

WHAT WILL BE IN NATO'S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT?

Just as the ability to learn is more important than what we actually know, so the ability of the new Strategic Concept to engage NATO in a permanent process of self-examination and strategic versatility may be more important than the immediate vision which is set out. That will also determine whether this next Strategic Concept will prove to be more enduring and influential than its predecessors.

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NATO's strategic concepts have rarely been memorable documents or even reference points for NATO observers. The short 12 article Treaty of Washington, NATO's founding charter, has proved to be a more visionary, flexible and enabling piece of paper than the various concepts that NATO has come up with from time to time to push its transformation forward. The one exception to this rule is undoubtedly the Harmel Report of 1967 which, at the onset of détente between East and West, gave the Alliance a political role as a promoter of arms control and dialogue in addition to its hardcore military function. It is probably because the Harmel formula was so simple that it is still remembered today.

What has driven the Alliance's evolution is more the pressure of events –mainly unforeseen– than intellectual exercises on paper. Today's Alliance is the product of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s or of the 9/11 attacks on the United States which forced the Organization to venture far beyond its traditional role of territorial defense and seek new partners and capabilities in the process. The last NATO Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999 bear the imprint of the age in which they were written. They codify more the contemporary Alliance *acquis* than give a sense of direction of where the Organization would be headed in the future. As such they are descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Given these precedents, it may seem surprising that there are such great expectations regarding NATO's new Strategic Concept to be unveiled at the Lisbon Summit this November. Never has NATO talked so much about the new Strategic Concept nor made it such a centerpiece of its activity, indeed the very headline of a summit meeting of an Alliance more known for action than treaty revisions. The process NATO has embarked upon has largely contributed to these unusually high expectations. 18 months before the Lisbon Summit NATO's leaders already trumpeted the new Concept and the establishment of a high level group of independent experts that would lead the way by assessing the state of the Alliance and making recommendations to adapt it to 21st century challenges and conditions. This group, under the chairmanship of Madeleine Albright, spent nine months holding seminars and hearings in various NATO and Partner countries as well as consultations in Allied capitals and Moscow. They engaged with the strategic community in its widest sense and looked into every nook and cranny of the NATO Organization. As the report of the Albright Group has been made public by NATO, despite the independent nature of the group and the fact that its report is not the actual Strategic Concept, it will be difficult for the Alliance to distance itself too much from the Group's analysis and more far-reaching recommendations. The open and highly transparent process NATO has committed to, inviting the public to put its views and questions both to the Group of Experts and NATO officials, underscores the Alliance's wish to have a Strategic Concept that

will not only make sense to the general public but also reflect its security needs and preoccupations.

So why so much fuss about a new NATO Strategic Concept? What is more important this time round?

In the first place, NATO needs a process of reflection to sort out how it can perform its traditional functions better, and in a way that makes them more relevant to 21st century security conditions. This applies first and foremost to the Alliance's core task of collective defense under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Unlike during the Cold War there are now two dimensions to Article 5. The first is the classical function of defense against conventional attack. This unlikely but still potentially catastrophic contingency is something that NATO's newest member states in Central and Eastern Europe are unwilling to rule out. They are seeking strategic reassurance in the form of contingency planning, Article 5 exercises and the pre-arranged availability of rapid response forces. Given NATO's historical role of providing for collective defense, these are natural things to do for NATO. In any case, it will be difficult for NATO to convince its newest members to send troops to Afghanistan if they feel insecure at home and choose instead to invest their defense budgets in static territorial defense forces. Yet at a time of acute financial constraints and mounting demands in Afghanistan, NATO members will not want to divert major resources to cope with the least likely scenarios and will not want to antagonize Russia either. Already Russian officials have reacted to the report of the Group of Experts by pointing out that "strategic reassurance" can only mean that NATO still considers Russia as a threat. Clearly this is not the message NATO either intends or wants to convey. Consequently, the Alliance needs to establish the right balance in its new Strategic Concept between reassurance and reset *vis-à-vis* Russia. Perhaps a revised CFE regime limiting conventional forces and exercises on both sides of the Alliance's new eastern borders, together with a new package of transparency and confidence building measures would help in this respect.

