

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly outlines the map of Europe and the Atlantic Ocean.

Towards A New NATO Strategic Concept

A View from Poland

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- The development of the New Strategic Concept is seen in Warsaw as a timely step in the right direction: the Alliance's Strategic Concept of 1999 was perceived as being badly in need of refurbishment.
- The document prepared by the group of experts includes helpful analyses and stimulating recommendations that provide useful insights and can be used to prepare NATO's final strategic concept.
- The ongoing transformation, adaptation and modernisation of the Alliance's capabilities is essential for reinvigorating NATO and enabling it to address new threats.
- The transfer of NATO infrastructure to the new member states; contingency planning for all NATO members (including the Baltic States); large-scale 2013 NRF exercises in Poland; and further NATO enlargement are indisputably Poland's main priorities.
- The Report concludes that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO should continue to maintain secure and reliable nuclear forces. Warsaw will surely be among the capitals subscribing to this recommendation, as well as supporting the stationing of nuclear weaponry in Europe.

Quest for Reassurance and Security - The Polish Road to NATO

The end of the 1980s witnessed a rapid and mostly peaceful democratic transformation in Central Europe. From the beginning of that decade, Poland was in the vanguard of these changes. The Solidarity trade union, led by staunch anti-communist Lech Wał ̄sa, grew into an unprecedented opposition movement and was empowered by a membership of over 10 million (one-quarter of the population). In 1989, the weakened communist government agreed to a roundtable to negotiate on power-sharing and free elections. On 4 June 1989, the first – partially – free elections were held and shortly afterwards – 12 August – the first non-communist government under Tadeusz Mazowiecki was sworn in. The political and economic transformation in Poland had begun and was soon to be followed by changes in other Eastern block countries.

The years that followed witnessed a 180-degree about-turn in Polish foreign and security policy. This was an era of uncertainty and change for the whole region. The Warsaw Pact – once NATO's mighty opponent – slowly deteriorated, to be completely dissolved in July 1991. The Soviet Union collapsed too, although Soviet troops had remained stationed for a while on Polish territory and in neighbouring East Germany (GDR). All the neighbours disappeared, seemingly from one day to the next: instead of three states (GDR, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union) Poland was now bordered by seven: the reunified Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and the Russian Federation (Kaliningrad Region). Relations with these new states had to be established almost from scratch.

Changing borders and political transformation are often a breeding ground for uncertainty and instability, especially when accompanied by unresolved ethnic and territorial disputes. The Balkan conflict exemplified what can happen when things go wrong. Fortunately, Central and Eastern Europe was apparently able to pass through this period of national rebirth and redefinition without serious disputes and conflicts.

The political changes were, in substance, positive, with one important exception. The collapse of previous political alliances and security arrangements created a very unfavourable situation for Poland, in the form of a »security vacuum« in Central and Eastern Europe. In

other words, the need for security and predictability was not properly satisfied by the existing security framework, including bilateral relations, regional cooperation and multilateral organisations, such as the UN or CSCE/OSCE. This presented the newborn democracies with a genuine political dilemma. Poland and other CEE states had to decide what security options they should pursue. With Soviet troops still on the ground, it was anything but an easy task.

In those early days, all potential security arrangements were taken into account: neutrality, regional alliances and Russia–NATO cross-security guarantees. NATO membership was among the options, but seemed at that time the most challenging and distant. Not only was NATO itself somewhat unwilling and cautious, but also Russia strongly opposed the idea, claiming a right of veto stemming from the political agreement on the reunification of Germany. Feeling that he was banging his head against a brick wall, President Wał ̄sa at one point in 1992 even tabled the idea of a new NATO-look alike (»NATO-bis«). The message was simple: if you don't accept us, we will form our own club.

Every possible option was sifted, but historical experiences and geographical location left only one valid choice: an application for NATO membership. The arguments were straightforward. Poland is located in the centre of Europe, at the crossroads of West, East, North and South. Its terrain is mostly flat, making it hard to defend. For this reason, Poland has experienced 123 years of lost independence and division of its territory between three more powerful neighbours. A preponderance of major European wars have also been fought in Poland, to which the Cold War adds another tragic chapter. A war game exercise (code-named Seven Days to the River Rhine) developed in 1979 by the Warsaw Pact and published by the Polish government, along with other documents, in 2005, depicted a seven-day East-West nuclear war. On a map, a long line of nuclear mushroom clouds was neatly stamped along the Vistula, where Soviet bloc commanders assumed that NATO tactical nuclear weapons would rain down to block reinforcements arriving from the East. A reading of contemporary war scenarios in Europe – however unlikely they may seem – would probably not give Poles any more grounds for optimism.

