

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific geographical locations.

# The New NATO Strategy

## A Temporary Compromise

CHRISTOS KATSIOLIS

January 2011

- The heads of state and government of the North Atlantic Alliance adopted a new Strategic Concept at the NATO summit on 19–20 November 2010. The document drawn up by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen supersedes the Concept of 1999, which previously described NATO's role and tasks.
- The 2010 Concept is intended to summarise the existing consensus of the member states and to introduce new approaches, without laying down a fixed schedule. It is intended to situate NATO – at least conceptually – in the new security environment. The core NATO tasks which it identifies are defence, crisis management and cooperative security.
- However, the Strategic Concept glosses over the sometimes fragile consensus between the member states and avoids definite positions on disputed points. Four disputed areas in particular stand out here, in respect of which the Secretary General's document falls short of expectations or harbours the potential for future conflict: the role of nuclear weapons in the Alliance, crisis management in relation to other actors, relations with Russia, which focus in particular on joint missile defence, and the question of defence funding in a period of financial and economic crisis.
- The new NATO strategy in this way postpones important questions for the Alliance in the coming years. Only with regard to cooperation with Russia are there constructive ideas for a long-term improvement in relations with the former adversary in the combination of the concept and decisions of the NATO–Russia Council.



## Contents

Introduction.....	2
A new approach to the Strategic Concept – from transparency to secret diplomacy.....	2
The New Strategic Concept.....	2
Evaluation.....	4
Outlook .....	6

## Introduction

The heads of state and government of the North Atlantic Alliance adopted a new Strategic Concept at the NATO summit on 19–20 November 2010. The document drawn up by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen supersedes the Concept of 1999, which previously described NATO's role and tasks. The document is supposed to position NATO for the challenges of the twenty-first century and initiate the next phase of its evolution. In this sense, the Strategic Concept which has just been presented represents the third development stage since the Cold War, the two previous concepts dating from 1991 and 1999. The idea is that the Alliance, by means of a kind of »genetic mutation«, will be put in a position to react to future threats and political challenges with new capacities and partners.

A cursory glance at the key events reveals the enormous changes that have occurred in the member states' security policy environment since the last NATO Concept was formulated, and with which the new basic document had to deal:

- The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the »casus foederis« which this triggered for NATO for the first time. This was followed by NATO's operations in Afghanistan, which continue to the present day.
- The split in the Alliance on the occasion of the Iraq War in 2003, when some allies supported the USA in a »coalition of the willing«, while others demonstratively refused.
- The attacks by Islamic terrorists in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005.
- NATO enlargements in 2004 and 2009.
- The cyber attack on Estonian servers in 2007, which extensively paralysed the country's public communications infrastructure.
- The massive increase in piracy in the Gulf of Aden, one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world.
- The war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, which led to the secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and, in particular among NATO's Central European member states, gave rise to nervousness and distrust in relation to Russia.
- The revival of the political goal of a nuclear-free world, postulated by US President Barack Obama in Prague in 2009.

- Reform of the European Union through the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which anchored a solidarity and mutual assistance clause in the EU and thereby laid the foundations for a European Defence Union.

## A New Approach to the Strategic Concept – from Transparency to Secret Diplomacy

NATO's Anniversary Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl in 2009 tasked the Secretary General with drawing up a new Strategic Concept. The process which led to the adoption of the new Concept was unique for a defence alliance such as NATO. An expert group under the leadership of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright developed recommendations for the NATO Secretary General in a dialogue-oriented process. For example, there were seminars with academics, journalists and decision-makers; the group also met in Moscow and consulted many international organisations and states outside the Alliance, before presenting its report to Secretary General Rasmussen on 17 May 2010. This phase was accompanied by an intensive online debate on NATO's homepage in parallel with the expert group, in which the participants were invited to present their ideas about NATO's new Concept. The up to that point unprecedentedly transparent and participatory process then gave way to secret diplomacy, however. On the basis of the report and the debates Secretary General Rasmussen developed his own draft, which was submitted to the member states at the end of September and formed the basis for NATO's new Strategic Concept. This last phase was characterised by negotiations between the member states and was again subject to strict secrecy, so that even national members of parliament, with only a few exceptions, were not permitted to read the drafts.

