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NATO 3.0

The North Atlantic Alliance must be agile in reinventing itself

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A resilient, collective defense is the cornerstone of NATO, but if we define NATO territorial security as “homeland” defense, we can borrow three concepts from U.S. homeland security: **contain**¹ (limit the threat potential),² **absorb** (mitigate the consequences of the threat) and **recover**³ (repairing any system targeted by an enemy). But how can NATO implement such an approach?

Foresight, Scalability and Feedback

In line with the above-mentioned dimensions of resilience, I have tried to identify some current evolutions that could be used as an “anchor” point for resilience development. Therefore, I will examine **foresight** as a key to limit threat potential, **scalability** as a way to mitigate the consequences and **feedback** as a means for rebuilding a targeted system.

Between 2008 and 2009, we have witnessed the first organization-level **foresight**⁴ exercise within NATO, in the framework of the Multiple Futures Project. In the effort to elaborate on the previously mentioned assessment, Allied Command Transformation took two views into consideration: one with a focus on the future of the security environment and the other imagining plausible NATO futures.

The future of the security environment in the Multiple Futures Project's report is built on four scenarios:

- *Dark Side of Exclusivity* (weak and failed states generate instability in areas of interest, and the states of the globalized world are faced with related strategic choices)
- *Deceptive Stability* (developed states preoccupied with societal change and demographic issues rather than geopolitical risk)
- *Clash of Modernities* (advanced, rational networked societies with inherent fragility challenged by external authoritarian regimes)
- *New Power Politics* (increasing number of major powers, competition and proliferation undermine value of international organizations).

In analyzing the four scenarios, the Allies found 33 security implications, but the interesting conclusion was that most of the top five security implications were nonmilitary (e.g., disruption of vital resource flows or negative impact on economy).

Another facet of the foresight exercise envisaged a range of alternative “future NATOs” based on capturing NATO’s main dimensions of change (such as the trans-Atlantic link, the U.S. leadership, the area of operations and a few other characteristics). Even though a majority of the participants felt that the disappearance of NATO was conceivable, the question of whether NATO would exist in 2025 was not systematically addressed, the approach deemed unacceptable for the purposes of the exercise.

However, by combining three key drivers (U.S. willingness to assume a leadership role in NATO, impact of the European Union and threat perception) and concluding that developments within the Alliance were more important to its future than what happens outside NATO, the analysis led to several scenarios: the “strong” versus the “dispersed” toolbox, the return to ESDI⁵ versus shared partnership, and a future NATO as an “old boys’ lounge.”⁶

To make the foresight actionable, the findings of the Multiple Futures Project were used in drafting NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept.

The second concept useful for our analysis is the **scalability** of Allied capabilities, in the light of its potential to mitigate the consequences of a threat. Given the fact that

capability is not narrowly defined within NATO – being used with multiple understandings – I will define the term as the ability to achieve a specified (military) effect,⁷ with specific lines of development.⁸

Scalability could be defined, with reference to the telecommunications and software industries, as the ability to handle growing amounts of work and tasks flexibly and efficiently. I will bring into play only two characteristics ensuring this feature: Allied capabilities’ **connectedness** and **modularity**. While modularity could be seen as “an established technique for organizing and simplifying a complex system”⁹ by using principles such as cohesiveness, encapsulation, decoupledness and reusability/commonality,¹⁰ connectedness deals with the concept of Network Centric Warfare, which is not about hardware and routers but about people, organizations and processes.

A suitable model for a better understanding of the idea of scalability is the NATO Response Force. The NRF was designed as a “high readiness and technologically advanced force ... capable of performing tasks worldwide across the whole spectrum of operations.”¹¹ It is composed of a core (deployable headquarters, land, air and naval units) and enabling modules (intelligence, combat support, etc.).¹² Even though the feasibility of the concept has been questioned mainly because of its continuous redesign,¹³ this has nothing to do with scalability, the debate being more connected to divergent views about the NRF’s purpose and resourcing.