A political and public consensus for a NATO application was achieved rapidly and easily. Poland began its

membership drive in March 1990, just 10 short months after the end of communist rule. It was almost ten years before Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic finally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on 12 March 1999.

NATO's Role for Poland Today

The political imperative of NATO's role for Poland today is based on three simple notions. First, just as it was in the 1990s so it remains today that NATO membership is the only proven option providing Poland with an assured security framework. Second, NATO also guarantees that the United States will remain involved in European affairs both politically and militarily. And third, the Treaty binds Poland and Germany together in a multilateral Alliance, which is an unprecedented development given the two countries' uneasy history. One of the turning points in their relations was the role Germany played in Poland's successful NATO membership bid. Germany's unparalleled support and advocacy for Poland's Euro-Atlantic and European aspirations was a milestone in Polish-German reconciliation, building trust and confidence between Warsaw and Berlin.

From this perspective, the elaboration of the New Strategic Concept is seen in Warsaw as a timely step in the right direction. It is also widely believed there that the Alliance's major strategic document, dating from 1999, was badly in need of refurbishment. As an advocate of NATO's traditional mission as a defensive alliance, Warsaw was certainly worried by opinions questioning the relevance of NATO for today's challenges. From that viewpoint, Gerhard Schröder's (in)famous Munich speech did more harm than good, calling into doubt existing platforms of cooperation and consultation and hardly offering a viable alternative. Therefore, the New Strategic Concept is clearly an important attempt to build a consensus around strategic issues, but also an instrument for NATO's reinvigoration, reminding us again of its importance and making it more relevant to the changing security requirements.

It is also good that the old habit of calling in anonymous experts to draft new strategies has been put into the closet by Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's Secretary General. Wisdom and expertise are by no means limited to security councils and government organisations. Poland had one representative in NATO's

group of experts, Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld: it would not have been easy to find anyone else in Poland more entitled to contribute to such a Report. An internationally recognised specialist in security and disarmament issues, former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, he left an easily recognisable – to anyone familiar with his views - imprint on the final Report. The Polish input to the Report stemmed also from the formal consultation that NATO's group of experts carried out in Warsaw, as well as numerous informal meetings, conferences and seminars.

From a theoretical point of view, every strategy is a combination of three elements: strategic goals, ways of achieving them and the necessary means (resources). The document prepared by the group of experts is therefore by no means a strategy. As the authors rightly put it on the first page, it is a package of analyses and recommendations that provides useful insights and can be used in preparing NATO's final strategic concept. This must be borne in mind when assessing the document.

Challenges to NATO

The text brings to the fore two interlinked challenges for the Alliance. First, the very existence of NATO's political dimension is being called into doubt in some quarters. Alternative legal and institutional approaches to security are being hammered out, not only in Moscow, but even in some NATO capitals. Success in Afghanistan turns out to be »essential« for NATO's survival – a »be all and end all« for the Alliance. In consequence, as the Report states, »NATO today is busier than it has ever been, but its value is less obvious to many than in the past«. The added value of NATO to Euro-Atlantic security, as well as its attainments and effectiveness as a political and military alliance have somehow become lost in everyday politics. NATO seems to be treated merely as a »tool-box«. As a result, political and strategic disagreements (Iraq war of 2003, missile shield, policy on Russia, Afghanistan strategy and so on), combined with old rivalries, and military and financial imbalances could result in the stagnation and then the slow deterioration of the Alliance.

The second substantial challenge involves the changing nature of today's security threats. NATO is an organisation that was designed to deter and – if necessary – repel an all-out Soviet assault during the

Cold War. Although successful in that mission, to remain relevant in the twenty-first century, NATO must adapt to new dangers and the demands of complex, asymmetrical operations. The ongoing transformation, adaptation and modernisation of the Alliance's capabilities is a crucial condition for reinvigorating NATO and enabling it to address new threats.

