NATO's New Clothes.
A New Strategic Concept

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The decision to issue a new Strategic Concept had been hammered out in the Declaration on Alliance Security issued by the Heads of State and Government at NATO's Summit at Strasbourg/Kehl, in April 2009.

In general, the Strategic Concept served to codify the policy framework of the Alliance's functioning and its periodical reviews provided for the reflection of the incremental changes the Alliance underwent. Since 1991, when the Strategic Concepts have started to be released to the public – thus following the logic of a public diplomacy document but keeping its core strategic dimension – the document sets out NATO's security tasks, acknowledges and possibly foresees the features of the evolving security environment, highlights the Alliance's approach to security and offers guidelines for its future cooperation policy (with partners and organizations) and for the streamline of its military capabilities.

The first Strategic Concept, called "The Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area" was agreed in 1949 and since then it had been revised in 1952, 1957, 1968, 1991 and 1999. Every new version was triggered by the intrinsic transformations the international system went through and the fundamental changes in the Alliance's approach to the security environment.

Four out of six Strategic Concepts (1949, 1952, 1957 and 1968) were conceived for the preparation of military defense in given geographical areas and were classified. The other two (1991 and 1999) were post-Cold War documents, forward-thinking and innovative in their approaches, heralding the transformation of the Alliance.

The first two strategic concepts, D.C. 6/1 of 01.12.1949 and M.C. 3/5 of 03.12.1952 do not differ much in the language used, provide general lines for defense planning and do not clearly identify the potential enemy. In a way they set the stage for the next strategic concepts, which will become more focused and explicit.

The breakthrough came in 1957 with the third strategic concept, M.C. 14/2 of 23.05.1957, where the USSR is for the first time identified as *the enemy* and the *general war* is perceived as the greatest threat to the survival of the NATO nations. The idea of *massive retaliation strategy* becomes an integral part of the Strategic Concept as "utilization of all weapons and forces at NATO's disposal" should be used "since in no case is there a NATO concept of limited war with the Soviets". The Alliance is envisaging not only the use of *first strike* but also is accommodating the idea of "maximum destruction...within the first few days" when using a nuclear arsenal, in order "to gain nuclear superiority".

The fourth strategic concept, M.C. 14/3 of 16.01.1968 brings in new notions and theories. It identifies the Warsaw Pact as the enemy, launches the *concept of forward defense* and *limited war* and highlights that the Alliance's deterrence is based on *flexible response*, consisting of three pillars: direct defense, deliberate escalation and general nuclear response (the ultimate deterrent and military response). It also thoroughly depicts the regional geo-strategic importance of its allies

from the North Sea to Mediterranean and from the Atlantic Ocean to inland Western Europe.

Post-Cold War strategic concepts had several objectives. First, it had to lay down the Alliance's purposes, underlining NATO's radical shift from *competition* to *cooperation* with former rivals. Actually many ex-enemies became in a very short period of time cooperation partners, highlighting how artificial the ideological adherence to the communist military bloc was. For NATO it was less expensive to engage and develop political dialogue and practical cooperation with them than to perpetuate the rift.

Second, it had to gather public support within NATO nations and prepare and endow the Alliance for future engagements. The post-Cold War strategic concepts were less explicit than previous versions, as the security environment was radically changed. There was not anymore a single enemy but a myriad of potential risks. NATO was a defensive political-military organization, with the capabilities to combat only a few of them; *therefore* it had to take into consideration further adaptations to the fluid security environment. Based on these assumptions the Alliance gained a *raison d'être* despite many voices that heralded the end of it.

The "Alliance's New Strategic Concept" of November 1991 acknowledges the broad definition of security and the shift from "the *predominant threat* of the past" to *risks* that "are multi-faced in nature and multi-directional" and are "hard to predict and assess". Furthermore, it admits that the Alliance security "must take account of the global context". The set premises led to the conclusion that "the changed environment offers new opportunities for the Alliance to frame its strategy within a broad approach to security."

As a strategic document it emphasizes four fundamental security tasks: security, consultations, deterrence and defense and preservation of the strategic balance within Europe (referring to the remaining Soviet forces in Europe, in particular in Poland and Germany).

The document includes a reference to the Alliance's new force posture that intends to shift "where appropriate from the concept of forward defense towards a reduced forward presence" and the modification of the principle of flexible response "to reflect a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons". The Allies' forces also transform, replacing their in-place linear defensive posture with rapid reaction elements, main forces and augmentation forces and new concepts fly such as: flexibility, mobility and readiness.

The Alliance's Strategic Concept of April 1999 brings in new realities. The Alliance's fundamental security tasks are revised as the objective of creating a strategic balance in Europe is accomplished.

New ways of enhancing the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area are identified: promotion of partnerships and involvement in crisis management. It signals the Alliance's interest and intent to broaden its area of activity and involvement beyond its traditional territory (NATO countries territory). Past experience, such as the involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo crisis (March 1999) made *NATO become regional* and was indicative for the breaching of the old patterns of international law principles that allowed for military interventions. This approach is practically included in the Strategic Concept: "Regional and, in particular, geo-strategic considerations within the Alliance will have to be taken into account, as instabilities on NATO's periphery could lead to crises or conflicts requiring an Alliance military response, potentially with short warning times."