The third premise is focused on **feedback**, or in NATO’s case, on a lessons learned system. Since 1996, the need to extract the appropriate lessons from NATO operations and exercises and the process of converting analysis into remedial actions led to the idea of building a lessons learned capability. NATO began by establishing the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre. JALLC is the lead agency for the analysis of operations, exercises, training and experiment; the collection and communication of lessons learned; and delivering analysis support to the Alliance and its partners at the strategic and operational levels. It followed up with the development of a Lessons Learned Database. The centre and the database now assists with strategic planning and the design of a specific capability for lessons learned.¹⁴ For example, lessons learned from Afghanistan

were used in drafting the Group of Experts report on the 2010 Strategic Concept.

Lastly, in approaching the problem of lessons learned, we have to take into account that in periods of dynamic change producing strategic discontinuities, learning must be nonlinear and involve a configuration of skills and competences.¹⁵ Therefore, the three-step process proposed at the 2010 Lessons Learned Conference – that begins with a Lesson Identified, develops it into a Lesson Learned and, through formal and informal distribution methods, becomes a Lesson Shared¹⁶ – would have to cope with the previously discussed dynamic of change.

Transformation to agilization:¹⁷ resilience framework for NATO

The three previously mentioned terms – foresight, scalability and feedback – could be the backbone of a new way of doing business for NATO, in the framework of resiliency. Therefore, even though the current buzzword for change within the Alliance is transformation, we have to be open to a shift in describing NATO's development by taking into account the following "equation": While the transformation process provides for adaptability, the agilization process leads the organization towards resiliency.

There is a wide range of definitions for transformation. They include "a process that shapes the changing nature of military competition and cooperation through new combinations of concepts, capabilities, people and organizations,"¹⁸ and "an iterative, ongoing process that seeks to adapt and master unexpected challenges in a very dynamic environment." Yet another definition is "a process that is all about changing the way we fight by adapting new technologies, developing advanced war fighting concepts and then integrating the two in a decisive manner."¹⁹ Although transformation can be illuminated by experimentation,²⁰ the idea of having adaptation as the core or an alternative view of transformation²¹ underlines the fact that embracing resiliency requires more than transformation.

According to experts, an agile organization is based on the following tenets: robustness (the ability to maintain effectiveness across a range of tasks, situations and conditions), resilience (the ability to recover from or adjust to misfortune, damage or destabilization in the environment), responsiveness (the ability to react to a change in the environment in a timely manner), flexibility (the ability to employ multiple approaches and

the capacity to move seamlessly between them), innovation (the ability to do new things and the ability to do old things in new ways), and adaptation (the ability to change work processes and the ability to change the organization).²² The only thing I would argue with in analyzing this vision is the role of resilience within the framework of agility. If we define resilience as the ability of an organization to respond, monitor and anticipate threats to current operations and agility as the strategic willingness to embrace changes and seek out the opportunities within a change,²³ we might see resilience more as a result of agility.

If we are to picture the difference between transformation/adaptability and agilization/resiliency, we could make an analogy to the following so-called models: Sisyphus and Madonna.

While promoting the development of a new Strategic Concept for NATO, Peter van Ham, researcher at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael in The Hague, coined the idea of remodeling NATO by using the American pop singer Madonna as a role model for self-reinvention.²⁴ Business experts analyzing Madonna's career noted how the artist changed her style, music or message almost every year to preserve a "fresh" image that ensured longtime success.²⁵ These experts have borrowed from Madonna's career to help reinvent organizations, using names such as Madonna's curve, strategy or effect.

Meanwhile, even though I am unaware of any business model built on Sisyphus, the ancient king of Corinth from Greek mythology, I use him as a symbol of futility. Because of the nature of NATO (the need for the harmonization of almost 30 sometimes-divergent views) it is time-consuming to implement a conventional policy of change. If negotiations run too long, NATO runs the risk that it will implement an already obsolete policy.