## The New Strategic Concept

The initial fears that this process would accelerate rather than hinder the drifting apart of NATO's strategic consensus have not been realised, however. The 2010 Concept summarises the existing consensus of the member states, initiates new approaches, without laying down a fixed schedule, and situates NATO – at least conceptually – in the new security environment.

## NATO's Core Tasks

As expected, the new Concept emphasises NATO's role as a defence alliance and gives prominence to collective

defence in accordance with Article 5 of the NATO Treaty as a core task of the Alliance. The revitalisation of Article 5 clearly became necessary against the background of the debates after the Russia–Georgia war and NATO’s operations in various missions worldwide in order to reaffirm that, regardless of past debates on how meaningful NATO is, there continues to be a basic consensus in the Alliance in relation to Article 5.

Alongside defence, crisis management is named as NATO’s second key task. The Alliance should take action before, during and after conflicts which impinge on its security.

NATO’s third task is to establish cooperative security. For that purpose NATO will enter into partnerships with international organisations and states in order to ensure security. Subordinate points here include arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, as well as future enlargement and the cultivation of partnerships.

The Strategic Concept also emphasises NATO’s role as a transatlantic forum. In this context the Alliance is to continue to serve as a central hub for consultation.

### Who Still Threatens NATO Today?

Even if the description of the security environment does not proceed from a clear prioritisation of threats to NATO, the order given provides at least an approximate picture. For example, conventional attacks are listed in first place, even if their probability is classified as very low. At the same time, it is emphasised that the spread of missile technology has become a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is cited as a second threat to stability worldwide. This is followed by international terrorism as a threat to NATO citizens, including the danger arising from the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups. More concrete threats mentioned by the Concept include cyber attacks, the interruption of trade routes and, in particular, the vulnerability due to the strong dependency on energy imports. Finally, technological developments in weapon systems are cited, as well as such general and unconnected threats as resource scarcity, the risk of environmental damage, climate change and water shortages as problems characterising NATO’s security environment in the future.

### Implementation of Core Tasks – Defence

The Concept remains vague with regard to the question of how NATO can and should defend itself in this environment. Although Article 5 of the NATO Treaty is stressed as an identity core of the Alliance it is not laid down precisely in what situations the *casus foederis* comes into play. In this way differences concerning how to deal with cyber attacks, which emerged in the preliminary stages, could be avoided. Instead, NATO is focusing on a bundle of measures. As before, deterrence remains a key aspect of defence, based on an appropriate combination of nuclear and conventional weapons. In this context the strategic arsenals of the USA and the independent nuclear weapons of France and the UK, which contribute to the security of the Allies, are cited explicitly. With regard to the formulation of the conditions for the deployment of nuclear weapons the Concept falls back almost word for word on the formulation of 1999: »The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote.« Besides strategic weapons tactical weapons are referred to implicitly, given that the Allies are supposed to participate on as broad a basis as possible in nuclear sharing. Missile defence – a new, long heralded and much discussed project in Alliance defence – is incorporated in the Concept and intended to be a core element of NATO. There is to be close cooperation with Russia and other partners in this respect. At the same time, conventional forces are to be maintained, which can be deployed both for defence and crisis management – robust, mobile and rapidly deployable. In order to arm itself against cyber attacks and terrorism the Alliance is to boost its capacities for the identification of and defence against such attacks and improve national coordination between the member states. With regard to energy security the Concept remains defensive, with vague mention of the protection of critical infrastructure and transport routes. Member states are to be consulted and joint plans developed. NATO also proposes to maintain national defence expenditure in order to ensure the equipping of national armies.

