

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 France

JEAN-PIERRE MAULNY

August 2010

- The objective of the report of the experts group is not to develop a complete future strategic concept, but it does examine all the issues involved: threat analysis, missions, tools and capacities, and future partnerships.
- Like many recent strategic analyses, this report has a tendency to identify the threat without seeking the root of the threat. Such documents neglect diplomatic tools and instruments of conflict prevention.
- The report tries to find a compromise between the need to reaffirm the primacy of collective defence, sought by the Central and Eastern European countries and the Baltic states in response to fears of a resurgence of the Russian threat, and the fact that threats to the security of NATO member states are not necessarily only at the borders of the treaty region and may take forms other than purely military threats.
- However, the experts' first priority is to expand the basis for consensus between member states. Differences are kept to the margins and there are few issues with the potential to create principled opposition by any state.

Last year a group of twelve experts chaired by Madeline Albright was asked to prepare a report for NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on NATO's future strategic concept. Its publication on May 17, 2010, marked the completion of the first phase of preparing NATO's new strategic concept. Two more will follow:

- From May 17, 2010, until the second half of September, the first draft of the official strategic concept will be prepared under the direction of Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.
- Starting from September, the twenty-eight member states will begin negotiations on the basis of the Secretary General's draft with the aim of adopting the new Strategic Concept at the Lisbon summit in November 2010.

While the objective of the report is not to develop a complete future strategic concept, it does examine all the issues involved: threat analysis, missions, tools and capacities, and future partnerships. The aim of the report was to have an independent assessment by a group of recognized experts, while keeping in mind the diverging points of view within the Alliance (on role, importance of missions, partnerships, relations with Russia), and to find ways around the difficulties associated with these divergences. NATO followed an identical process in 1967 with the Harmel report.

Threat Analysis

NATO's threat analysis draws conclusions about the current international situation in terms of two perspectives: geographical tendencies (global and regional) and specific factors. For their threat analysis the authors of the report drew on the work of the Multiple Future Projects developed in 2008 and 2009 within the NATO Allied Transformation Command (ATC).

Seven risk factors are identified:

- proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction;
- international terrorist groups;
- persistence of corrosive regional, ethnic, and religious rivalries;
- increasing global reliance on potentially vulnerable data systems;
- competition for oil and other strategic resources (and consequently the need for maritime security);

- demographic changes that could aggravate global problems such as poverty, hunger, famine, illegal immigration, or pandemics; and
- accumulated consequences of environmental degradation, including climate change.

Overall, the analysis is consistent with the existing European security strategy vis-à-vis unresolved regional conflicts, the risk of failed states becoming safe-havens for terrorist groups, and the emergence of new threats such as cyber-attacks, global warming, and energy insecurity.

The conclusions centre on risks to Alliance partners:

- »a conventional attack against the Alliance is unlikely yet future possibilities are not excluded«;
- three threats stand out in particular: ballistic missile attacks, attacks perpetrated by international terrorist groups, cyber-attacks of varying intensity.

The threat analysis brings two observations to the fore:

- Like many recent strategic analyses, this report has a tendency to identify the threat without seeking the root of the threat. Such documents neglect diplomatic tools and instruments of conflict prevention.
- The report presupposes that Iran and Arab countries seeking ballistic missile capabilities represent a threat to NATO members. This assumes intentionality in the threat from these countries, because the previous Strategic Concept of 1999 did not identify ballistic missile attacks as a threat even though Russia kept its ballistic missile arsenal after the end of the Cold War.

Respective Importance Given to Collective Defence and Other Alliance Tasks

The report reiterates that the fundamental task of the Atlantic alliance is collective defence. This is in order to reassure the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the face of the re-emergence of the Russian threat following the Georgian episode of August 2008. In addition, one must note that the group of experts has added non-military cyber-threats to the realm of collective defence under Article 5. One of the most credible examples of a cyber-attack was the operation against Estonian government servers in January 2007 where the Russians are suspected to have been the orchestrators.

However, when seen as a whole the report casts some doubt on whether the authors see Article 5 as central.

First of all, it also prioritizes other Alliance tasks that could conflict with Article 5. There is no stated priority of missions, and collective defence could come into conflict with the three other tasks presented in chapter 2 of the report, even if collective defence is emphasized. These three other tasks are:

- »To contribute to overall security in the entire Euro-Atlantic region«, which might justify military operations in areas neighbouring this region.
- »To act as a transatlantic means of consultation on security and crisis management within the spectrum of issues facing the alliance«. Even if the favoured means of this consultation are outlined in Article 4 of the treaty and even if this »global« engagement is modulated by the privileged partnership concept, further development of this task, which largely involves the development of peacekeeping operations, may in fact call into question the primacy of Article 5.
- To protect the vital international routes which supply modern societies and promote stability well beyond the immediate borders of the countries of the Atlantic Alliance.

