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FOR THE NEXT DECADE



NATO'S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT HONES
THE ALLIANCE'S ROLE IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

How well does NATO's New Strategic Concept succeed in ascertaining a modern definition of the purpose, character and role of the 60-year-old Alliance in the 21st century? Does it recommit and reassure all Allies and answer today's and tomorrow's security challenges while establishing concrete goals for continuing reform and renewing public support?

NATO's founding document, the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, finds its concretization in the Alliance's Strategic Concept, which is constantly reviewed and periodically updated. The Treaty itself remains valid, as does its commitment to international peace, security and justice. Based on a common heritage of freedom and founded upon the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, the treaty embraces the purposes and principles of the United Nations and supports the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Washington Treaty's main provisions endure: consultation (Article 4), mutual assistance in the case of armed attack (Article 5) and openness to new members (Article 10).

The first Strategic Concept was issued in 1991, after the end of the Cold War, and revised in 1999. However, the 1999 document had been outdated for some time, since it was adopted before the terror attacks of September 2001, NATO's Afghanistan mission, the Iraq war, the Russo-Georgian conflict, and predated the growing awareness of globalized security challenges for which there are no military "solutions." Therefore, the question was posed whether NATO – which had successfully protected Western Europe during the Cold War, helped stabilize the developing "Europe whole and free," and pacified the Western Balkans – would develop into an Alliance for the 21st century and what that requires.

For several years, there was great reluctance in NATO Headquarters and member capitals to revise the 1999 document. Some feared a "very divisive process," but proponents of a New Strategic Concept countered that the Allies were so divided on several central issues that a "uniting effort" was urgently needed.¹ A convincing new mission statement was essential to document NATO's continued relevance in the diffuse security environment of the 21st century.

A PUBLIC AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

NATO commissioned the New Strategic Concept during its 60th anniversary Summit at Strasbourg/Kehl in April 2009. Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen chose a procedure drastically different from the way previous Strategic Concepts had been

developed. Rather than lengthy closed negotiations among the member nations, resulting in texts fraught with diplomatic formulae, compromise language and "constructive ambiguities," Rasmussen initiated a public and participatory process.

This time, several particular difficulties had to be taken into account: *first*, NATO's engagement in an ever more problematic mission in Afghanistan, where it is left with a bulk of tasks taken on by the International Community; *second*, the unwillingness of "post-heroic" societies, exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis, to sacrifice for security; *third*, a lack of agreement among NATO members on fundamental matters regarding its character, role, tasks and policy; *fourth*, the impression that solidarity among Allies was weakening; *fifth*, divergent threat perceptions among a now much more diverse Alliance membership; and, *finally*, NATO's image – particularly in the Muslim world – as an instrument of often problematic United States policy, or in the perception among its own populations and media that NATO is a relic of the Cold War.

Because NATO's continued relevance and public support were so crucial, preparation of the New Strategic Concept was launched by the Secretary General with an "inclusive and participatory approach" and emphasized "interactive dialogue with the broader public." A Group of 12 experts was formed under the chairmanship of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. After a comprehensive series of seminars and consultations, the group presented its report, "NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement," in May 2010. The document reflected agreement among the group members, though this did not yet mean consensus among the 28 NATO governments.

It must be recognized, however, that the Albright Group did a good job in "loosening the ground," as it were, in preparing consensus, fueling public debate and interest in NATO, involving the strategic community, providing transparency and inducing member states to clarify their positions and "show the color of their cards." The Secretary General and his closest collaborators developed a draft and controlled the process, collecting comments from the member nations and consulting discreetly about contentious aspects while avoiding negotiations involving the layers of NATO bureaucracy that would beget ever more diluted text.

The New Strategic Concept was adopted on November 19, 2010, at NATO's Lisbon Summit by the Heads of State and Government under the title, "Active Engagement, Modern Defence." Even

though the 11-page document – half the size of its predecessor – passes over some persistent differences of opinion, on the whole it is a credit to the Secretary General’s chosen procedure and political energy. Analysts had said that the *process* would be as important as the *result*. And as significant as the outcome might be the fact that in the course of this work, NATO member nations had to reflect not only on their own security policy, interests and priorities but on the demands of Alliance solidarity. This resulted in many national priorities being aptly accommodated by the final draft. In sum, the New Strategic Concept is a good achievement, as it rallies and recommitments Allies behind NATO’s purpose and solidifies the Alliance.