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The other aspect of Article 5 is of the less automatic and predictable kind. Article 5 specifies that NATO's member states are obligated to defend each other against an "armed attack"; but what is an armed attack these days? Does Article 5

potentially apply to non-conventional incidents such as terrorism, or cyber attacks or energy cut-offs? If we remember that Article 5 was invoked for the first time in NATO's history on 12 September 2001 in response to the Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, then the answer must be yes. This said, NATO's response at that time was essentially political and hesitant making initially the Article 5 invocation more a gesture of solidarity and readiness to assist than an operational activity with a military follow-up. It will not be clear in advance when an incident such as a cyber attack or a proliferation threat reaches the threshold of an Article 5 case. Therefore NATO's consultations, in advance of a crisis, during a crisis or following an actual attack will need to determine at which stage NATO acts collectively and whether its response is political, preventive, defensive or a military response to a blatant and identifiable aggression.

A second area of NATO traditional business that will need to be revisited is deterrence. For the first half century of its existence NATO was in the business of preventing wars rather than fighting them. A mix of nuclear and conventional weapons covered all threatening contingencies. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, NATO has retained sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe spread over a number of Allies. Yet the U.S. President has set forth a vision of a nuclear free world which, if it is to be achievable, must begin by reducing the salience of nuclear weapons in defense strategies.

Some Allies have publicly advocated the removal of these Europe-based nuclear weapons given the currently benign security situation in the Euro-Atlantic area, and as a contribution to nuclear disarmament. However, before doing this, the Allies need to ask themselves some serious questions: Does it make sense for NATO to give up its small number of sub-strategic weapons as long as other countries, many with anti-Western ideologies, have nuclear weapons or are trying to acquire them? Should NATO give up these weapons unilaterally or seek instead an arms control *quid pro quo*, especially when we consider the thousands of sub-strategic nuclear weapons that Russia still has, many of which are deployed close to NATO's borders? Would a unilateral withdrawal by NATO lead to similar steps by other nuclear powers and help to promote disarmament or would it have no global impact? Finally, if nuclear burden sharing is abandoned in the Alliance, what would replace it as "transatlantic glue" holding both sides of the Atlantic together? This is not an argument for the status quo but simply to think strategically before changing NATO's deterrent posture. This said, deterrence has traditionally worked best against a single adversary who plays by the same rules of the game. The world of the future, however, will have several nuclear powers armed with long range ballistic missiles. Will they also be rational actors? Deterrence may well need to be complemented with a NATO-wide missile defense system which could have the added advantage of making ballistic missile acquisition less attractive to

potential proliferators. This missile defense system could be a major innovation in NATO's Strategic Concept. The U.S. in any case is proceeding with the deployment of missile defense components in and around Europe. Some European Allies are also developing missile defenses, at least at the tactical level. For some years NATO has also funded research and development into a NATO-wide tactical system (ALTBMD). Thus, it makes eminent sense to combine these various systems into a single command and control structure ensuring comprehensive coverage of all of NATO territory. The sum required (around 200 million dollars) would appear modest even in the current financially strained environment.

A third area for improvement is political consultations, for example through an increased recourse to Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. Paradoxically the North Atlantic Council may have consulted more broadly about world events during the Cold War than in the 20 years following the fall of the Berlin Wall. NATO's political scope has narrowed to those places where it has deployed troops, such as the Balkans and Afghanistan, as the Group of Experts recognized in its Report. To some degree, this focus is understandable given the pressures and complexity of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. But its limitations and drawbacks have also become more manifest. By not consulting on the Middle East, Iran, North Korea or Somalia, NATO gives the impression that it is not interested or a relevant player in many of the crisis situations that are at the top of the security agenda in Washington, Ottawa, European capitals or even the other side of Brussels (European Union). Too limited consultations also diminish NATO's situational awareness and thus prevent it from having much of a role in conflict prevention or the early, more political stages of crisis management. It also means that NATO has to assume the consequences of a crisis (for instance in sending troops to the Balkans or Afghanistan at considerable cost in blood and treasure) without being fully involved in the political and diplomatic activities in search of a settlement. This was certainly the case with NATO's absence from the early phases of the Yugoslav conflict or the immediate post-9/11 pacification of Afghanistan. So it is hardly surprising that the Group of Experts have called for more and broader political consultations in the Alliance and, in particular, more frequent use of Article 4 where an Ally can convene a meeting of the North Atlantic Council if it feels its security has been threatened (last used by Turkey on the eve of the 2003 Iraq conflict and implicitly during the June 2010 Israeli boarding of the Gaza-bound flotilla).