### NATO Crisis Management after Afghanistan

In implementing this core task the new Strategic Concept applies the *comprehensive approach*. Effective crisis management requires a combined approach made up of political, civil and military approaches, which is why NATO strives for maximum cohesion with other

international actors. As the new document makes clear, crises and conflicts outside NATO can nevertheless represent a direct threat to Alliance security. The Alliance should therefore be active in all three phases of crisis management: (i) prevention, (ii) the ending of violent conflicts and (iii) the stabilisation of post-conflict situations. For this purpose the existing instruments – or *unique conflict management capacities* – among which only armed forces are mentioned explicitly, should be expanded. NATO wishes to improve its early warning capabilities, further develop its military instruments for combating uprisings, stabilisation and reconstruction and build up a dedicated unit for civilian crisis management in order to interact better with civilian partners and to lay the foundations for the transfer of responsibility to other actors. Besides that, civilian–military planning is to be improved, training for the development of local troops is to be reinforced and national civilian experts are to be identified and trained so that they can be deployed more rapidly.

### Cooperative Security

While the first two core tasks are clearly focused on military planning and capabilities the section on Cooperative Security is devoted to the political aspect of the Alliance. NATO is to concentrate its political efforts with regard to security in three areas: (i) arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation; (ii) enlargement; and (iii) partnerships.

With its new Concept NATO is dedicating itself to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, without reference to *Global Zero*, but rather to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. NATO emphasises its major progress in disarmament since 1990 and refers to the need for greater Russian transparency with regard to its arsenal and reciprocal disarmament with Russia in the area of short-range weapons. Conventional arms control is also mentioned as a NATO concern. This refers in general to efforts towards strengthening arms control regimes in Europe, although, in contrast to the 1999 Concept, the CFE Treaty is not mentioned. The document implicitly warns against unilateral national disarmament or arms control policies and instead emphasises that appropriate Allied consultations are needed on these topics and, in case of doubt, have to be developed.

With regard to enlargement the Concept falls short. The successes of the past are emphasised and the

notion of the integration of all European countries in NATO is outlined as an ideal. This means that NATO's door remains open to all European democracies which share the values of the Alliance and contribute to common security and stability. In contrast to the previous Concept, the expectation that new member states will soon be knocking at NATO's door is not mentioned. In other words, although NATO cannot revoke the so-called Bucharest Decision (stressing NATO's open-door policy) it is reluctant to refer to Georgia and Ukraine by name.

Instead, the realm of partnerships has been markedly expanded. The implication for NATO in this respect is the notion of effective multilateralism, in terms of the wide network of partnerships which Euro-Atlantic security requires. Although particular emphasis is laid on the United Nations, the European Union and Russia this is a multilateralism with NATO at the centre. For example, NATO wishes to deepen cooperation with the United Nations and improve practical cooperation. The EU and NATO are to play complementary and mutually reinforcing roles in building security. To that end the strategic partnership between the two organisations is to be strengthened. In practical terms, operational cooperation will be improved and capacity-building will be conducted jointly.

Relations with Russia are also to be improved, because they are of strategic importance. To that end a »real strategic partnership« with Russia will be developed, building on common interests with regard to missile defence, fighting terrorism, drugs, piracy and fostering international security. Full use will be made of the NATO-Russia Council for this purpose.

Besides these three specific partnerships a series of other programmes are mentioned, including »Partnership for Peace«, the Mediterranean Dialogue, cooperation with the Gulf region and the Istanbul cooperation initiative. Interestingly enough, relations with Georgia and Ukraine are also addressed in this section, although with reference to these countries' aspiration to join the Alliance at some point.

### Evaluation

The new Strategic Concept assembles the various views of the member states. In that way it emphasises the urgency of consensus on the role and tasks of the Alliance as of 2010 and makes clear both internally and

externally that NATO, even under dramatically changed circumstances, can play an important and leading role for the member states.

To be sure, this consensus is fragile at a number of points: the Strategic Concept remains particularly vague on this point and avoids unambiguous positions. Four disputed aspects in particular stand out in respect of which the Secretary General's document falls short of expectations or harbours the potential for future conflict:

- The role of nuclear weapons in the Alliance.
- Relations with other actors with regard to crisis management.
- The special relationship with Russia, which is focused in particular on joint missile defence.
- The question of defence funding in periods of financial and economic crisis.