The report tries to find a compromise between the need to reaffirm the primacy of collective defence, sought by the Central and Eastern European countries and the Baltic states in response to fears of a resurgence of the Russian threat, and the fact that threats to the security of NATO member states are not necessarily only at the borders of the treaty region and may take forms other than purely military threats.

The Open Door Policy and New Partnerships

This restatement of the principles of the open door policy comes in a context where the participation of Georgia and Ukraine was badly received in Russia, especially after the Georgian conflict in August 2008. Although NATO is no longer an official objective for the Ukrainian government following the election of President Viktor Yanukovich, it remains a political goal for Georgia.

While the open door policy is only given half a page in the section on political and organizational issues, the question of partnerships occupies an entire chapter covering nine pages of the report. Of course enlargement and partnerships are not the same thing. But still,

both types of relationship with non-member states have the goal of assuring the security of members and are thus in competition.

Within this advocacy of partnerships, the report proposes a major shift in the Alliance, which would provide three advantages:

- An extensive partnership policy is more acceptable to a number of Alliance member states critical of a »global NATO« or a »NATO world police«, France for example, but also to states outside the Alliance. As a defensive alliance NATO would take more the tone of an organization of collective security, which would be more acceptable to a number of countries who might consider the Alliance a potential threat (one thinks most notably of Russia);
- Partnerships allow the augmentation of Alliance capacities in operations based on Article 4 of the NATO Treaty;
- Finally, one must ask if the partnerships are actually just a »softer« alternative to the open door policy. Even if this is not stated, a reinforced partnership with Georgia, for example, could be an alternative to full integration in NATO. Moreover, it is without doubt difficult for the Central European and Baltic countries, which are more strongly inclined to prioritize collective defence and the open door policy, to oppose the policy of partnership developments.

Relationship with the European Union

The relationship between the European Union and NATO is not a simple one, but is vital for success of operations in the field. At the same time, however, there is much rivalry between these two political organizations. The evolution of NATO must not be allowed to harm the development of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The report addresses three issues concerning NATO and the EU:

- In the first place, twenty-one of the twenty-eight NATO members are in the European Union. This raises the issue of coordinating NATO's recently overhauled strategic planning process with the EU's planning process, the 2010 Headline Goals.
- In the field, coordination between NATO and the EU functions poorly and various difficulties (notably con-

cerning the functioning of the Berlin plus agreement permitting the EU to access NATO planning capacities), are worsened by the Cyprus problem, which poisons relations between the EU and Turkey, as well as between NATO and the EU;

- NATO possesses no civilian capacities of its own while the EU is the most advanced international organization in terms of the development of civilian capacities in support of military operations. Two thirds of EU operations undertaken since the adoption of the European Security Strategy in 2003 have been civilian operations. How can we create complementarities between these two global organizations without one overshadowing the other? The question is difficult and the experts try to avoid advocating a precise solution. The goal has been set and it will be the job of the member states to find a solution. As the report states: »Many situations will require a response that includes both forceful and non-coercive elements; NATO, the EU, and others should bring to bear the capabilities that add the most value in finding a solution. Accordingly, NATO should seek to agree with EU leaders on a plan for regular joint participation in meetings, more regular communications between military staffs, and more extensive coordination with respect to crisis management, threat assessments, and the sharing of capabilities« (8).

Partnership with the EU also raises the question of the comprehensive approach for employing civilian and military capacities together during an operation. This relates to the still open issue of civilian capacities required to complete NATO military capacities, and the planning of civil-military operations undertaken by NATO and other organizations.

The Comprehensive Approach

The consensus-seeking of the group of experts is not without ambiguity, nor is it completely ambiguous. The report endorses France's opposition to creating civilian NATO capacities, which would be a doubling of parallel EU efforts.

That said, the necessity to be able to conduct successful civil-military operations leads the report to make four propositions which lead NATO *ipso facto* to acquire certain competences in civilian domains:

- creation of a small civilian planning unit within NATO to maintain contact, share information and engage in joint planning with partner countries and organizations;
- establishment of memoranda of understanding with larger international organizations and with NGOs;
- identification of NATO and non-NATO civilian capabilities in the defence planning process;
- designation by the member states of a cadre of civilian specialists ready for rapid deployment on selected missions if qualified personnel from partner countries or institutions are not available.

The comprehensive approach poses the much larger problem of managing civil-military operations. This is not, however, just a technical question of command; it is also a political question. Civil-military planning is determined by political analysis of a crisis and the political objectives that must be met to end the crisis. One can easily imagine that the different institutions joining in an operation might have differing visions of political objectives and the necessary means to be put in place (e.g., underestimating the scale reconstruction and the means necessary for such efforts at the start of operations in Afghanistan in 2001). It is conceivable that an *ad hoc* group could be established to fulfil the civil-military planning tasks in an integrated manner where all partner institutions are represented (most importantly the EU and the UN). This would necessitate sharing both operational political objectives and planning techniques. This solution seems to be the preferred solution in the report, but the outlines remain vague. Moreover, the necessity to integrate civilian and military means demands complete integration of civilian and military planning. It must be noted that the proposition in the report to create a small civil planning unit within NATO justifies *a contrario* the long-stated demand of a number of EU member states wanting to create a small military planning unit within the EU.