AMBITIOUS CONTENT

The content of the New Strategic Concept revolves around three core tasks: defense and deterrence, security through crisis management, and promoting international security through cooperation. These tasks emanate from enduring principles: NATO’s purpose to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members, its character as a unique community of values; the affirmation of the primary responsibility of the U.N. Security Council and the critical importance of the political and military transatlantic link between Europe and North America. These tasks and principles ensure that “the Alliance remains an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, security and shared values.”

The New Strategic Concept restated unequivocally that the commitment to Collective Defense (mutual assistance in the case of an armed attack) from Article 5 of the Washington treaty “remains firm and binding.” This was important in light of concerns expressed particularly by new Allies, who feared that this commitment could be diluted or taken less seriously by NATO members who, “surrounded by friends and Allies,” might put harmony with Russia first. The long discussion process clarified that reassurance of all NATO member states is a precondition of everything else NATO does.² So it is significant that the New Strategic Concept pledges to “carry out the necessary training, exercises, contingency planning and information exchange for assuring our defence against the full range of conventional and emerging security challenges, and provide appropriate visible assurance and reinforcement for all Allies.”

Rather than focusing on territorial defense (the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low), the New Strategic Concept considers an array of present and future security challenges. These include proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles, cyber

attacks, international terrorism, threats to critical energy infrastructure and emerging technologies, all seen as areas in which the Alliance can demonstrate solidarity. The threat assessment is broad and the security challenges are seen as diffuse, volatile and unpredictable, implying that possible NATO action will be decided on a case-by-case basis. The assessment also vaguely references climate change, the long-term consequences of which can have potential implications for global security.

The New Strategic Concept does not prioritize between defense and crisis management tasks. In recognizing that crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can impact the Alliance’s security, it declares prevention and management of crises, as well as stabilization of post-conflict situations and support of reconstruction, as necessary NATO engagements. Monitoring and analyzing the international environment are important to crisis prevention. “Dealing with all stages of a crisis” calls for broader and more intense political consultations among Allies and with partners.

Satisfying the statement that “NATO will be prepared and capable of managing ongoing hostilities” is a tall order, however, given the Afghanistan and, more recently, the Libya experience. An explicit lesson drawn from Afghanistan is the need for a comprehensive political, civilian and military approach. After controversial debates, it was decided that NATO would create “an appropriate but modest civilian management capability” as an “interface” with civilian partners. Rightly, the training of local security forces is highlighted.

Elaboration of the third core task, “Promoting international security through cooperation,” starts with arms control, but the commitment to “create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons” is limited to the goals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Further reduction of nuclear weapons is linked to concomitant steps by Russia. On conventional arms control, the statement, “to strengthen the conventional arms control regime in Europe,” is rather limited and lacking in novel ideas.

Building and enhancing partnerships, based on the existing formats (Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, Ukraine, Georgia) are emphasized, including cooperation with other institutions such as the U.N. and the European Union. However, of other security-relevant institutions, only the U.N. (with the intent to give life to the 2008 U.N.-NATO Declaration) and the EU are mentioned. Some space is devoted to the relationship with the latter, but as long as this cooperation is blocked for political reasons, the statements remain largely declaratory.



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NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, left, and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev shake hands at a Russia-NATO Council meeting at the Black Sea resort of Sochi in July 2011. Russian and NATO leaders met to resolve tensions over missile defense and the NATO air campaign in Libya.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen speaks on the topic of “The New Strategic Concept: Active Engagement, Modern Defence” at the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. in October 2010. Rasmussen employed a public approach in drafting a new NATO Strategic Concept and encouraged public participation.

The Lisbon Summit has been widely interpreted as a breakthrough in NATO-Russia cooperation and as contributing “to creating a common space of peace, stability and security.” NATO is seeking a “strategic partnership” with the expectation of reciprocity from Russia, using the full potential of the NATO-Russia Council for dialogue and joint action. Convinced that “the security of NATO and Russia is intertwined,” NATO proposes enhancing political consultations and practical cooperation in the areas of shared interest, such as missile defense, counterterrorism, counternarcotics and counterpiracy. A cautious agreement by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to “explore” missile defense cooperation, was seen as an important advance in mutual cooperation. In turn, NATO did not overly emphasize its “open door” policy, limiting itself in the Strategic Concept to the conventional statements of principle.