### The Role of Nuclear Weapons

Expectations that NATO would raise its disarmament policy profile have increased since President Obama's speech in Prague. With its *Nuclear Posture Review* Washington has also produced a much more defence-oriented blueprint for the use of nuclear weapons, limiting the latter to states which do not comply with the rules of the non-proliferation regime and themselves use – or at least threaten to use – nuclear weapons. NATO falls far short of this, taking up once more the 1999 formulation which foresees the use of nuclear weapons in extremely improbable circumstances. However, there is no further qualification and limitation. The second regrettable omission concerns nuclear sharing, which remains prominent in the Concept. In this way NATO fails to live up to the spirit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which it appeals a few sections previously, and to end the stationing of American weapons on European territory. However, it merely postpones the problem until the point at which sharing is no longer technically feasible has been reached, at least in Germany. Then, the Tornado aircraft which would be used to deliver the weapons are out of service or require expensive replacement.

The demand for reciprocal disarmament with Russia in this context helps to only a limited extent since Russia is demanding, before any debate on tactical weapons takes place, the withdrawal of the last 200 or so US

bombs from Europe. The third omission is the missing link between missile defence and disarmament. On this point the German Foreign Minister Westerwelle was unable to prevail over NATO partner France. The German government wanted missile defence to be interpreted as the beginning of NATO's turning aside from nuclear weapons, while Paris wanted to define it as complementing the nuclear arsenal. The Concept embeds missile defence in the core of collective defence, while referring to the dominant role of nuclear weapons for the Alliance. The lack of Treaty-based limitation and verification of missile defence systems, however, could lead to a new arms race, since the missile defence shield primarily strengthens NATO's exceptional position as a military power and, at the same time, reduces its credibility as a disarmament policy actor. The Strategic Concept thus in no way constitutes a turn towards more disarmament and arms control by NATO, but rather merely garnishes NATO's increasing unassailability with politically opportune but in no way binding formulations.

### Crisis Management – How and with Whom?

NATO's crisis management, now a core task, harbours three traps which jeopardise NATO's external image and its compatibility with other actors. For example, although there is a paragraph on relations with the United Nations it is subsumed under »Partnerships« and not in the much more important chapter on crisis management. In addition, there is only vague talk of cooperation between headquarters, political dialogue and practical cooperation. The equivalent of this in the Crisis Management chapter is the enhanced willingness to cooperate with other actors. However, a clear declaration is lacking that NATO will intervene to settle conflicts only with a mandate from the UN Security Council. As a result, the risk remains of NATO mandating itself and thereby resuming the role of the »world's policeman« which was debated in the 1990s.

The second trap is the planned establishment of a civilian unit: »an appropriate but modest civilian crisis management capability«, as the Concept puts it. In this way NATO reduces its readiness to cooperate with other actors to absurdity, since this would mean the duplication of existing UN, EU or OSCE capabilities in order to be able to function in civilian areas. In addition, NATO would thereby come into competition with the EU and the UN for the recruitment of civilian experts. These bodies already find such people difficult to recruit

and the member states would have to inform the EU and NATO – as in the case of combat forces – of the availability of the same experts, which is likely to give rise to rivalry between these organisations.

The third problem hindering effective NATO crisis management with the EU is the continuing blockade of strategic dialogue between the two organisations by Turkey on the NATO side and Cyprus on the EU side. It is not possible to address this conflict in the Strategic Concept and it also limits the possibilities of effective cooperation for the long term and prevents the envisaged »complementary« cooperation.

### Relations with Russia – Rapprochement through Missile Defence?

Relations with Russia also harbour potential conflict for NATO since the compromise involving Moscow's participation in missile defence is far from being a done deal. President Medvedev's willingness in principle to operate this system jointly with NATO is subject to a key constraint, which Medvedev himself formulated in Lisbon: equal partnership between Russia and NATO with regard to missile defence.<sup>1</sup> This remains extremely vague with regard to specific arrangements. A solution that would meet the expectations of both sides with regard to shaping the system, taking decisions and maintaining secrecy is unlikely given the current relations between Russia and some NATO member states. The decisions taken by the NATO-Russia Council in Lisbon on the direction of relations are therefore prudent, ameliorating the effects of this problematic situation and enabling a pragmatic improvement in relations. A joint threat analysis is to be carried out, on the one hand in relation to general security threats and on the other hand in relation to the dangers of ballistic missiles. In addition, joint efforts to stabilise Afghanistan will be stepped up. Russia has granted NATO more transit rights for the transport of non-lethal cargo and cooperation in the drug war is to be intensified.