First Things First – Core Tasks in the New Strategic Concept

Poland and, indeed, most of the new member states clearly prioritise NATO's traditional task of collective defence. These are states on NATO's outer rim, relatively small and with fresh memories of lost independence and repression, bordering the still unpredictable region of Eastern Europe, including such highly unstable areas as Transdnistria. Historical and ethnic tensions are by no means rare, to take only the example of the Russian minority in the Baltic states. Everyday reality is characterised by a heavy military imbalance, with Russia's conventional and nuclear forces on the one side, and the small and ill-equipped armies of the CEE countries on the other. Political and economic pressure, backed by Russian sovereign fund investments is a serious concern for capitals ranging from Tallinn to Sofia. Energy cut-offs and other energy supply issues add another layer to the stock of security concerns. From that perspective, NATO remains the ultimate guarantee of sustained political and military stability in the region. Security in Europe is indivisible, and any weakening of NATO would result in the growth of a feeling of relative uncertainty, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

Although the priority of traditional defence tasks is obvious in Warsaw, setting them against new NATO capabilities creates a false dilemma. Terrorism, cyber-attacks, global nuclear proliferation, the humanitarian consequences of failed states, piracy and energy supply security are threats that clearly exceed the response potential of even larger and better-off countries. The question is, whether NATO should be dealing with all of them, which would probably entail its evolution into a full-fledged security organisation.

The answer given to this question by the group of experts is probably in step with mainstream thinking in Poland. In a nutshell: adaptation, yes – overstretch, no. To which a warning might be added: don't overestimate NATO's capabilities. Warsaw clearly

expects NATO to adapt itself to some of the new challenges, but surely not to all of them. In other words, NATO should facilitate a global partnership for security, but cannot be the guardian of global peace and security. Energy supply security can be dealt with, for instance, through the existing emergency response mechanism of the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the European Union. Nuclear proliferation cannot be resolved without a genuine partnership with China and Russia. NATO is fully engaged in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan and in stabilising the country. It is hardly likely to embark on another mission in such a far-off location any time soon. NATO is not now and will never be a universal platform for problem-solving and pan-global security. The new age requires new partnerships and a strategy for building them should be a pivotal aspect of the New Strategic Concept.

Warsaw is also concerned by the internal divisions in the Alliance. The fissures sometimes run deep in terms of burden-sharing, military spending, national caveats, US force deployment and enlargement, to mention only a few and leaving aside such weighty issues as relations with Russia, transatlantic relations and consensus building (the almost forgotten deadlock concerning Turkey's request for military assistance before the 2003 Iraq invasion). This is surely worrying for NATO's new members and is the reason for seeking additional security arrangements, most often across the Atlantic. Keeping the Americans involved was one of the objectives of the Washington Treaty. Although today a highly criticised strategy in many Western countries, it is still a fundamental goal of NATO for Poland and other new member states. The United States give the necessary »heavy weight« to NATO's military capabilities, which is essential when dealing with security concerns originating from NATO's Eastern neighbourhood.

The same applies to relocating NATO or US military infrastructure to the territories of new member states. Not surprisingly, historical references seem to play a major role in defining CEE approaches to this issue. One of the weaknesses of past alliances was that political agreements were not backed by military deployments. Poland experienced that at first hand in 1939. This experience also influences modern strategies. No doubt, having either NATO installations or a US missile shield would be a welcome option in Poland. It is surely seen as a security bonus, even if it might cause a nervous reaction in Moscow, including the possible gearing-up

of forces in the Kaliningrad region. Everything that reinforces the physical deployment of forces in the region will find staunch support in Warsaw and other CEE capitals. Thus, the proposals announced by Polish Minister of Defence Bogdan Klich should encounter no surprise. The transfer of NATO infrastructure to the new member states, contingency planning for all NATO members (including the Baltic States), large-scale 2013 NRF exercises in Poland and further NATO enlargement indisputably top the Polish agenda.

New member states are also doing what they can to bring about success in the »ultimate NATO test«, Afghanistan. Last year, ISAF witnessed the disproportionate participation of Polish soldiers (2,500), with no use-of-force limitations. This year the Polish contingent will be boosted by several hundred combat troops.

This brings us to another problem, which today is specific to Western Europe, but will slowly and surely embrace Central Europe and cross the Atlantic. Public attitudes to global security have changed much since the Cold War, and people are less and less prepared to accept the financial and human burdens of military action. Analysts have already concocted the term »post-heroic societies« to describe this phenomenon. Imposing new tasks on NATO has its logic, but without public understanding and support grand plans can be short-lived. EU experiences in bringing institutions closer to the public – which are of considerable interest, given the overlapping memberships of the EU and NATO – are, unfortunately, not encouraging. The group of experts recognises the challenge and proposes to »tell NATO's story«. However, how this might be done successfully requires further discussions.