Finally, regarding “Reform and Transformation,” the New Strategic Concept reinforces Alliance intent to maintain sufficient resources; deployability and sustainability of forces; coherent defense planning; interoperability; and commonality of capabilities, standards, structures and funding. A continual process of reform “to streamline structures,



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improve working methods and maximise efficiency” is pledged, once again.

A COURAGEOUS DOCUMENT

The New Strategic Concept is a courageous document, because it challenges the *zeitgeist* in several regards: *First*, in spite of the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world, it emphasizes the need for nuclear deterrence as long as such weapons exist; *second*, although many global security challenges are not of a predominantly military nature, NATO enlarges its ambition as a security provider; *third*, while it remains a regional organization, it avoids an insular, Eurocentric perspective and looks toward the global horizon; *fourth*, in spite of recent problems with the enlargement process – and Russian indignation about it – the Alliance maintains its “open door” policy for European countries fit for accession and able to make contributions to European security; and, *finally*, without antagonizing Russia, it takes seriously the concerns of Central and Eastern European Allies.

The development of the New Strategic Concept was dissimilar to previous experience in that normally such documents are not particularly forward-looking. Rather, they tend to be mainly the codification of previous decisions: theory follows events and concepts come

after reality, as was the case with the 1999 Strategic Concept, though the 1991 document was an exception because of the completely novel situation. It is to the credit of the Expert Group and the Secretary General that the Lisbon Strategic Concept is impressively programmatic and future-oriented.

NOT ALL THAT SHINES IS GOLD

A number of small – but not unimportant – flaws should have been avoided. The extension of the term “partnership” to include cooperation with International Organizations (e.g. the U.N. and the EU) dilutes and devalues NATO’s successful concept of “Partnership” (with a capital P). Also, at a time when conflict prevention appears ever more important, it is difficult to understand why the New Strategic Concept makes no mention of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), let alone the African Union. Furthermore, despite the commendable stand on nuclear weapons, NATO’s characterization as a “nuclear alliance” is somewhat excessive and

might prove counterproductive. In addition, the document is weak in considering lessons learned from Afghanistan, lessons pertaining to the broader international community, which cedes many responsibilities to NATO, and internal lessons regarding command and control, coordination, multinationality and so forth. Finally, it would have been logical to add “consultation” to the stated triad (collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security) as a fourth “essential core task” since NATO’s much broader global security involvement will require rigorous activation of Article 4 (consultation) of the Washington treaty.

The elegant text, moreover, conceals disunity on a number of issues, such as the question of whether NATO is a regional or a global organization; its political or military character; the balance between collective defense and expeditionary orientation; the assessment of certain security challenges and their emphasis in the view of individual Allies; the NATO-EU relationship and its political “blockage”; the U.N. mandate issue; the approach to

French Prime Minister François Fillon, left, meets an Afghan who planted trees for a nongovernmental organization in the Kapisa Valley in 2010. Close coordination between NATO and civilian operations is essential to successful redevelopment of war-torn places like Afghanistan.



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Russia; and nuclear weapons policy. In some of these areas, verbal consensus may quickly collapse in the face of concrete tasks, requirements and challenges.

It can be gathered from the New Strategic Concept that NATO continues to regard itself as a regional organization, but one with a global perspective, which emphasizes consultation among Allies, as envisaged in Article 4 of the Washington treaty. The perennial debate whether NATO is a military or a political organization should at last be put to rest. It is a political-military security organization that places its unique capabilities (military forces, integrated command structure, common defense and force planning, experience in multinational military cooperation and expertise in training) at the service of international security. Nevertheless, NATO's place in the international system needs to be better defined.

THE REAL TASK: IMPLEMENTATION

The new Strategic Concept will only be as good as its implementation, as recognized in the Lisbon Summit Declaration by its many urgent taskings to Foreign and Defence Ministers as well as to the Permanent Council. Therefore, it should be read together with the Summit Declaration and the NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement. Successful implementation of the principles and intentions is crucial in the areas discussed next, and in some respects may also require more conceptual work.

The first core task – deterrence and defense – requires a reinterpretation with “new” security challenges. Combating terrorism, cyber threats, threats to energy security, piracy, organized crime and trafficking in human beings cannot be done with military force alone, and NATO's added value must be defined. Viewpoints on NATO's role and the function in these areas vary greatly among Allies. Regarding defense, it remains to be seen to what extent preparatory measures and contingency planning will be implemented, and how visible, and thereby effective at providing “assurance of all Allies,” they will be.

