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Militarism vs. Diplomacy: The Case of NATO

By Michael S. Rozeff

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The point I wish to make clearly is that there is a divide within government groups between militaristic voices and diplomatic voices, particularly between NATO's orientation toward force and a diplomatic orientation. This divide doesn't mean that the governments of NATO's member countries cannot and do not try to use NATO militarily for their own narrow interests, as they have in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya. It means that the militaristic orientation of NATO sets it against a diplomatic orientation when conflicts, real or imagined, arise. It means that NATO looks much more trigger-happy than is consistent with peaceful diplomatic resolutions of differences or with a policy of non-intervention. NATO is a much more dangerous organization than it is generally perceived to be.

Let me define what I mean by militaristic. In situations of conflict or simply opposing views, as between the U.S. and Russia in Ukraine, the militaristic voices tend to overstate threats, see the opponent as an enemy, think that the opponent has designs to conquer territories, favor force of arms as responses and solutions, side with anyone who opposes the bigger enemy even if that ally is odious, eschew diplomatic means to defuse situations, and hark back to inapplicable past situations like those in the 1930s involving Germany. They emphasize or perceive military threats even when they are minimal or even absent. They call for military responses.

In the Ukraine case, I take the NATO response as a poster child for the militaristic voice. A short time ago, Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen of NATO interjected himself and NATO

into the ongoing conversations or discussions between the U.S. and Russia by making a statement expressing his concern about Russia massing troops near Ukraine. The parallel in the U.S. is for a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to make an important public statement about some situation while the President is conducting talks and policy. Think MacArthur and Truman. The U.S. has a tradition of civilian control over the military. Rasmussen also intimated that NATO was ready to act militarily by mentioning NATO's "determination to provide effective defense."

Rasmussen's statement was not helpful from the standpoint of government control over NATO, especially when the U.S. and Russia are talking to one another about Ukraine. Furthermore, no less than two former NATO Supreme Allied Commanders (a general and an admiral) also commented on the ramifications from NATO's point of view.

At the same time, we of course have a bevy of media, Congressmen and commentators here in the U.S. also taking a similar militaristic approach, whose features I have listed above. The militaristic orientation of NATO is far more dangerous because it has all the trappings of an official government institution, and that gives it a legalistic cover for its decisions. Being a high-level creation of many states also places it in the spotlight of media attention, giving it a wide hearing from an institution thought to represent those governments and to be in the know and important.

NATO is now an independent and militaristic voice or power. It has degrees of freedom beyond government control, with its decision methods and processes being manipulable by its committee and consensus processes. At the same time these processes are murky, obscure, far from transparent and several levels removed from control by civilian voters.

We already know of NATO's participation in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya. A number of eastern European countries are in its bailiwick. It speaks out on Ukraine which is a NATO "Partner". This history of warfare since 1989 and the military nature of this organization, its very reason for being, combined with its lack of transparency and accountability, should cause us to sharpen our focus on this organization's negatives.

A strong case can be made that NATO should have been dissolved once the Cold War ended. A strong case can be made that the U.S. should not be committed to defend every member state in NATO in the eventuality of some situation that NATO can define as war or close enough to war or a material matter of security so as to justify the commitment of military forces. A strong case can be made that NATO is now an instrument of certain states to work their will when they cannot obtain UN Security Council approval.

While NATO is taking this militaristic position concerning Ukraine, which fits its newfound structure and mission, put in place since 1989, we have diplomacy going on between Putin and Obama and between Lavrov and Kerry. The Russians have pulled back forces from near Ukraine as a signal, and Lavrov has made some very strong statements denying any intent whatsoever to

invade Ukraine. Diplomacy is not helped by either militaristic public pressures stemming from slanted newspapers or news agencies in the U.S. or by militaristic pressures from a NATO that has an existential interest in exaggerating threats or even fanning the flames of conflicts.

NATO has gotten a pass from the mainstream media that its war-making record since 1989 does not warrant. The recent statements by its Secretary-General confirm NATO's militaristic orientation.