

Prof. Dr. Tapani Vaahtoranta

Director of Finnish Institute of International Affairs

芬蘭國際關係研究院主任



最高及重要學歷

Ph.D. (Valtio-oppi), Princeton University
美國普林斯頓大學政治學博士(1990 年)

MA (Valtio-oppi), Princeton University 1985
美國普林斯頓大學政治學碩士(1985 年)

VTK (Valtio-oppi), Turun yliopisto 1980
芬蘭土庫大學學士(1980 年)

重要經歷及現職

芬蘭國際關係研究院主任(現職)

日內瓦安全政策研究中心客座研究員(1998-2001)

芬蘭國際關係研究院主任(1989-1990)

芬蘭土庫大學助理教授(1986-1989)

連絡方式 : tapani.vaahtoranta@upi-fiiia.fi

A NEW ERA AND FINLAND'S NATO MEMBERSHIP

Prof. Dr. Tapani Vaahtoranta
Director of Finnish Institute of International Affairs

A new era

NATO membership has been debated in Finland ever since the end of the Cold War. Finland joined the European Union in 1995 but has stated that in the “prevailing circumstances” it remains militarily non-aligned. However, these circumstances no longer prevail, and the situation is continually evolving. To understand the implications of the change, it is useful to think that a new era has begun in international relations. The Cold War ended in 1989-1991. During the 1990s it was typical to talk about the “post-Cold War era”. It has been difficult to come up with a name for the period, since there was so much uncertainty about the environment that would replace the Cold War order. We can now see more clearly the new era's shape. Two characteristics in particular are significant: unipolarity and the war against terrorism. The new era has also had an impact on the debate on Finland's potential NATO membership.

Two reasons

The new era has two main causes. First, the structure of the international system changed in 1989-1991. The United States won the Cold War and a geopolitical shift to the east took place in Europe. The Soviet Union collapsed and Russia is both economically and militarily a weaker actor than the former Soviet Union. Since the Japanese economy is in difficulties, it is uncertain whether Japan will ever become a pole in international politics. The economic wealth of the EU countries is comparable to that of the United States, but militarily the EU is a dwarf. China is growing fast, but it will take years before it catches up with the US. As a result, we are now living in a unipolar international system,

where the United States is a much stronger actor than any other. The US is both big and rich. The EU and Japan are rich but small. China and Russia are big but poor.

Another reason for the new era is 9/11. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington awakened Americans to the fact that even the United States is vulnerable to attack with WMD. As a result, the policy of the United States is to target those rogue states and terrorist organizations that are assumed to have intentions of attacking the US.

In sum, 9/11 did not alone cause the new era. The change away from the Cold War order started in 1989-1991 when the structural changes took place. The terrorist attacks in September 2001 completed the change.

The US national security strategy

An important characteristic of the new era is the US national security strategy. The willingness to use military force for preemptive or preventive purposes has caused concern in other countries, but the strategy also contains other significant elements:

- (1) The US aims at deepening the cooperation with Russia and China to form an international coalition against terrorism.
- (2) It aims at increasing economic assistance to poor countries and spreads democracy to remove the causes of terrorism.
- (3) The US aims at maintaining the unipolar moment by preventing any other actor from challenging its international position.

Unilateralism and participation now characterize US security policy.

Consequences for international security

The new era has already caused changes in international security agendas. Three are particularly significant for Finland and its potential NATO membership.

First, great power conflict and major war are unlikely. No country can defeat the United States and the American power dampens security competition among other great powers. Terrorism and WMD now form a new threat. The bomb in Bali and the attack against the French tanker

show that now only the United States alone, but rather the whole western world, which seems to be the target of terrorism. Besides, Russia and China share the same concern. All these countries have a common interest in fighting terrorism.

Secondly, Russian policy has changed. Russia is no longer balancing against US power, but it is seeking to cooperate with the United States. As an example, Russia is no longer trying to prevent NATO from enlarging, and the Baltic states from joining the alliance.

Thirdly, the foundation of the transatlantic relationship has changed. During the Cold War the US and Western Europe had a common enemy and a common perception of the nature of the threat posed by the Soviet Union. This unifying factor no longer exists. The US no longer has the same interest in defending Europe and it expects its allies to contribute to the fight against terrorism. The Europeans no longer feel the same need to support US policy but they want to have more influence. The US proposal to create the German election campaign, are examples of this new situation.

Disagreements between Americans and Europeans are likely to continue but it is difficult to see the United States would leave Europe altogether. The relative US interest in Europe has decreased but Washington still needs the presence to maintain its preeminence. As long as the EU as a security actor is weak, the Europeans need the American presence to stabilize the nearby regions of the enlarging Union. Besides, Europeans and Americans share the same basic values: democracy, the market economy and human rights.

The big question is how the transatlantic relationship will develop. A new transatlantic compromise is needed. Three alternatives come to mind. First, the EU remains a weak civilian power. In this scenario the Union would stay dependent on the US and would have little influence over US policy. Second, a new division of labour is created. The EU would assume a greater responsibility for European security and the US would focus on global security. Third, the EU becomes a global partner of the United States. It seems now unlikely that either the Europeans or the Americans are ready for this final possibility.

A new NATO

NATO too has changed. The old NATO won the Cold War and it is no longer needed. The upcoming enlargement will further change NATO. It now seems that NATO is becoming a pool of countries that can be used to form a coalition of the willing to deal with specific situation. The way the Iraq question is handled will have consequences for the future role of NATO.

Finland and NATO

The new era means that the question of Finland's NATO membership has changed. It is no longer primarily a Russia issue. Finland does not need NATO's security guarantees against the Russian threat. Neither does the Russian opposition prevent Finland from joining NATO. Joining NATO is no longer a problem or a solution to a problem. In other words, NATO membership is less significant than it used to be.

Instead, the membership has more to do with Finland's influence and with the United States. Now that the new NATO-Russia council exists and the Baltic states are about to join NATO, the ability of the non-aligned Finland- and Sweden- to influence Northern European security may be weakened. Joining NATO could also help Finland to take part in shaping the transatlantic relationship; to make the EU a stronger security actor while maintaining the link between Europe and America.