

NATO'S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT: A CRITICAL VIEW

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Abstract

The changes that followed the adoption of the previous NATO's strategic concept in 1999 forced a review of its goals, threats and risks, as well as a new look at the capabilities of the organization at a time dominated by the economic crisis and cuts in its members' defence budgets.

On this occasion, the development of a strategic concept begun with a proposal made by a commission of experts, and a public debate which transformed the final text into a diplomatic document, not into a true useful document capable of guiding strategic planning over the next decade.

These differences between the goals established by the document and the actual resources available to NATO were noted immediately with regard to the crisis management system, for which the organization does not possess the structures and civil means. It is not clear either that this limitation can be solved through cooperation with the EU. The involvement of NATO in the international mission in Libya will be the first test to ascertain the validity and effectiveness of this new strategic concept.

Keywords

NATO; New Strategic Concept; Defence; World Security, Crisis Management

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1. The need for a new strategic concept for NATO

The important changes that took place in the International Society since the Strategic Concept was formulated at the 1999 Atlantic Council, in Washington, suggested the revision and update of the objectives, resources, and capacities of the Alliance for the first decades of the 21st century.¹

The jihad terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 in the United States, followed by the attacks of 11 March 2004 in Spain, and on 7 July 2005 in the United Kingdom, stood out as a major impact among the main changes leading to the formulation of the New Strategic Concept. A revision of NATO's priorities, directly related to jihad terrorism, already took place in the Prague Summit (2002) to discuss the threat of international terrorism.²

It is also important to keep in mind the effect of the expansion of the Alliance to Central and Eastern European countries, which not only translated into a significant increase in its members, with the consequent complication of the system of decision by consensus, but also generated a new dynamic in the relationship with Russia and increased the importance of some existing threats, such as international organized crime.

NATO's participation in the ISAF (*International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan*) is of no less importance and has been decisive in finding the capabilities, as well as the limitations, of expeditionary operations the Alliance may undertake in the years ahead.

The reappearance of piracy in new geopolitical scenarios, such as the waters of the Indian Ocean and the coast of Somalia, have served to restore maritime security, which had been ignored or postponed in prior strategic concepts, as one of the Alliance's priorities.

However, by themselves, these events would not have been enough to lead to the formulation of a new Strategic Concept. The political impulse created with the United States Administration of President Obama and the need to make NATO's future compatible with the changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty on Foreign Policy and

¹ NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept is available at:
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm (viewed on 07/04/2011)

² See the Declaration of the Prague Summit available at:
<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2002/p02-127e.htm> (viewed on 07/04/2011)



Common Security, particularly in its diplomatic and military dimensions, was also fundamental.³

All this takes place in an environment of acute international economic crisis which is forcing Alliance governments, particularly those of hegemonic countries, to revise their own national defence strategies, as was recently the case in the United Kingdom.⁴

2. The elaboration process of the New Strategic Concept

The difference in the strategic concepts devised in 1991 and 1999 and the elaboration process of this new concept demonstrate that the Allies were fully aware of the need to involve public opinions in its preparation in order to guarantee the political legitimacy of the final document, albeit at the expense of sacrificing the conceptual rigor and the precision of contents required by this type of document.

In accordance with the position of the Alliance, the elaboration of the strategic concept took place in three phases with occasional overlapping.

A. Reflection Phase (July 2009 – March 2010)

It included the creation of a team of 12 experts, presided by United States Ambassador Madeleine Albright, who prepared a draft copy following comparing their initial analysis with the opinion of experts from all allied nations at five seminars on: General Questions; NATO Associations; Transformation of Structures, Strengths and Capacities; Integral Approach to Crisis Management⁵;

B. Consultation Phase (September 2009 – March 2010)

At the same time, the team of experts consulted with all allied governments with the goal of comparing the results of the analysis and the seminars with official positions, in an attempt to find topics and points of agreement among all members to allow for the preparation of its final report.

