

Hannes Swoboda – Short concept

NATO AND GLOBAL SECURITY

The common sentiment is, that our world gets more and more insecure with a rising number of conflicts and people killed by wars. Well, looking to the figures, we have to realize, that the number of deaths by war is today much lower than in most periods after World War II - not to speak about the world wars. Nevertheless many citizens especially in the Northern hemisphere have the feeling of increased insecurity. Partly this is because of terrorism brought directly into the center our countries.

This feeling and perception is also expression of a big disappointment after the breakdown of communism and the Soviet empire. It was perceived as a simple and clear cut victory of the "West" and some people hoped for the end of history. But history in the sense of new conflicts and alliances does go on, in Europe itself and much more beyond Europe especially in its neighborhood.

NATO had a clear purpose as a defense organization of the Western Hemisphere against the threats coming from the "East". The challenges and threats from the East are not over, but many new threats have been developing and are endangering the security of our citizens. The geography of these threats and the possible ways to meet and mitigate them is much more complicated than the East-West conflict of the past. State and non-state actors, civil wars and wars between different Muslim orientations are creating a chaotic picture. The same is true for the disputes about the sea in the Chinese neighborhood.

And as we saw, military interventions like those in Iraq and Libya can make things worse and deteriorate a fragile situation rather than improve it. And the rise of terrorism has often its roots in these outside military interventions. By the way, we in the West count only "our" people killed and do not count the many more killed by terrorism in the other countries in addition to the many - often innocent - people killed by Western forces.

Caution and a comprehensive approach have to be used to tackle this rising number of complicated conflicts. The strengthening of the UN and the OSCE is as necessary as the strengthening of NATO. Sometimes it would be helpful to refrain from interventions. At least these interventions - if they should become successful - must have a clear purpose and we need a strategy of dealing with the complicated political and social structures in the aftermath of the military actions. Of course we must have some idea of an exit strategy. And one has also to think of the geopolitical consequences of any kind of military intervention. NATO is not alone in this world.

Any military action these days must take into account a lot more facts and actors than in the past. NATO cannot and must not try to "solve" all the conflicts of this world. Very often no analysis of the root causes of these conflicts are undertaken or they are done very superficially. We still think in terms of the Cold War and are not grasping the new world we are living in. Power and geography do still play a big role, but new factors are influencing developments and the course of conflicts. Often old and new colonial experiences are mixed with new aspirations. NATO can only be successful as a global actor if it learns to live with the new realities and adapts itself to these new conditions.