

NATO AT 60: TIME FOR A NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

With a new administration assuming office in the United States, this is the ideal moment to initiate work on a new Alliance Strategic Concept. I expect significant inputs from all member states during this process, including a major contribution to the debate from Turkey, given the country's pivotal geographical position and its unique regional expertise. It is essential that we reinforce the concept of Allied solidarity in this new security environment and that all nations are reassured that they will not be left to face these challenges on their own. That is why the new Strategic Concept must provide an updated definition for our "solidarity clause" and a clear understanding of what we mean by collective defense.

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer*



* Jaap de Hoop Scheffer is General Secretary of NATO.

On the 4th of April NATO will celebrate the 60th anniversary of its birth: six decades is an impressive age for an Alliance of sovereign nations drawn from two continents. So it is certainly worthy of celebration. But at their Summit meeting in Strasbourg and Kehl, Heads of State and Government of the Allied nations will do more than merely celebrate NATO's 60th birthday; they will also take important decisions about the Alliance's future. And one of these decisions concerns something that I have already been promoting for a while: with a new administration assuming office in the United States, this is the ideal moment to initiate work on a new Alliance Strategic Concept.

A new Strategic Concept is valid for several reasons. Although there are many aspects of the current document that are timeless, and there are others that now appear prescient and remain relevant. The current Strategic Concept dates back to 1999, and so it does not take into account many of the key political and security events of the early 21st century, such as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and NATO's subsequent engagement in Afghanistan. Similarly, it doesn't take into account that the Alliance has evolved in that time from 16 to 26 sovereign states, soon to be 28. Nor does it reflect the other aspects of transformation that the Alliance has undergone since 9/11. In 1999 the Strategic Concept talked of a "Eurocentric" Alliance. Today that body is much enlarged and deals with security issues well beyond Europe's borders – a fact that needs to be reflected appropriately in the new document.

This brings me to the second reason I believe we need a new Strategic Concept: to make the broader public aware of this new NATO. I have the impression that a large part of our public does not fully understand, or is simply unaware of, the immense changes that NATO has undergone since the end of the Cold War. A new, up-to-date basic document would make it easier to explain the current validity of Alliance and elicit the public support that is essential for the Alliance's continued success. Clear presentation of the Alliance is not only of interest to the public in Allied nations: NATO's strategic interests coincide with those of an increasing number of nations that are not members of the Alliance, so a new Strategic Concept would be read attentively by those nations too.

The third, and arguably most important reason for a new Strategic Concept is a conceptual one. The demands on NATO today are greater than ever before. A clear vision of the role and core tasks of the Alliance is urgently required. Only then will we be in a position to take the necessary political decisions, to prioritize the many tasks and identify the military resources required to fulfill them. It is for this reason that a new Strategic Concept has a key role to play within the Alliance. The negotiations involved in preparing a new edition will

almost certainly require a lengthy and intellectual debate among Allies, and that debate will offer them the opportunity to address all the key questions relating to NATO both today, and into the future. I expect significant inputs from all member states during this process, including a major contribution to the debate from Turkey, given the country's pivotal geographical position and its unique regional expertise. I don't expect this internal debate to always be easy, or harmonious, but it is absolutely essential if we are to reach a new consensus and I am confident we can.

These three reasons for launching the process to develop a new Strategic Concept appear to be widely supported. But what should we expect from its content? In my view, if it is to have real value, it must tackle a number of key issues.

Firstly, it must provide a clear description of the strategic environment. This should include not only terrorism, failed states, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but also, for example, the security implications of climate change cyber-attacks, energy security and piracy. In an age of globalization, we face "globalized insecurity", and it is clear that the whole of the international community needs to be involved and that a broad and complex range of instruments and approaches are required. The Alliance's new Strategic Concept must lay out convincingly where NATO has a role to play, and what that role should be, in order to bring added value to Allies' and the international community's, efforts.

Secondly, the Strategic Concept must define the meaning of the Washington Treaty's Article 5 in light of the new security environment. The NATO allies invoked Article 5 for the first time in the Alliance's history in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, yet this was not an attack in the traditional military sense of the term. So how should Article 5, the bedrock of the Alliance, be interpreted and implemented today? A cyber attack does not require a single soldier to cross another nation's border, yet it can paralyze a country's ability to function. The disruption of a country's energy supply can rupture the economic and social fabric of a country in a way that resembles the consequences of a war – yet without a single shot being fired. And the melting of the Arctic icecap could have serious security implications for the Allied Arctic rim states. These security challenges do not necessarily require military responses, but they do require a collective response by Allies. It is essential that we reinforce the concept of Allied solidarity in this new security environment and that all nations are reassured that they will not be left to face these challenges on their own. That is why the new Strategic Concept must provide an updated definition for our "solidarity clause" and a clear understanding of what we mean by collective defense.