### Dwindling Defence Budgets

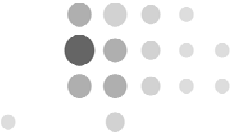
One gap in the Secretary General's document is particularly conspicuous: there is no reference in the Strategic Concept to the fact that member states'

<sup>1</sup> See press conference with President Medvedev in Lisbon, available at: <http://www.natochannel.tv/default.aspx?aid=4371>

defence budgets are facing the biggest cuts since the end of the Cold War. Instead, the Concept emphasises that NATO will keep a watchful eye on the relevant budget appropriations: »[we will] sustain the necessary levels of defence spending, so that our armed forces are sufficiently resourced«. The sole concrete idea on how this could be achieved is in the chapter on EU-NATO relations. There is to be closer cooperation in capacity-building in order to ensure cost-effectiveness. This blind spot of the Concept is one of its biggest weakpoints, given that virtually all member states are facing the challenge of living up to their duties as NATO allies while at the same time making massive cuts in defence spending. No less a person than Mike Mullen, current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has declared that the economic and financial crisis constitutes the greatest threat to the security of the United States, the most important NATO ally of all. The cost of around 200 million euros for linking up the Alliance's missile defence systems announced by the NATO Secretary General in May 2010 looks fine against this background, but this represents only the beginning of this programme: subsequent costs for the member states will be much higher.

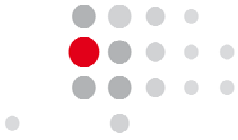
### Outlook

Summarising, it must be said that the euphoria which greeted the Lisbon Summit does not appear to be merited. »Historically« speaking, the most one can say with regard to this summit is that NATO was able to adopt a joint Strategic Concept despite the preceding differences. The document itself remains unclear on the most important points, postponing in particular questions on the role of nuclear weapons, its disarmament policy profile and the design of crisis operations. Only with regard to cooperation with Russia are there constructive ideas for the long-term improvement of relations with the former adversary in the combination of the Concept and the decision-making of the NATO-Russia Council. The Concept gives NATO some breathing space, but does not absolve it of the need to take decisions in the coming years which some member states will find painful. The withdrawal of tactical weapons remains on the agenda; a new duplication debate looms with regard to cooperation with the EU in the area of crisis management; the very basis of NATO, the military capabilities of the member states, is being eroded in the wake of the financial and economic crisis; and the Afghanistan mission – which, by the way, is only briefly mentioned in the Concept – has not yet



been concluded. Withdrawal could call into question NATO's willingness to undertake another stabilisation mission on this scale. More clarity is needed on all these issues. Tactical weapons should be withdrawn as soon as possible to send a signal in the context of disarmament policy. NATO should position itself under the UN umbrella when it comes to crisis management and introduce its unique military capabilities into the concert of actors directed by the UN. NATO should support the possibility of building up specialised and task-sharing forces in Europe because in the medium term it would take some of the burden off the member states and ensure the Alliance the availability of effective units. The new Strategic Concept is sufficiently vague to leave these decisions open and it is up to NATO and the member states to find a way on which they can agree. Should they be unable to do so, this phase in NATO's evolution could prove to be a dead-end, the only way out of which is already being, to some extent, pursued: the confinement of NATO to collective defence.





### About the author

**Christos Katsioulis** is an expert at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's (FES) International Policy Analysis unit in Berlin.

### Imprint

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

Responsible:  
Dr Gero Maaß, head of the International Policy Analysis unit

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

Orders /Contact:  
[info.ipa@fes.de](mailto:info.ipa@fes.de)

International Policy Analysis (IPA) is the analytical unit of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's International Dialogue department. In our publications and studies we address key topics of European and international politics, economics and society. Our aim is to develop policy recommendations and scenarios from a social democratic perspective.

This publication appears within the framework of the working line »European Foreign and Security Policy«, editor: Christos Katsioulis, [christos.katsioulis@fes.de](mailto:christos.katsioulis@fes.de).