³ Texts of the European Union Treaty and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union can be found at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:SOM:EN:HTML> (viewed on 07/04/2011)

⁴ See *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy (2010)* available at: <http://www.analisisinternacional.eu/archivo/viejos/ID13.ppt> and also *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defense and Security Review (2010)* in <http://www.analisisinternacional.eu/archivo/viejos/ID14.pdf> (viewed on 07/04/2011)

⁵ The team of experts included: The Honorable Madeleine K. Albright (United States); Mr. Jeroen van der Veer (The Netherlands); Ambassador Giancarlo Aragona (Italy); Ambassador Marie Gervais-Vidricaire (Canada); The Honorable Geoff Hoon (United Kingdom); Ambassador Ümit Pamir (Turkey); Ambassador Fernando Perpiñá-Robert Peyra (Spain); Ambassador Dr. Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz (Federal Republic of Germany); Mr. Bruno Racine (France); Ambassador Aivis Ronis (Latvia); Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld (Poland); Ambassador Yannis-Alexis Zepos (Greece).
The report prepared by this group is available at: http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2010_05/20100517_100517_expertsreport.pdf (viewed on 07/04/2011)



C. Draft of the New Strategic Concept and final negotiation (September – November 2010)

The report submitted by the Team of Experts and officially presented to NATO's Secretary General served as the basis to the latter's writing of a proposal submitted to the governments for negotiation and, finally, to the document approved in the Lisbon summit on 19 November 2010.⁶

3. Core tasks and principles

The New Strategic Concept, like previous ones, reiterates that the Alliance's ultimate aim lies on the community of values that rules its members and which aims to defend the principles of: individual freedom; democracy; human rights, and Rule of Law.

To this end, there are four different categories of core tasks which NATO must be able to carry out and have an impact on:

1. Collective defence;
2. Crisis management;
3. Collaborative security;
4. The continuous process of reform, modernization, and transformation.

4. The international strategic environment: threats and risks

As in all strategic formulation, once the fundamental principles and tasks have been determined, it becomes necessary to define the set of threats and risks the Alliance must confront in the next few years.

As was the case with the documents mentioned above, it is recognized that the threat of a generalized attack, of conventional or nuclear nature, against the allied nations constitutes a very unlikely, although not impossible, scenario. Such threat is no longer linked to the military capability of the former Soviet Union or the transition processes of European communist countries that gave rise to the war in the Balkans.

There are four threats that were not included in previous strategic documents: cyber attacks; missile attacks against the population or territories of allied nations; organized delinquency and serious environmental and public health issues.

However, just as important as the new strategic threats included in this document, are those identified in the 1999 strategic concept document and which were removed from the current document: *the collapse of political order that results in failed states; the policies of oppressive regimes and economic chaos*. It appears clear that in face of the changes the Arab world is experiencing and the effect of the crisis on some allied countries like Greece, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy or Portugal, one would think that such omissions are not reasonable.

⁶ The text of the New Strategic Concept is available at:
<http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (viewed on 07/04/2011)



5. Means and capabilities

Once the threats the Alliance must address were identified, with more or less accuracy, the New Strategic Concept established the means and capacities deemed essential to carry out its main tasks.

The principal means are as follows:

1. A combination of conventional and nuclear forces;
2. Establishing strong conventional forces, mobile and deployable in defensive and expeditionary terms;
3. The joint undertaking among allies of training, exercises, and planning and exchange of information;
4. The participation of all allied nations in the planning of nuclear actions, the storage of nuclear forces during peacetime, and the formulation of command, control and consultation dispositions;
5. The cooperation with Russia and other Euro-Asian partners;
6. The planned coordination of national cyber defence capacities and the adoption of a NATO centralized protection system against cyber attacks;
7. A coordinated analysis of terrorist attacks among allies and the adoption of adequate military capabilities in the fight against terror.
8. The upkeep of defence requirements, despite the crisis, so that the FAS have the necessary means to carry out the missions assigned;
9. Adoption of a general position by NATO in face of the emergence of new threats;

The availability of such means must support the development of the following Alliance capacities:

1. The ability to maintain major joint operations concurrently with several minor operations to guarantee collective defence and to carry out crisis management from a *strategic distance*.
2. The ability to defend populations and allied territories against ballistic missile attacks;
3. The capability of effective defence against threats and attacks with NBDR weapons;
4. The ability to prevent, detect, defend itself against and recover from cyber attacks;
5. The capability to detect and defend itself from international terrorism;
6. The ability to contribute to energy safety, including the protection of critical infrastructures, traffic areas and supply lines;
7. The capacity to evaluate the impact of the development of new technologies on security.