NATO-Russia from a National Perspective

Polish attitudes and strategies towards Russia are often simplified or even misinterpreted. Warsaw fully subscribes to the idea of building a cooperative Euro-Atlantic security order, including security cooperation with Russia. It may be surprising to many that even the idea of having Russia as a member of NATO (presented recently in *Der Spiegel* by K. Naumann, V. Rühle and F. Elbe) has not met with fundamental opposition in Warsaw. Many argue that it would even be desirable, assuming that internal Russian reforms began to transform that country into a friendly, democratic state dedicated to the rule of law and with a genuinely


cooperative attitude to its neighbours. Until this happens, opening up to Russia should be safeguarded by a strong commitment to taking into account the security interests of neighbouring states, whether NATO members or only aspirants. NATO remains a thorny issue in Moscow, as the first threat and potential enemy. Moreover, while Europe disregards power politics, Russia seems to be reintroducing it. The invasion of Georgia is an eminent example. The support for the secession of Abkhazia, Ossetia and Transdnistria only adds to the grim picture. Therefore, the key to bridging the gaps with NATO clearly lies in Russian hands.

Nuclear Strategy and Disarmament

The nuclear component of NATO was given a backstage role with the end of the Cold War. Some have even forgotten that nuclear weapons are still stationed in Europe. But they are here and still play an important role in NATO's defence strategy. In fact, the US and NATO strategy with regard to the use of nuclear weapons has probably not changed as much as that of the Russians. Moscow's current military doctrine allots tactical nuclear weapons the same roles as in NATO's nuclear planning of the 1970s and 1980s. Because of the numerical and technological weakness of Russia's conventional land forces today, tactical nuclear missiles would be the weapon of choice for stopping a NATO invasion.

On the other hand, the world has witnessed a significant decrease in the number of strategic warheads (the new START Treaty was signed in April 2010 in Prague). This would not be the case without a change in US and Russian strategic nuclear doctrine, involving a diminishing role for nuclear deterrence. In other words, today there seems to be less chance of a global nuclear conflict, but greater risk of the tactical use of nuclear weapons. A review of the list of other nuclear states and potential conflicts involving them does not lead to optimism either.

The Report concludes that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO should maintain secure and reliable nuclear forces. Warsaw will surely be among the capitals subscribing to this recommendation, as well as supporting the stationing of nuclear weaponry in Europe.



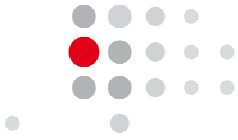
The Report rather limits NATO capabilities with regard to countering nuclear proliferation, at least in the political realm. The Alliance can add value but mostly in terms of information exchange, coordination and consultation among allies. The same applies to conventional arms control, in respect of which NATO can point to significant past achievements under the CFE Treaty. Inspections according to the CFE Protocol not only verified military equipment status but played a crucial role as a confidence-building measure between East and West. They were the only instrument that allowed NATO and Russian officers to visit each other's bases and military training areas at short notice. Since the unilateral suspension of the Treaty by Russia in 2007, Europe has lost an important mechanism of stability promotion and cooperation. The group of experts proposes to undertake new efforts to revive the CFE Treaty. In fact, some Russian complaints about the CFE Treaty regime make sense in the new circumstances. Therefore there is surely room to manoeuvre and for building a consensus with the Russian Federation.

One of the motives for suspending the CFE Treaty was the previous US administration's plans for setting up missile defence elements in Poland and the Czech Republic. Paradoxically, Barack Obama's decision to give up this project has turned out to be something of a poisoned chalice for Russia. Instead of MD anti-ballistic missiles, which in fact were not a threat to Russian strategic nuclear forces, a US Patriot air defence battery has been stationed in the Polish town of Morąg. The arrival of the Patriots was part of the MD deal to ease

Warsaw's security concerns. Moscow now faces the presence in Poland of a modern US air defence system. The Patriot allocation has been the object of criticism from Moscow but can hardly be seen as a provocative move. It is a purely defensive platform. Moreover, both in the Kaliningrad region and Belarus Russia has long deployed its S-300 systems, which are hardly matched by the rather obsolete Soviet-era air-defence equipment in Poland.

Conclusion

The Report of the group of experts is certainly an excellent introduction to the transatlantic debate on NATO's new Strategic Concept. The authors have tried to address the dilemma of how to combine the traditional role of a defensive Alliance with the requirements of new global tasks, while ensuring that NATO remains cohesive and progressive. The main strength of this attempt is that everyone in the Alliance will find there what it thinks NATO's core tasks should be. New member states will cherish the assured security; other countries the philosophy of dynamic engagement, flexibility and new partnerships. It is not just Scotch whisky that can benefit from blending. Only those who think that NATO is irrelevant are likely to be disappointed. The document sets down in black and white why a renewed Alliance should remain the backbone of transatlantic security and stability. Let us only hope that the famous sentence of Thomas Jefferson engraved on NATO's seal – »Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom« – is still sufficiently understood among the allies.



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