Thirdly, a new Strategic Concept must incorporate the notion of a “Comprehensive Approach”. Unlike during the Cold War, today’s security challenges cannot be dealt with by NATO alone. But equally, no other institution can do everything on its own. Security in Afghanistan, and elsewhere, demands a comprehensive application of economic, political and military measures that go far beyond NATO’s capabilities. A new Strategic Concept has to recognize this; it will need to lay out the role NATO can play within a comprehensive approach and how the necessary civilian and military means are to be applied coherently, effectively and in a coordinated manner. The signature, last September, of a NATO-UN Declaration is a major step towards delivering such a “Comprehensive Approach”, but there are also other international organizations with which NATO needs to develop a closer partnership, in particular the European Union (EU). Twenty-one nations are members of both organizations, five members of the EU are NATO Partners, and these figures are likely to increase in the near future. But it is not only members that both organizations share: NATO and the EU share the same values; they are both engaged in efforts to ensure their populations are free to enjoy their full human rights and live in a safe and stable security environment. And for these reasons, a closer partnership is not only logical, it is also highly desirable, and it would enhance the effectiveness of both organizations. Clearly, in developing the necessary closer partnership, it will be essential to take fully into account the concerns of those nations that are members of only one organization, and not of the other. With a pragmatic approach and a large dose of political will, I am confident that we can overcome these concerns, and that we can then finally unlock the full potential of NATO-EU relations.

Fourthly, military transformation. A new Strategic Concept must also address the balance between collective territorial defense and the new missions of NATO such as expeditionary operations. Naturally, collective territorial defense remains, and will remain, the very core principle upon which the Alliance is built, but no Ally today can afford to keep armed forces for solely this purpose. The requirement to send forces and their equipment to operate in distant crisis regions, often at short notice, is as important as the requirement to have forces that can defend national borders. Yet whereas forces able to do the former can also do the latter, the converse is not true. That is why we need forces and capabilities that have the flexibility and adaptability to operate across the full spectrum of military operations, from crisis management and peacekeeping through to war fighting. A new Strategic Concept must not only make this requirement abundantly clear, but it must also map out how it is to be achieved. This will entail measures to continue Alliance and Allied transformation efforts, such as reforming the defense planning process and the way Alliance-led operations are financed.

Fifthly, the consolidation of Europe. The task of further enlarging the Alliance and simultaneously maintaining good relations with Russia would appear to have been seriously challenged by the conflict in the Caucasus last August. Yet both tasks remain essential. Enlargement is an expression of sovereign nations' right to choose their own alliances and allegiances, rather than have them chosen for them, and it is one of the most important instruments in consolidating Europe as a whole, free and democratic security zone. Enlargement has reduced the chance of a large-scale war in Europe and has enhanced stability and security in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area, not just for Allies, but for new Allies, and neighbors alike. I therefore fully expect a new Strategic Concept to signal clearly that the enlargement process remains open, while also making it clear that Russia's legitimate security concerns will not be ignored or overlooked.

That leads to another feature of a new Strategic Concept: how NATO foresees its relationship developing with Russia. In light of recent events, it is important to learn lessons from the way we have interacted in the past through the NATO-Russia Council. Clearly, effective cooperation between NATO and Russia is essential for addressing many of the common challenges we face, yet Russia currently appears to perceive that the West, and notably NATO, does not take fully into account Russia's security concerns. This is a perception that needs to be tackled – both by NATO and by Russia. There is no shortage of issues where we have a common interest and cooperation is certainly preferable to confrontation; but that cooperation can only come about if both NATO and Russia are prepared to undertake a continual and frank dialogue. I believe the new Strategic Concept will provide the ideal opportunity for Allies to reach a clear consensus on how to engage with Russia and how to give further impetus to our relationship.

Although I have focused on only six issues, there are of course many others, including identifying the role of arms control and disarmament; our relationships with partner nations around the globe; cooperation with regional organizations such as the African Union; and NATO's role in humanitarian and disaster relief operations. And there is one further role for NATO that needs to be reinforced which is making full use of the Alliance as the forum for security consultations between all Allies – North American and European.

At a time when our security environment is changing rapidly, and when the challenges we face are ever more unpredictable, NATO requires a correspondingly broad and adaptable set of instruments. Above all, however, we require agreement among Allied nations on how and when to use them in order to safeguard their common interests and values. A new Strategic Concept will provide us with this consensus. That is why the time is right for it.