The question is: Will the U.S. and the Europeans be prepared to use NATO to coordinate their transatlantic grand strategy in preference to the U.S.-EU bilateral relationship (as with Iran and the Middle East peace process)? Moreover, will NATO be able to develop better intelligence and intelligence sharing as well as better regional expertise and network of diplomatic envoys to anticipate crises and focus the Allies' minds on deteriorating situations, notwithstanding all the other pressing

issues on NATO's agenda? Anticipating crises and acting on them early is not an area where any international organization or government, let alone NATO, has a good record. Also, some Allies may simply be hesitant because they fear that an early NATO consultation could send a confusing or even negative public signal of NATO's military engagement – when this may well be far from the case. To which it can be countered that the more regular and routine NATO's political consultations become, the less the rest of the world will expect the Alliance to always take action – thus increasing NATO's room for diplomatic maneuver.

A final existing task of the Alliance that needs to be reformed is operations resulting from crisis management. Which areas should NATO countries look at in this reform?

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First, the Alliance will have to decide on the role and place that should be given to these crisis management missions in the Strategic Concept. Are they a means to an end or an end in themselves? Crisis management since the early days of NATO's involvement in the Balkans, has in effect partly redefined NATO's identity, beyond collective defence. Crisis management has become part of NATO's visible and substantive contribution to the maintenance or restoration of international peace and security, in concert with others. So, is crisis management an

instrument –an important instrument for sure– of NATO's wider mission of protection and defense? Or is it an end in itself?

Some have commented that the Report of the Group of Experts gives crisis management operations a relatively low profile. Yet operations have played a key role in NATO's evolution over the past 20 years and will undoubtedly continue to be important in the future as well. Afghanistan will certainly be a decisive factor in this regard. It is still perhaps too early at this stage to draw final political and strategic conclusions; but there are obviously important lessons learned that NATO needs to take account of. Simply saying “never again” after Afghanistan and assuming that NATO will not have to contemplate such a large scale mission in such a hostile environment with inadequate regional cooperation is tempting but far too easy.

To a large extent, the debate on whether crisis management should be or not be a fundamental security task of the Alliance is a technical one. It is already reflected in the three plus two (3+2) security tasks identified in the 1999 Concept. But what NATO needs to define is the overall importance it should attach to operations in its policies and instruments. How high up should crisis response operations be in the order of priorities? Should the Strategic Concept reflect NATO's current priorities –where Afghanistan is clearly at the top– or should it think beyond Afghanistan? One way to do this would be to think of long term engagement in regions of vital interest to NATO through training and security sector reform as well as partnerships with local governments and security forces.

Second, a framework for operational engagement will have to be defined. The Group of Experts proposed “guidelines for operations” while some advocate somewhat less restrictive terms and a less constraining vision. Thinking instead of “guiding principles”, in this sense, might be a better way forward. The underlying idea here is how to improve NATO's consultations, planning, decision-making and its ability to conduct operations at the political and strategic level. Some Allied Ministers, such as the German Defence Minister, have argued for set criteria such as a clear end state for missions, the requisite military forces, a clear threat to at least one ally, no alternative to the use of force and a high chance of success. Even if NATO does not make these criteria public, in order to avoid putting itself into a straitjacket with Parliaments or the UN Security Council as the mission authorizer, it makes sense at least for NATO to have a better internal grasp of such checks and balances before it embarks on major costly operations such as ISAF in Afghanistan. A lack of political will or burden sharing must not become manifest only after the troops have arrived in theatre.

