

THE LONG ROAD

As the 21st Century continues to unfold and NATO's civilian leaders press on with crafting a new Strategic Concept, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, reflects on the myriad challenges faced by NATO, the most successful alliance in human history, and the many opportunities NATO has to serve as a worthy partner on the long road to peace, security, and prosperity.

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Stepping Forward with Confidence

“No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river, and he is not the same man.” remarked an ancient philosopher.

Though the wisdom of that assertion stands the test of time, the thought is not quite complete. The allegorical river –like a real river– may be different, but not unrecognizably so. Man, likewise, changes with the passage of time, but only as a function of his experiences and in context of his fundamental self. He may be more experienced, wiser, and more prudent perhaps, but he is still the same man.

Although we and our security environment continually change, grow, and mature, the framework of our existence remains stable if not fixed. New challenges arise, yes, but often, old challenges are simply transfigured into challenges we perceive as new. In this context of international security, NATO fords many well-known streams and a few unknown ones as well on its long road to security; and it does so with the confidence that comes from experience and success.

Steady, not Stale

Global security conditions have changed since the signing of the Washington Treaty and the Alliance is larger and more broadly engaged than was envisioned 60 years ago. Yet in a changing world where the security of the Alliance is not guaranteed, NATO remains a crucial guarantor of Euro-Atlantic security; firmly resolved today to the safeguarding of the freedom, common heritage, and civilization of its people as it was in 1949. The Alliance remains anchored by the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law: three guiding ideals –values– that will remain unchanged even as NATO evolves.

From the rise of the Iron Curtain to the fall of the Berlin Wall; from a bipolar world bounded by the struggle between Soviet Communism and Western Liberalism to a multipolar world characterized by globalization and the rapid flow of information, ideas, and ideologies; from the tumultuous 20th century to this chaotic new millennium, these principles and values have served as the guiding star to which our compass ever points through calm and crisis alike.

Even so, there are those who claim that NATO is obsolete, a relic of the past. Commentary abounds in academic journals and popular media that the Alliance has served its purpose and it is time for it to go. Worse still, there is a pervasive ignorance of NATO’s *raison d’être*. But that ignorance is an opportunity to remind the world of NATO’s unique and indispensable function, its enduring values, and

its favorable position in the global marketplace of ideas. The Alliance and its partners strive every day to build a better world. This is a message that is most vividly being shaped in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and off the Horn of Africa, and one that must be clearly transmitted through our words and our deeds across the globe.

Rocking the Boat

In view of NATO's successful adaptation to our dynamic security environment today, and in light of the vibrancy of its members, the Alliance is hardly "long-in-the-tooth" NATO is quite simply not a stale idea whose time has passed; it remains, rather, a fresh idea whose time is now. The world needs to know and understand this.

As NATO ventures deeper into 21st century and faces some tough challenges with implications to the security of its member states and partners, it will inevitably need to "rock the boat". The current development of a new Strategic Concept and its subsequent adoption as NATO's path forward is an opportunity to ensure that the Alliance stays fresh and is better understood by its constituents, by its friends and partners, and by those who would seek to fracture the peace.

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Throughout its history, the Alliance has ensured that member states are shielded from armed aggression. It has done so by the most appropriate means available including nuclear deterrence, superiority of conventional forces, diplomacy and dialogue, and membership expansion; all anchored firmly by the credibility that comes from strategically communicating both the viability of means and the resolution of will to respond to international aggression. More recently, the Alliance has preserved its security by assuring not just the collective defense of the Euro-Atlantic region, but also by pursuing collective security through mitigating risks and addressing instability at the geographic periphery of the Alliance and well-beyond.

In doing so, NATO has endeavored to maintain its position of leadership in matters of security, to fulfill its missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans, and to preserve its freedom of action to counter the threats of ballistic missiles, piracy, emerging cyber vulnerabilities, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and associated technologies, the emergence of transnational terrorism, the illegal

trafficking and use of narcotics, the implications of an aging population to our military arm, and many other challenges to our security.

As NATO looks forward, it will not be a global actor, but rather, a responsible actor in a globalized world. It must contend with regional instability, deter aggressive activity by potentially hostile state and non-state actors, help manage the growing global competition for natural resources, and mitigate the effects of natural disasters and pandemics; and it must do so effectively in an environment of declining budgets.

Pulling Together

If NATO has learned anything from its recent experiences, successes, and challenges in Afghanistan and the Balkans, it is the notion that collective security is about more than combat. Given the diversity of challenges it faces, NATO must recognize the need for a comprehensive approach to Alliance security so an all-encompassing security policy can be adopted. Though NATO does boast a combined Gross Domestic Product in excess of 31 trillion dollars (26 trillion euros) –nearly double that of the European Union– its resources are not unlimited; no one nation, no one military, no one alliance or organization, can address the challenges of this complex world on its own. Our collective security will require a collective effort that leverages the vast diversity of capability resident within the Alliance as well as outside of it.

