-old bloc is heading in the next decade in a fast-changing environment?

**THREE CHALLENGES**

A self-claimed “most successful military alliance in history,” NATO now finds itself in a delicate and tricky situation.

The end of the Cold War left the bloc without a rival, and the rapid expansion from 12 to 28 members has made NATO much less cohesive than it was.

Moreover, the ongoing global financial crisis has prompted European members to cut defense spending, a trend that has made the United States, the bloc’s major partner, anxious.

Even with unprecedented missions outside its traditional defense area over the past five years, NATO and national defense budgets have fallen consistently. Of the 28 members, only five have achieved the defense spending target of two percent of GDP set by the bloc.

Then there is the Afghan war — NATO’s biggest and longest-ever expeditionary ground

military operation involving about 150,000 troops from 48 nations. The war is dragging on with no end in sight, sapping popular support in Washington as well as European capitals. Justin Vaisse, a senior fellow with the Washington-based Brookings Institution, said that Afghanistan is just one of the three existential challenges facing NATO.

“It’s evident that many NATO allies are in Afghanistan because the United States is in Afghanistan and out of loyalty for the United States, rather than out of conviction that they should be there like in the Balkans in the 1990s where they really had a conviction that they should be there,” Vaisse told Xinhua in an interview. “Not all NATO allies are convinced that the operation should go on.”

He named contracting defense budgets as a second challenge, noting that at a time when spending and technological gap already exists between the United States and its allies, European nations are cutting defense budgets to the range of 2-5 percent up to 10-15 percent, or even more for countries like Greece which was hit hardest by the financial crisis.

“The new cuts are gonna put in doubt the interoperability of the allies, meaning how they fight, how can we fight together, Americans and Euro-

peans, if Europeans are not spending enough,” Vaisse said.

Inside the alliance, there are conflicting visions on how NATO moves on. New members in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region prefer continued collective defense as an insurance policy against a resurgent Russia, based on Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states an armed attack on one is attack on all.

Other countries, including the United States, call for a NATO doing out-of-area or expeditionary missions and combating terrorism, cyber attacks and other nontraditional threats.

Meanwhile, France, Germany and others wish to see a streamlined and more effective NATO in defense of Europe with less out-of-area missions yet more cooperation with Russia and enhanced consultations with the United Nations and other organizations.

“So what is NATO for? That’s the third and I guess most enduring challenge,” Vaisse said. While Washington continues to see Europe as its most important economic partner, its interest in NATO has declined recently.

With no credible security threat on the horizon, Europeans spent less on defense. In contrast, U.S. military power and spending are expanding as ever, especially over the 1980s and 1990s, greatly enhancing the ability to act on its own. As

U.S. decision-makers are preoccupied with events in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have become much less interested in NATO.

Vaisse observed that even though Article 5 was invoked for the first time after the 9/11 attacks, the Afghanistan mission was done pretty much by the United States on its own with a few allies like Britain and France sending in special forces in 2002, and thus was “basically not done in alliance with NATO members.”

NATO remains a military alliance, but the word “military” can have many different meanings, he said.

It can be a defense alliance against missile proliferation, or a coalition supposed to go

around the world and do things like it does in Afghanistan. Different role asks for different input of resources. In the case of an expeditionary role, “I think Afghanistan has severely reduced their appetite for doing

**VISION “NOT ENOUGH”**

Steven Pifer, another Brookings expert, foresees a compromise at the upcoming Lisbon summit on different visions, with NATO possibly taking some out-of-area operations but not one as large as in Afghanistan.

When they gather in Lisbon on Friday and Saturday, he said, NATO leaders are expected to have Afghanistan, the new strategic concept, nuclear deterrent, missile defense and defense

spending as well as reform and transformation of the alliance on their top agenda, with a goal of invigorating it for the challenges of the 21st century.

The new strategic concept will map out policy guidelines for the military coalition in the decade to come, according to the expert.

“But vision is not enough, we also need to implement that vision. So we have proposed and hope to have accepted a set of capabilities that the alliance, in a time of dwindling resources, will decide it must fund,” U.S. ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder, told reporters Tuesday at a White House press briefing on the upcoming summit. (Xinhua)

## After the G20 summit

By Joseph Kishore

The G20 summit in South Korea ended, predictably, without any agreement between the major powers on resolving the increasingly fractious conflicts over currency and trade.

The final communiqué on Friday barely attempted to paper over the divisions, setting a timetable for next year to agree to “indicative guidelines” on imbalances in the world economy. In the meantime, the principal actors are set to continue their “beggar thy neighbor” policies, which threaten an all-out trade war.

The summit exposed the inability of the United States to impose its will on the other powers. The Obama administration failed to get agreement on its principal aims, including the demand that China allow its currency to appreciate more rapidly, and that sharper restraints be placed on exports from surplus countries (particularly China and Germany). The administration also failed to secure a much-trumpeted bilateral trade deal with South Korea.

Both before and after the summit, major powers and “emerging” economies alike bitterly criticized the increasingly belligerent economic policy of the United States.

Just over a week before the conference, the US Federal Reserve announced a new plan to essentially print nearly \$1 trillion, devaluing the dollar and once again flooding financial markets with cheap cash—the lifeblood of the American ruling class. This measure was quite legitimately denounced as the same type of currency manipulation that the US accuses China of engaging in.

The outcome of the summit is one more demonstration that the financial crash of 2008 was not a temporary downturn that will give way to a new equilibrium. A gradual smoothing out of the enormous imbal-



ances in trade and deficits has proven impossible. As in the 1930s, the breakdown of the existing order is expressing itself in a conflict between states over who will be forced to pay.

The ruling classes of the different capitalist powers are themselves coming to an understanding that there is no quick economic restoration in order. Particularly since the debt crisis erupted in Europe in the spring, when it became clear that there would be no gradual return to steady growth, the response has been twofold: 1) To take measures aimed at off-loading the crisis onto competing powers; and 2) To impose ever more severe austerity policies on the working class.

Even as the G20 met, two events served to underscore the close connection between global tensions and social austerity. First, European representatives at the G20 were forced to break from their heated deliberations to reassure bond markets in Europe, which had sent yields on debt for several countries soaring.

Investors were nervous about the ability of Ireland and other European governments to impose sufficiently severe austerity measures. They were also upset about suggestions that private investors might be required to foot a greater portion

of the bill in future bailouts. To avert a renewed debt crisis, at least temporarily, the European representatives were forced to hold a press conference to assure bond investors that their money was safe.

Second, the chairmen for the debt commission set up by the Obama administration issued a list of proposals for addressing US budget deficits that include brutal cuts in spending on key social programs. It is likely that the commissioners’ report was timed at least in part to coincide with the G20 summit, to send a signal to the other powers that the US is determined to impose its own austerity measures.

Obama made a point at the G20 meeting of coming to the defense of the budget deficit commissioners, declaring that it was necessary to “take actions that are difficult” and “tell the truth to the American people.”

The American financial aristocracy sees the imposition of poverty conditions on the working class as a key condition for maintaining its position on the world stage—through increasing exports and reducing US debt.

An article in the most recent edition of *Foreign Affairs* (“American Profligacy and American Power: The Conse-

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