6. Security through crisis management - An impossible task for NATO?

One of the most problematic aspects of the New Strategic Concept concerns crisis management, identified as one of the Alliance's core tasks.

In effect, after stressing that crisis and conflicts presume a direct threat to populations and territories of the Alliance, and that the experiences in the Balkans and Afghanistan command the adoption of a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, post conflict management, stability and reconstruction through the use of political, civilian, and military means, the strategic document recognizes that NATO's superiority lies on its military capabilities. It recognizes that the organization just aspires to reach "*an appropriate but modest civilian crisis management capability*" that will allow the Alliance's military forces to have a linking instrument with the civilian means employed on the ground by other players and international agencies.⁷

Without question, NATO lacks an adequate political-civilian structure to assume the leadership of crisis management in its civilian and humanitarian aspects, but, above all, to lead the stabilization and reconstruction processes that follow armed conflicts. Neither is it likely that it will, in the short term, develop that structure with a sufficient degree of efficacy to replace or complement the one available in the framework of the United Nations or the European Union.

Under similar circumstances, the inclusion of this central task forces the Alliance to collaborate with those institutions or, alternatively, to accept that humanitarian and civilian reconstruction tasks be assigned to military forces. This second alternative presents the risk of causing mission failure as a result of the armed forces' lack of preparation to perform this type of tasks. This constitutes a strategic dilemma whose consequences should have been carefully evaluated prior to its inclusion in the final document with the clear intention of making it a politically correct document in the face of public opinions.

7. Critical assessment of the New Conceptual Strategy in the light of the new system of world security

An adequate assessment of this New Strategic Concept requires not only a consideration of its content, but also a comparison with the new system of world security, which has been developing in the last two decades, in order to evaluate its adequacy, or lack thereof, to that system.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the multinational intervention in Iraq following the invasion of Kuwait, world security has, little by little, evolved from a bipolar system with nuclear deterrence towards a system of *collective security through interventionism* promoted by the great military powers.

⁷ Center for Security Studies (ETH-Zurich) - *Comprehensive Approaches to International Crisis Management*.- CSS Analyses in Security Policy, vol. 3, no. 42 (October, 2008), available at: http://kms1.iisn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/93229/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/460f9c24-18c1-45fa-8e14-62b9c0a37682/en/css_analysen_nr42-2008_e.pdf (viewed on 07/04/2011)
Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz - *Civilian Dimension of International Crisis Management in Spain: Commitments, Alternatives and Advantages*.- CITpax Document no.5 (February 2006). See: http://www.fride.org/download/OTR_CrisisMang_ENG_feb06.ppdf.pdf (viewed on 07/04/2011)



On the one hand, the increase in the number of peace missions promoted by the United Nations which followed, which continues to enjoy political legitimacy and legal exclusivity, has reinforced the collective dimension of world security.⁸

Notwithstanding, it is also evident that the collective security of the United Nations cannot always be applied, either because it is prevented by the veto system preponderant in the Security Council or because countries, particularly the super powers, are not always willing to contribute with the troops the world organization requires.

The increase in the number and duration of peace missions has brought about the increasing need to involve regional powers in the decision process and execution of such missions. We often see the presence of troops from India, Brazil, Pakistan, South Africa, Canada, Spain, The Netherlands, Portugal, and other countries in these missions, strengthening and complementing the duties of troops from the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, or France.

Likewise, the geo-strategic, political and economic interests of the great powers do not always coincide with those of the rest of the international community. In similar circumstances, and in face of the inability to achieve the approval of a Security Council Resolution that backs its military actions, international interventions have become generalized, whether unilateral or collective, and directed at defending the interests of those powers in a certain country or region.

The cases of Kosovo (1999); Iraq (2003); *Enduring Freedom* (2001) in Afghanistan or, more recently, Lebanon (2006) and Georgia (2008), more than any argument, illustrate the reality of the interventionist dimension of the current system of world security.

NATO has defined its strategic performance in this international context in some cases in accordance with pragmatic criteria, such as in the military intervention in Kosovo, and, on other occasions, in accordance with international legality criteria, such as in the case of ISAF.