Third, reforming NATO's operations will also have to account for potential ‘up-stream’ Allied action. When we talk about NATO's crisis management what we mean is crisis response. We tend to focus on the remedial role; namely response and resolution. But, how should NATO elaborate in the new Strategic Concept other distinct contributions of the Alliance in the wider spectrum of crisis? In particular as regards the Alliance's anticipatory role in crisis prevention or in post-conflict resolution and reconstruction phase. In other words, should NATO be a specialist focusing on crisis response, or should it be a generalist that covers the whole crisis cycle – from prevention through crisis management to response and post-crisis stabilization?

Fourth, a revisit of the way Allies conduct operations should be enlightened by the “comprehensive approach”, which is certainly not just about crisis management. The Strategic Concept should dispel misunderstandings on the term and make clear that it is not about NATO controlling other actors. The Strategic Concept

should also define the right ambition in terms of civilian capabilities and effects needed in the NATO structures to effectively implement a comprehensive approach. This last area will not be an easy one to resolve as some Allies will want to avoid duplicating the civilian assets that already exist in the EU or national governments. A limited civilian cell to “plug and play” in operations with other international organizations and NGOs is the most realistic option.

This brings us now to the second consideration. What will be new in NATO’s Strategic Concept?

The first novelty will be a broadening of NATO’s security agenda to embrace a broader spectrum of security challenges. The focus will be on defense of populations as much as on defense of territory or borders. Two further novelties are related to the fact that in the time frame of this Strategic Concept, the most probable threats to Allied security will be non-conventional and many of a non-military nature.

Of most immediate concern to the Alliance is the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, whether in the hands of irresponsible states or non-state actors. Any use of a weapon of mass destruction would have incalculable consequences for global stability and prosperity. Therefore preventing this from happening must be one of NATO’s highest priorities. This will require, as already mentioned, a full spectrum deterrent posture based on a mix of conventional and nuclear weapons at the lowest possible levels complemented by a missile defence to cover all of NATO’s territory and its populations. It will also require more Alliance involvement in international efforts to strengthen arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation régimes to prevent the emergence of new nuclear weapon states or the dissemination of weapons of mass destruction. Instead of just supporting other people’s ideas and initiatives, NATO will need to develop more of its own.

Also of immediate concern to NATO is the malevolent use of modern technology and information systems by individuals, organizations and states to target the vulnerable areas of Allied societies. Terrorist groups have access to greater financial resources, global support networks and more sophisticated weapons, including potentially weapons of mass destruction. The growing dependence of modern societies and economies on computer networks has massively increased the incidence of cyber attacks and cyber crime which, at a certain level of intensity, could paralyze governmental, commercial and military systems causing enormous disruption, economic loss and even jeopardizing Allied security. NATO must have better capabilities to detect such infiltrations and attacks as well as to rapidly limit the damage and restore the integrity of its own, as well as Allied, information sys-

tems. It must share best practice and lessons learned as well as develop a rapid response capability to help Allies or partners who are singled out for such attacks.

There are other challenges too which will increasingly require NATO to engage with the world beyond its borders in a new way.

Globalization has made irreversible the flow of goods, services, people, technology, ideas, customs, crime and weapons to which open democratic societies will remain especially accessible and therefore vulnerable. Growing inter-dependence may hopefully make the world's countries more willing to work together to find common solutions to these challenges; but in the short term it will also empower a large number of actors driven by ideology, religious fanaticism or criminal intent with the capacity to harm the interests of the Allies. Such threats may be directed at the territory of Allies or at their citizens, economic systems, infrastructure, troops in operations, or even their values. Because of these values as well as NATO's unique capabilities and operational experience, it will undoubtedly be called upon to respond also to challenges that do not affect Allied security directly but which matter to its citizens and governments. These could include the humanitarian consequences of a failed state, the devastation caused by a natural disaster and massive human rights violations which engage the international community.