Though we may see the concept of resilience is strongly connected to homeland defense, we could elaborate on Gen. Stanley McChrystal's idea of using a network to defend against a networked enemy in Afghanistan as an example of agility/resilience abroad. By describing the Taliban as "more network than army, more a community of interest than a corporate structure," the former International Security Assistance Force commander emphasized that an "effective network involves much more than relaying data." Therefore, "a true network starts with robust communications connectivity, but also leverages physical and cultural proximity, shared purpose,

established decision-making processes, personal relationships and trust. Ultimately, a network is defined by how well it allows its members to see, decide and effectively act.” In other words, NATO is in need of a new way of doing business.²⁶

NATO inherited a “stovepiped” structure²⁷ and has started the optimization process, but much remains to be done in terms of agility. To reach the 3.0 version envisioned by its secretary-general, NATO needs to move from a traditional framework of transformation (a Sisyphus-like approach) to a framework of agilization (a significant reinvention of the organization in terms of agility). In short, the organization must efficiently use and expand its ability to see into the future, its scalable structure and its learning system.

In the light of the previously mentioned premises, we could argue that the elements are already in place for this transition: There is a foresight system in place that has proved its usefulness in the development of the New Strategic Concept for the Alliance; the network is perceived more often as an indispensable instrument for NATO’s future, even though there is a certain lack of connection between networks across the Allied spectrum; and the feedback (lessons learned) system is widely used, but needs to adopt a nonlinear approach.

Now comes the toughest challenge for NATO agilization: Are all members ready to generate the political will needed for such tremendous change? One of the answers is that pressure for change will at some point lead to questioning the current decision-making system to avoid impeding operational plans.

In the meantime, another issue, strongly connected to political will, could arise: Does NATO need an all-inclusive framework for managing threats or is the organization in need of a strategic reorientation toward a cost-effective/priorities-oriented approach? What values do we want to protect and how much are we willing to pay?

An agilization framework might give an impetus for NATO to overcome its old model of doing business and to update its “software” to a 3.0 version. But it could be also seen as a Pandora’s Box, unleashing new challenges to the fundamental values of the organization. □

1. Meir Elron, *Israel’s Homeland Security Concept: From Civil Defense to National Resilience*, briefing presented to Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, August 4, 2009.

2. I merged the term of Israel’s view on resilience - contain - with its corresponding definition from the U.S. view, because I think that the term “resistance” initially used in the U.S. view is a bit inaccurate to express the idea of limiting threat potential.

3. Kahan, Jerome H.; Allen, Andrew C. and George, Justin K. (2009), *An Operational Framework for Resilience*, Journal of Homeland Security and

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4. Which could be seen as an organized and systematic process to reduce uncertainty regarding the future (Helene Lavoix, ed., *Strategic Foresight and Warning: Navigating the Unknown*, The Centre of Excellence for National Security is a research unit of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, November 2010).

5. European Security and Defence Identity.

6. De Spiegeleire, Stephan and Korteweg, Rem, *Future NATO’s, NATO Review*, Summer 2006 <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2006/issue2/english/military.html>, accessed May 1, 2011.

7. Touchin, Malcolm, *System of Systems Engineering for Capability*, INCOSE 2007 IS Panel, June 2007, <http://www.seic-loughborough.com/pdf/SoSEng4Capability.pdf>, accessed May 1, 2011.

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16. 2010 NATO Lessons Learned Conference Report, 26–28 October 2010, Portugal, <http://www.jallc.nato.int/newsmedia/docs/2010%20Lessons%20Learned%20Conference%20Report.pdf>, accessed May 1, 2011.

17. The term “agilization” was coined by Ian Tomlin in *Agilization - The Regeneration of Competitiveness*, as a process of transforming enterprise behavior for the purpose of meeting the competitive imperative of organizations of the 21st century.

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