This is one aspect in which the relationship with Russia appears fragile. The upbeat interpretation of the NATO-Russia Summit in Lisbon came from a “breakthrough” on missile defense (though the agreement “to discuss pursuing missile defence cooperation” was cautious), on plans for concrete cooperation in various practical fields (including a “Joint Review of 21st Century Common Security Challenges”), and on a very positive statement of intent about further use of the NATO-Russia Council. Together, NATO and Russia must overcome zero-sum thinking in security policy. And a substantial NATO response to Medvedev's missile

defense proposals is overdue, in recognition that Russia's place in the European security order is still insufficiently defined.

Concerning nuclear weapons policy, it is clear that the remit contained in the Summit Declaration to “review NATO's overall posture” points to the need for a fundamental debate about the role of nuclear weapons, to include extended deterrence and forward stationing, the shift from “deterrence by punishment” to “deterrence by denial,” and the future of “nuclear sharing.” The task for NATO and its member governments remains to reconcile public expectations for “global zero” with the explanation of deterrence requirements in the (presumably very long) transition period. Conspicuously, the debate about a nuclear-free world has until now been a Western soliloquy.

Conventional arms control is given importance in the New Strategic Concept, and the Summit Declaration envisages a revival of the High Level Task Force, which had accompanied the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations in the 1990s. But there are no new ideas, and to “work to strengthen the conventional arms control regime in Europe” is not enough. The CFE Treaty – suspended by Russia – is all but dead, and its confidence-building instruments of verification and transparency are corroding. Therefore, a new departure in conventional arms control is required. This means broad talks among all European states – most prominently Russia – over conventional military forces, their potential linkage to tactical nuclear weapons, threat perceptions, doctrines, force levels and weapon holdings, leading to negotiations on numerical limitations, regional constraints and transparency measures. Such an approach would enhance confidence in the strictly defensive orientation of military postures, advance cooperative security among the nations of Europe, and might even further nuclear disarmament and missile defense cooperation.

Because new security challenges are not mainly amenable to military responses, NATO is not the sole actor and Alliance solidarity in this field does not automatically invoke Article 5, “broadened and intensified” consultation, as pledged by the New Strategic Concept. But is there a realization that this will require a genuine cultural shift in NATO? Many obvious security issues have never reached the Council table, not least for fear that disagreements would be interpreted as an internal crisis. Also, in order to bring about a qualitative improvement in the consultation process, a much-improved analysis and assessment capacity is needed at NATO Headquarters. This appears to have been recognized in the establishment of a new Emerging

Security Challenges Division in the International Staff. However, it remains to be seen to what extent it will produce valid political-military analysis or deal with relevant issues (including long-term implications of climate change), and whether it will contribute to broaden the Council agenda.

Developing “a more efficient and flexible partnership policy” is an immense task, and should involve a review of the basic Partnership for Peace document. One priority should be strengthening the consultation clause when Partners see menaces to their security. It is an open question whether NATO will improve operations of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which played no role whatsoever in the months before the outbreak of the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. And utmost transparency is required toward powers such as India and China regarding the further development of “global” partnerships with like-minded countries, or those contributing to the Afghanistan mission.

As noted previously, it is striking that at a time when crisis prevention gains ever more significance, the Strategic Concept makes no mention of the OSCE. As all Allies are also OSCE members, NATO should strengthen organizational potential and mechanisms and align with the OSCE’s emphasis on “soft security,” such as human rights, confidence building and early warning, and to strive for better crisis management and prevention of violent conflict.

The African Union, through which Africans are taking ownership of African problems, also deserves support from NATO, not only in concrete operations, but also with assistance based on the Alliance’s rich experience in such fields as consultation, civil-military cooperation, education and training, security sector reform (SSR), force planning, arms control and confidence building.

Much space is, however, devoted to the EU and its Common Security and Defence Policy as an important complement to NATO, better enabling European countries to take responsibility for security and stability on their continent and at its periphery. Nevertheless, as long as cooperation is still blocked by individual Allies, statements about a strengthened strategic partnership, enhanced practical cooperation, broadened political consultation and fuller cooperation in capability development remain hollow.