In the longer term, demographic changes could exacerbate long standing global problems such as poverty, hunger, illegal immigration and pandemic disease. As globalization brings the world closer together and makes borders more fluid, these problems are spreading faster. No state, no matter how geographically remote, can isolate itself from these flows, nor protect itself in isolation. The growing impact of climate change, will act as an additional stress factor that will combine and intensify these human and environmental challenges in ways that are hard to predict but could well be severe.

The emergence of a more multi-polar world is bringing with it an increased reliance on the "global commons" of vital communication, transport and transit routes on which global trade and prosperity depend. In addition to the growing importance of cyber space, air space, land, sea and spatial networks now link the world together as never before. Strategic resources, such as oil, gas and minerals, transit over greater distances, especially by sea, making international efforts to protect key sea lanes against piracy, terrorists and threats of closure or disruption by states an ever more important objective. As the world economy recovers and emerging countries take their place in the global economy, competition for these vital resources may become even more intense and the resources themselves scarcer. This will necessitate new forms of international cooperation and a cooperative approach to the global commons to ensure unfettered access and freedom

of movement. The international community is also depending more on space for its key communications and observation systems. Keeping space free of disruption and excessive militarization will become an important security objective.

NATO will need to be better prepared and equipped to help preserve the global commons, for instance by increasing its maritime capabilities to patrol the sea lanes of communication, developing a maritime situational awareness concept, better reconnaissance and intelligence gathering systems, and forces that are able to cooperate with police and domestic emergency response and rescue services in responding to attacks or attempts at disruption.

Certain regions will also remain crucial to Allied security because extremist violence or prolonged instability there could directly affect Allied security.

It is essential for the Alliance to remain engaged in Afghanistan and to promote political reform and improved governance and effective security structures throughout the region even beyond the timeframe of the current ISAF mission. Success in defeating Al-Qaeda and other forms of terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia will require a long term engagement and an intensified program of training and security cooperation by NATO, complementing economic and development assistance by the UN and other international actors.

Other regions could also become more important for Allied security if inter-state hostility, ethnic tensions or expansionist ambitions and military build-ups threaten to undermine Alliance security. In its annual report the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute shows global defense spending increasing by six per cent per annum, especially in Asia and the Middle East, even if that growth is now sharply negative in Europe. This build up is bound to erode the U.S. military superiority over time and create a different international environment in which NATO will have to operate. It will certainly make it difficult for the Alliance to dismiss altogether the prospect of inter-state conflict in the future. Elsewhere, Allies may well continue to receive requests from specific countries or regional organizations, such as the African Union, or from the United Nations for assistance with respect to peacekeeping missions, counter-terrorism activities, protection of supplies or military training. It is difficult to say no even when these capacity building and assistance missions are best shared with others, such as the European Union and United Nations.

The new Strategic Concept will undoubtedly put the focus more on the global reach of NATO and its increasing involvement in the wider world beyond its borders. This will require NATO to develop its partnerships well beyond the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond partnership as basically a mechanism to prepare countries for NATO membership.

The strongest message in the Group of Experts report is the need to strengthen NATO's partnerships. A broad discussion on this issue should encompass Russia, NATO-EU relations and the comprehensive approach. These are three delicate matters where the report tries to provide a balanced perspective. NATO's primary focus is on the Euro-Atlantic area where the majority of NATO's partners are located. NATO seeks to cooperate with Russia in upholding security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. This will benefit Russia as much as the Allies. NATO has never been and will never be a threat to Russia. Although this is not new, the means and the extent of NATO's engagement with it will be. The Alliance is striving to build a Euro-Atlantic security architecture in which Russia will have its place reflecting its size and importance while respecting in full the principles enshrined in the OSCE documents, the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the 2002 NATO-Russia Declaration. This means moving forward and not relapsing into outdated concepts from the past like spheres of influence or putting European nations into a hierarchy according to their size and power. Maintaining NATO's Open Door policy and the freedom of states to choose their alliances will be fundamental, and all the more so at a time when no further enlargement of NATO is imminent.