In the light of the Alliance's evolution in the last two decades, we may and should conduct an assessment of the new strategic document pointing out three essential characteristics: a) its political and declarative scope; b) its vagueness; c) and its incomplete nature. .

In a strict sense, it is not a strategic document, at least not in line with its predecessors, as it does not have a section on "directions for the forces of the Alliance" that specifically includes such relevant aspects as: specific missions military forces must carry out, directives for the disposition of forces, quantitative and qualitative characteristics of conventional and nuclear forces needed; command structure; etc.

⁸ For an analysis of the evolution experienced by the United Nations doctrine regarding peace missions, see the General Secretary documents:
An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping. (17 June 1992). A/47/277 - S/24111
Supplement of "Un Programa de Paz": Documento de posición del Secretario General presentado con ocasión del cincuentenario de las Naciones Unidas. (25 January 1995). A/50/60 S/1995/1.
Un mundo más seguro: la responsabilidad que compartimos. Informe del Grupo de alto nivel sobre las amenazas, los desafíos y el cambio.- Asamblea General (2 December 2004) A/59/565.



It is possible to argue that all these aspects will be included in the documents leading to the development of the New Strategic Concept. However, one must agree that their absence from the main document minimizes its importance and presupposes a change in position regarding the Alliance' strategies of 1991 and 1999.

It is also a vague document since, as we mentioned, it ignores active threats that had been acknowledged in previous documents; it includes environmental and health threats, for instance, whose management is primarily of national character, as the current nuclear disaster in Japan has proved, without specifying the means available or coordination criteria to follow; it mentions a system of crisis management without specifying the entities, procedures or civilian capacities required. And, finally, it refers to the need for a complementarity of functions with the European Union, particularly regarding crisis management and collaborative security, without making any reference, nor even of general character, to the directives under which such complementarity should be carried out.

Finally, for a series of reasons, it is an incomplete document. First of all, it does not draw from the lessons learned from the experiences in the Balkans and Afghanistan to determine the political and strategic criteria necessary to establish the reach and limits of the missions in which NATO intervenes. Secondly, there is not a precise and differentiated strategic assessment of the regions that neighbour the Alliance, such as the Maghreb, the Caucasus, and the Middle and Far East. Neither is there any mention of some missions that, on account of their frequency, their importance and their mixed nature (defensive and expeditionary) should have been explicitly recognized, such as the rescue missions and protection of citizens of Allied nations residing in areas of war conflict or disaster situations. Last but not least, there is the omission of the relationships the Alliance must maintain with organizations such as OSCE or what to do in face of proposals, such as the one formulated by Russian President Medvedev for establishing a European Security Treaty.

8. Conclusions

As a final assessment, it is necessary to point out that the New Strategic Concept reflects with great accuracy the set of strengths and weaknesses that currently affect NATO.

With regard to the strengths, the following stand out:

1. The capacities, organization (High Commands) and military experience that make NATO the most effective organization that has existed in the last half century;
2. A good part of that efficacy is due to the participation of three of the major military powers in the world which, besides, benefit from a combination of conventional and nuclear means;
3. That has given NATO not only an incredible and effective dissuasive ability, but also a proven capacity of power projection at regional and world levels.

However, the Alliance also presents some considerable weaknesses which, with time, have limited its international protagonist role and increased doubts regarding its reason for existing in face of the development of new multilateral provisional coalitions as



medium or long-term strategic alternatives. Among these weaknesses, the following stand out:

1. The military hegemony historically held by the United States, which has hindered the development of military capacities of European allies and their political will to assume the roles imposed by regional and world defence, at a time when Washington increasingly shifts its strategic priorities towards the Pacific, not towards the Euro-Atlantic region;
2. The insufficient institutional development of the Alliance's political structure in relation to its military structure, which has continuously incapacitated NATO to take on and adapt to the new world strategic and diplomatic situations;
3. The increasing discrepancy of geo-strategic interests among the allies which, together with the system of decision by consensus, is creating an internal political blockade which will become even more complex with the adherence of new members, such as the Ukraine or Georgia.

If these weaknesses are not recognized and no attempt is made to overcome them, the formulation of new strategic concepts will not solve NATO's already large tendency to become a mere military management agency without a political will and vision of the future. Notwithstanding, this is something that can be avoided despite the 2010 New Strategic Concept.