Finally, cooperation with the U.N., though close to satisfactory on the ground in foreign missions, requires enhancing consultation at the political-strategic level. The 2008 U.N.-NATO Declaration should be rejuvenated. Liaison procedures and effective consulting practices are necessary. The U.N.’s Peace-Building Commission should be a venue for institutional cooperation. It remains to be seen

how quickly these good intentions will overcome U.N. mistrust toward NATO.

PERSUASION IS CRITICAL

The Comprehensive Approach requires persuasion and better implementation. It is essential to acknowledge that missions such as Afghanistan cannot succeed through military effort alone, and that their joint, interagency and multinational character require close and synergetic cooperation with international organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This is not about hierarchy; NATO should not aspire to dominate others, but to coordinate *with* them. Self-evident as the concept is, greater efforts are needed to make it work as a truly integrated civilian-military effort, overcoming national and institutional interests and bias. Improving NATO’s interaction with NGOs is crucial, but it brings about the meeting of different, often opposing, institutional cultures, in which the military wishes to take control, whilst the NGOs seek to preserve their independence and impartiality. Further efforts are needed toward mutual understanding and joint planning and training.

The New Strategic Concept, the Summit Declaration and the “Lisbon Capability Goals” do not contain more than the obvious goals (usability, deployability, sustainability, etc.) regarding the development of NATO’s military capabilities. These concepts are well-known from the 1999 Defence Capability Initiative, the 2002 Prague Capabilities Commitment and the Comprehensive Political Guidance of 2006 and yielded very limited results. With the financial and economic crisis and the resulting drastic cuts in many national defense budgets, it is difficult to see how the gulf between ambitions and means will be bridged better than previously. Increased joint development of military capabilities and multinational, cost-effective approaches are needed.

Also, in the field of missile defence, apart from the foreseeable resurgence of disagreements among Allies and of Russia’s mistrust, cost may be hampering swift implementation of this important improvement in NATO’s missile defense.

For NATO’s internal reform, the New Strategic Concept and the Summit Declaration give the Secretary General a broad mandate and great authority “to streamline structures, improve working methods and maximise efficiency.” Implementation will be the crucial test of NATO’s “continual reform,” and it is revealing that the Declaration (in the context of Command Structure and Agencies Reform) twice refers to outstanding decisions about the “geographic footprint,” meaning the strong interests of individual nations in retaining NATO commands, installations



NATO

The Portuguese frigate NRP Álvares Cabral intercepts Somali pirates off East Africa. The ship was participating in NATO's Operation Ocean Shield.

or institutions on their soil.

It will be interesting to observe the pace and scale of the New Strategic Concept's implementation also in the fields in which further conceptual work is desirable. They include lessons from operations and guidelines for further NATO operations; the appropriateness of NATO's Level of Ambition; counterinsurgency in the NATO context; progress with the NATO Response Force; assessment and further development of multi-nationality; training assistance and NATO's contribution to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and SSR; NATO's role in nonproliferation; and public diplomacy.

Study and formulation of common Alliance positions are also needed in other fields, such as developments in international law regarding defense against potentially apocalyptic attacks with no forewarning; "Responsibility to Protect" in cases of genocide and massive human rights violations; problems of "humanitarian intervention"; implications of "failed states"; and further

development of a credible deterrence doctrine in a multipolar world with a multitude of state and nonstate actors.

The Alliance's New Strategic Concept makes a good case for NATO's relevance in the 21st century, notwithstanding this critical look at "What does it mean and imply?" And given the Cold War Alliance's amazing adaptation after the end of East-West confrontation, it marks another significant transformational step – programmatically. The Allies must now demonstrate the political will and provide the resources to implement what they have courageously proclaimed. □

1. Klaus Wittmann, Ein neues Strategisches Konzept. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 07.07. 2007, p. 9. Klaus Wittmann, Towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO. NATO Defense College, Rome, September 2009 (Forum Paper 10). Klaus Wittmann, NATO's new Strategic Concept should be more than a "Shopping List." In: The European Security and Defence Union, vol. 4/2009; p. 35-37. See also: Klaus Wittmann, NATO's new Strategic Concept. An Illustrative Draft. Berlin 2010.

2. See Ronald Asmus, Stefan Czumur, Chris Donnelly, Aivis Ronis, Tomas Valasek, Klaus Wittmann, NATO, new allies and reassurance. Policy Brief. London: Centre for European Reform, May 2010.