The Report is very ambitious in the area of partnerships but many aspects still need to be decided. Do the Allies need a new Framework Document and, if yes, what should be in it? Should such a framework be open to all potential partners or should we rather extend existing partnership commitments and tools on an ad-hoc basis? Can we build a new partnership around dealing collectively with the new security challenges, which would mean drawing in global partners? If this is the case, the Alliance will undoubtedly need to reach out to China and India and be better prepared to nurture "difficult or sensitive" partnerships with rising new powers that do not necessarily share NATO's values or security outlook but which are indispensable to developing a regional security framework in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Finally, NATO needs to ask itself if its current organization is up to the task of delivering all the many new priorities and political and military tasks the new Strategic Concept will impose on it, particularly at a time of financial crisis that will necessitate a rationalization of many programs and processes if NATO is to survive as a viable institution that its members want to invest in. NATO will have to use

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the financial crisis as an opportunity and incentive to reform rather than be overwhelmed by it.

By sharing the burden within NATO, individual Allies can achieve a far greater level of security than they could achieve through any national approach – and at far lower costs. But this collective insurance policy requires the regular premiums to be paid. All Allies, on both sides of the Atlantic, need to demonstrate the political will to continue to invest in defense, and to invest their fair share in NATO.

At the moment, all Allies have to cope with the serious effects of the economic crisis. However, they need to be aware of the potential long-term negative effects if they implement defense cuts that are too large and disproportionate. European Allies, in particular, must resist the temptation to use the economic crisis as an excuse for letting the transatlantic defense spending gap widen any further. Already, the U.S. spends about 70 percent of total NATO defense spending, three times more per soldier than the European Allies and six times more on research and development. This means that NATO must ensure cohesion across the Alliance in its defense decisions. The guiding principle should be to cut fat, and build up muscle. Allies should not continue to invest scarce resources in fixed infrastructure and soldiers who are essentially stuck in their barracks. They should re-direct investments towards more flexible, mobile and modern armed forces – armed forces that can actually be used. NATO Allies must also get a greater return from their defense dollars and euros. Through a combination of collective approaches and multinational solutions, NATO can deliver more and better. Through role specialization and prioritization, nations can focus their spending in specific areas, rather than to spread it thinly across a range of capabilities. Also, reorganization and rationalization can help bring down the expensive fixed overheads associated with infrastructure and personnel.

There is yet another way of delivering more with less: by building a true strategic partnership between NATO and the European Union. NATO and the EU are two of the world's most important institutions. They share 21 members. They have complementary skills and assets. No other strategic partnership would offer so many benefits, both operationally and financially. More coordination at the institutional level and between staffs would bring the most significant operational benefits in Afghanistan. NATO and the EU need to understand that their respective roles in Afghanistan are not complementary but mutually reinforcing. Both are there under the same UN mandate and the success of each organization's missions depends, to a large extent, on the success of the other. Financially, a NATO-EU strategic partnership would be a major cost-saver, especially in the area of military capabilities. In many cases, NATO and the EU share the same capability requirements. The partners should identify the priority areas and agree that wherever possible,

any capability work in one organization shall be open to all members of the other organization too. It is thus high time that the political leaderships of both NATO and the EU came together to lift the remaining obstacles in the way of a full NATO-EU cooperation. Perhaps Lisbon could be a deadline given all the many areas –operations, crisis management, comprehensive approach, capabilities– where NATO's effectiveness depends largely on the EU's responsiveness.

Because the future is as unpredictable as always and the defense choices that NATO makes today may not be the right ones in five or ten years time, the next Alliance Strategic Concept will need to contain a review clause. Perhaps this could come in the form of a Secretary General assessment and proposals for revision at each NATO summit. Just as the ability to learn is more important than what we actually know, so the ability of the new Strategic Concept to engage NATO in a permanent process of self-examination and strategic versatility may be more important than the immediate vision which is set out. That will also determine whether this next Strategic Concept will prove to be more enduring and influential than its predecessors.