For NATO, that means complimentary operations with the European Union and more intensely working with our Partners for Peace as well as with Mediterranean Dialogue Countries and other like minded nations from around the globe like Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand. Our combined and complimentary efforts in countering piracy off the Horn of Africa serve as a great example and a veritable laboratory for collaboration in the 21st century. It also underscores the fact that NATO does not always have to be in the lead; NATO can serve valuable supporting roles to others as well.

Globalization in its many forms and its myriad resultant perturbations is what drives our need to work together more closely than ever before. For all its benefits, globalization does come with some challenges. By its very nature, it depends on relationships and the interdependence of many stakeholders.

As former British Prime Minister Tony Blair wrote, “Globalization begets interdependence; interdependence begets the necessity of a common value system to make it work, and idealism thus becomes realpolitik.”¹

¹ Tony Blair, “A Battle for Global Values,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2007.

These interdependencies are relationships that must be cared for and tended to; and, even within the framework of our common values, that is sometimes not as easy task. Yet, there is a certain idealistic thrill in growing and sustaining these relationships. However, fostering new relationships and strengthening old ones based on common values and common interests, though vital, is not enough. NATO's next major role is to seek, develop, and galvanize relationships with non-military and non-governmental enterprises, both private and public, on the basis of common purpose.

In dealing with the tough challenges ahead, cyber security, for example, governments and militaries simply might not have the right answers; perhaps not even the right questions. But the right answers are out there and NATO's approach to seek and to find them must be comprehensive in the most comprehensive sense of the word. Security in the 21st Century depends on the cooperation of multiple governments, government agencies, and non-government public and private entities to ensure our collective well-being. The value of our freedom and our security is enhanced by the plurality of the paths radiating from our partnerships and the binding of those paths by our common interests, values, and purpose; in a nuanced blending of idealism and pragmatism.

Dialing in for Success

The future of security in the coming decades is predicated on the notion that the preservation of peace is fueled by the persistent application of soft power. This approach is the best way to mitigate the risks of applying hard power. The application of hard power, however, must remain an option. But we cannot view the role of NATO in preserving security as an on/off switch between hard power and soft power or between combat and peace. Rather, much like a rheostat, NATO must be structured to be adaptable and capable of being flexibly "dialed in."

In the words of U.S. Naval War College professor, Roger W. Barnett, flexibility in structure and capabilities increases options available; adaptability is selecting or devising the right option at the right time. A significant ability to adapt not only enables success, but at the same time it helps to tailor ways and means more closely to ends, which is another way of saying it decreases operational risk.²

Therefore, NATO must be structured to be adaptable and flexible enough to be dialed in for success. It must be able to shift smoothly from soft power to hard power across the full spectrum of peace and conflict.

² Roger W. Barnett, *Navy Strategic Culture: Why the Navy Thinks Differently*, (Naval Institute Press, November 2009).

Internally, NATO’s organization must be scrutinized objectively and completely, from the bottom up and from the top down. This does not mean NATO needs to be redefined into something new; that would be impractical. Rather, NATO must be refined into a cohesive system that is better, faster, and more resilient – a system

capable of enduring the strains of expanding membership, of negotiating the complex security environment, of pursuing extended partnerships, and connecting with public and private enterprises.

Nothing should be off the table: physical structure, political structure, staff sizes, decision making authorities and procedures, the limits and requirements of consensus, pre-planned responses and pre-delegated authorities, procurement of military systems, application of niche capabilities, the combination of headquarters, and any other of a number of factors that impact how NATO can “dial in” for success. In some cases more will be needed, in others, less. But NATO members must approach the future with an open mind and put Alliance needs ahead of individual member nation interests, which may prove to be one of the greatest challenges of all.

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In Good Company

There is an old Turkish proverb that says “No road is long with good company.” It is an appropriate adage for NATO’s journey since its foundation and forward in the years to come.

Though the road to peace may sometimes seem long and lonely, an expanding Alliance and a growing list of partners and friends make the journey that much more bearable and exciting.

But the road to peace is not a smooth one. As anyone that has made a long trek in the good company of family and friends can attest, disagreements arise, feelings are bruised, patience is tested, and the limits of understanding are approached. Managing the Alliance is likewise a challenge. With 28 nations fielding 130,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines operating on three continents, making decisions by consensus is tough and taxing, and in some cases neither warranted nor merited. But it is not impossible, and it is better than pursuing security goals alone.

When considering NATO, consider its wealth, its reach, its power and its track record. Since its founding, no nation has ever attacked a NATO nation, and more importantly when considering the turbulence of Europe's history, there has never been military aggression within the Alliance. NATO has served as a bulwark of our security and will continue to be a guarantor of the peace. Its comprehensive security and collective well-being at home and abroad, on shore and at sea, in the air, or in the stormy cyber realm depends on all the 28 members of the Alliance, our non-NATO partners, and more and more, upon our relationships with public and private enterprises.

By working together and pulling at all levers of national and international power with a common purpose as well as towards our common goals, the long road to security and prosperity, though still challenging, does not seem so long and lonely after all. On the road to lasting peace, NATO remains good company.