Alliance Forces and Capabilities

Alliance military mission and budgetary means

Military capabilities must permit member states to ensure the four military missions that make up the fundamental tasks of the alliance:

- guarantee of collective security based on Article 5;

- cooperation with partners and civil institutions to protect the treaty area against the full range of unconventional security challenges;
- maintain and deploy expeditionary capacities for military operations beyond the treaty area;
- help to shape a more stable and peaceful international security environment by enhancing interoperability with partners;

The requirements of these four missions lead the report to recommend NATO member-states »halt the precipitous decline in national defence spending, implement new reforms and efficiencies, and set priorities for future capabilities«. The report also recalls that only six of twenty-six European allies spend 2 percent or more of GDP on defence.

While desirable, this recommendation runs the risk of appearing unrealistic given the current budget realities of EU members. Defining the Alliance's military ambitions will be a serious question in drafting the Strategic Concept. Currently, the fixed objective – the ability to conduct two major operations and six minor operations – is in reality already beyond the abilities of the member states. Thus it is to be feared that the Strategic Concept will not set spending recommendations and set out instead to define modest ambitions for the alliance and promote a concerted, organized management of the reduction of military budgets that will be witnessed in the coming years due to the economic crisis.

Nuclear Forces and Disarmament

The report recalls the necessity for NATO to »retain a nuclear component to its deterrent strategy – at the minimum level required by the prevailing security environment«.

The report proposes: »There should be an ongoing NATO dialogue with Russia on nuclear perceptions, concepts, doctrines, and transparency. These talks should help set the stage for the further reduction and possible eventual elimination of the entire class of sub-strategic nuclear weapons.« This is the issue of opening negotiations on the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons, which is of concern to NATO as around 180 such weapons are currently deployed in several NATO countries. However, if such negotiations were to take place, which seems at the moment to be rather unrealistic given the Russian stance, it would affect primarily the US and Moscow, whereas the other members of

the Alliance would be mostly sidelined. Finally, the report suggests that NATO takes into account the new nuclear defence posture of the United States in endorsing »a policy of not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations«. The report thus recommends that at the NATO level there should be a guarantee of negative security for non-nuclear countries that fulfil their obligations stemming from the NPT.

Missile defence

Missile defence is, without doubt, the most controversial issue from the French point of view since the experts endorse the idea that NATO »expand its Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence System to provide the core command and control capability of a NATO territorial missile defence system«. It is possible that France opposed this for budgetary reasons as well as strategic priorities. This recommendation is undoubtedly the one that will provoke the most discussion because some states consider anti-missile defence redundant and the threat is not proven. Moreover, there is also the question of the cost of anti-missile defence.

Defence against Cyber-Attacks

Among new threats, cyber-attacks are the ones that have been the most prevalent over the past years. The report insists that NATO possess the means to respond to this non-conventional threat.

NATO Reform

Even if there is no perfect consensus, there is a general desire among a large number of member states to transform NATO and make the organization better able to adapt to new types of operation in the field. The objective is to reduce the size of the integrated military structure which is at the same time oversized, maladjusted to the new threats, and thus very expensive for the member states. The NATO ministerial meeting on June 10–11 already decided to reduce the number of NATO committee members by three-quarters, making a saving of more than €1.5 billion. It remains to be seen how far the number of headquarters staff in the integrated military command can be reduced (today 12,500 military personnel).

Conclusion

The experts' first priority is to expand the basis for consensus between member states. Differences are kept to the margins and there are few issues with the potential to create principled opposition by any state. Indeed, the report has thus far been well received. However, there is a risk tied to the preoccupation with attempting to create consensus. The report is not exempt from ambiguities on certain points and leaves some issues unclear in its application of principles (i.e. open door vs. partnership; partnership vs. global alliance; global approach vs. partnership; article 5 mutual assistance vs. other means of action; missile defence vs. other military capacities; the role of NATO vs. the role of the European Union). The new Strategic Concept to be adopted in November will certainly be a short text in order to avoid dwelling on ambiguities. It will not »reinvent the wheel« as US National Security Advisor General James Jones stressed at the fourth official seminar on the Strategic Concept in February 2010. Yet there remains the risk that divergences of opinion among the member states will remain.



About the author:

Jean-Pierre Maulny is Deputy Director of IRIS, Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, Paris.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
International Policy Analysis
Hiroshimastraße 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dr. Gero Maaß, Head,
International Policy Analysis

Tel.: ++49-30-269-35-7745 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9248
www.fes.de/ipa

To order publications:
info.ipa@fes.de