Great emphasis is put on the operational capabilities needed for the full range of missions (both article 5 and crisis response operations) such as: effective engagement capability, deploy ability, mobility, survivability of forces and infrastructure and sustainability.

Another innovative aspect reflected for the first time in a strategic concept was the clear reference to NATO's intention to *enlarge*, as stated under Article 10 of the Washington Treaty.

Debates and discussions on the necessity and inevitability to have a new strategic concept have been intensively engaged in the past three years. Security, consultations,

deterrence and defense alongside crisis management and partnerships are still relevant touchstones for the Alliance. One may ask which hypotheses could add to the decision to reflect on the shape of a new strategic concept which is expected to be delivered to the next NATO Summit.

The hypotheses that will be presented below are the two sides of the same coin: on one hand there is the nature of the evolving security environment and on the other hand is about the suitable feedback to both the challenges and the opportunities of this system.

First, the strategic environment evolved in the last 10 years becoming increasingly unpredictable; it encompasses new security challenges (such as terrorism, proliferation of WMD, misuse of emerging technologies, growing availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry, disruption of the flow of vital resources, cyber attacks, piracy just to name a few), mainly asymmetric threats that require a tailored response which many times could not solely make use of the traditional military means. Nowadays, the dichotomy between hard and soft security threats is fading out, as in many cases they feed and complement each other. Consequently, NATO should transform its forces and capacities to efficiently deal with them.

Second, NATO also assumed new operational roles (post-conflict stabilization, reconstruction and human welfare) beyond the military aspects involved in crisis response operations. Against this background, NATO's Comprehensive Approach to civil-military operations is a daunting but indispensable task and could become a core element of the next strategic concept. NATO's political goal in an operation cannot be achieved without well coordinated civil-military capabilities. Civilian capabilities which must be integrated with military ones should come from two important sources: NATO allies' national assets and international organizations (be it multinational such as UN, EU, OSCE or nongovernmental such as the Red Cross).

Third, the Alliance started to be involved in numerous operations that exceeded its traditional area of responsibility: Afghanistan (ISAF, NTM-A), Iraq (NTM-I) and off the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden. These examples where NATO extended steadily its area of operations indicated that the *Alliance became global and an expeditionary projector of stability*. It is the globalizing characteristic that keeps NATO's transformation process advancing. Concurrently, the growth in the complexity of NATO's operational tasks intertwined with the development of partnership relations and brings us to the next argument.

Fourth, the international system is entropic therefore long-term cooperation on specific issues and common, shared interests with like-minded states or organizations are of strategic importance and could bring benefits to all parties involved. Based on this assumption the idea of partnership cooperation crossed the traditional Euro-Atlantic area and involved countries from the Arabic Peninsula (Istanbul 2002-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) or Far East countries (Riga 2006-partners across the globe such as Australia, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand). It shows that NATO can engage in institutionalized global partnerships which could open on a medium-term the door to global membership.

Fifth, the revised strategic concept should clarify the legal framework for the use of force and NATO's relationship with the UN on this particular aspect, as NATO's air campaign in Kosovo in 1999 was considered from the point of view of the traditional international law as lacking legitimacy.

Sixth, NATO should also seriously contemplate the possibility to deliver preemptive strikes although it is debatable if using preemptive force is consistent with the terms and purposes of the UN Charter. Examples offered by the US in Iraq in 2003, Turkey in northern Iraq at the end of 2007 and Russia in August 2008 in Georgia (although this one is arguable as president Medvedev saw the intervention as "Russia's 9/11") make a point in case, as the fine threshold has been broken by state actors.

Seventh, NATO identifies the disruption of the flow of vital resources as one of the main threats to the Alliance over the next 10 to 15 years (as stated in the Comprehensive

Political Guidance endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government in 2006). In the same vein, the new Russian Security Strategy warns that the growing struggle for energy resources could bring about military clashes (just to remember December 2008-January 2009 skirmishes between Russia and Ukraine which fortunately didn't escalate beyond the diplomatic rhetoric). In this context, NATO should reorient the strategic focus on its traditional area, especially but not limited on High North which has become a colliding challenging area with Russia.

Eight, the Alliance's Strategic Concept of 1999 was written before the major wave of enlargement of 2004 which includes countries that had acute past resentments vis-à-vis Russia. Moreover, the reemergence of Russia which plays a regional assertive and resurgent role adds to the transformation of its near abroad to an area of "privileged interests" (as the August 2008 crisis in Georgia proved it); it means *realpolitik* is back in business. This could determine NATO to rethink the Alliance's deterrence policy and also to ponder more pragmatically its relationship with Russia.

Last but not least, it should be noticed that NATO as organization is benefiting from what could be called "structured cooperation" (a pool of nations decide to cooperate to take forward certain strategic programs) among its allies and sometimes even *partners* on areas of strategic importance (for example Strategic Airlift Capability-SAC, Strategic Airlift Interim Solution-SALIS, Sealift Capability Package and Allied Ground Surveillance-AGS). This manner of "structured cooperation" with allies and partners alike (which could be similar to what *niche capabilities* buzz words were in 2002) should be reflected in the future strategic concept.

These structural changes and conceptual developments will most probably be reflected in the next strategic concept when discussing the role and purpose of NATO. It is crucial to find common grounds and do not dilute the substance of this strategic document although the decision at 28 instead of 19 could be more difficult to be achieved than expected.