



Paul Gebhard & Ralph Crosby

STRATEGIC ADVISORS GROUP

## NATO Defense Capabilities: A Guide for Action

In launching the Strategic Advisors Group's STRATCON 2010 project, General Brent Scowcroft underscored the need of a new Strategic Concept to answer, "What is NATO for?"

As NATO leaders debate this question in the abstract, the world is not sitting by. Instead, the world is adding several layers of complexity to NATO's considerations:

- The immediate, stressing requirements of high-optempo operations in Afghanistan in which the Alliance will soon have 140,000 troops, of which some 40,000 will be from NATO allies in Europe and Canada;
- The proliferation of evolving threats and challenges, including nuclear-tipped missiles and state-sponsored attacks on national infrastructure through cyber space;
- The ongoing need to modernize NATO's military forces and the difficulties of cooperative procurement and development efforts across national borders;
- A long history among many European allies of underfunding their defense forces, a history compounded by the current economic environment where national budgets are under extreme pressure and defense budgets in many NATO nations are stressed;
- The highly variable mission scope and rules of engagement countries require of their of military forces, to include high-intensity expeditionary operations, peacekeeping and nation building, all in the same operation; and
- A mis-match between a "comprehensive" approach to security challenges, incorporating military and civil

### The Strategic Advisors Group

To tackle the tough issues facing NATO and the transatlantic community, the Atlantic Council created the Strategic Advisors Group (SAG). Co-chaired by Atlantic Council Chairman Senator Chuck Hagel and Airbus CEO Tom Enders, the SAG is comprised of North American and European preeminent defense experts. Founded in 2007 by then-Atlantic Council Chairman General James L. Jones, General Brent Scowcroft and former Norwegian Minister of Defense Kristin Krohn Devold, the SAG provides timely insights and analysis to policymakers and the public on strategic issues in the transatlantic security partnership through issuing policy briefs and reports, hosting strategy sessions for senior civilian and military officials and providing informal expert advice to decision-makers.

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instruments, and NATO's planning process that does not address capabilities required for civil reconstruction and development.

This issue brief will address **the enduring challenge for NATO nations of how best to enhance their individual and, through the Alliance, their collective capabilities and what could be done through the Alliance's new Strategic Concept.**

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The history of such efforts by NATO nations is mixed. Within the past 10 years, NATO Heads of State and Government have agreed at four summits on specific, concrete objectives to enhance the national and collective capabilities of the Alliance.

- **April 1999, Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI).** Emphasis on capabilities needed to deploy and sustain forces beyond national territories, as well as capabilities to protect forces from Weapons of Mass Destruction.
- **November 2002, Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC).** Creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and a Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism. Over 400 capability areas for enabling forces such as air- and sea-lift; intelligence and surveillance; deployable command, control and communications; and deployable combat support and service support units.
- **June 2004, Usability Targets.** Leaders agreed that the usability goal for ground forces is 40% deployability and 8% sustainability, meaning that each nation could deploy up to 40% of its forces and sustain 8% over an extended period of time.
- **November 2006, Comprehensive Political Guidance (CPG).** Stated that challenges such as Afghanistan and Iraq require a combined political-civil-military approach. Also launched efforts to increase the ability of special operations forces from member countries to train and operate together.

At a minimum, a new Strategic Concept should affirm these measures for Alliance forces going forward. Any new measures should seek to complement rather than supplant this guidance. And, **even in the depths of economic crisis, national leaders must look ahead to better times and renew their calls for additional resources for the Alliance.**

One must ask, however, what have been the practical results from such efforts and the advisability of continuing forward in the same path? In the first instance, NATO leaders and governments clearly have been working to adapt the Alliance and its capabilities to the changing world. This is good news. **The iterative and evolving calls by NATO's leaders for enhanced defense capabilities reflects as much the rapidly changing challenges of**

**national security in today's world as it does the lack of success of previous efforts.**

Nevertheless, many commentators, particularly those in the United States, frustrated by low European defense spending, seemingly limited European contributions to the war in Afghanistan, and by self-imposed national caveats on the use of those meager forces, argue that **NATO has not much to show for its defense planning efforts.**

Well-documented NATO capability gaps in Afghanistan, such as the shortfall of deployable heavy lift helicopters that went unfilled for many months in spite of European nations having dozens of such helicopters in their inventories (but lacking logistical support), and a garrison mentality of some European forces, support the view of NATO's lack of capabilities. By this assessment, **NATO leaders are, by Albert Einstein's definition, "insane," in that they repeatedly call for new capabilities, each time expecting different results.**

Several government officials on both sides of the Atlantic have noted that there is nothing about NATO's capabilities that additional money from nations could not fix. Yet many would argue that an agreement to accept missions that place soldiers at risk is a measure not definable in Euro or dollar terms. Leaving this issue aside, there are a number of potential options.

**A question for today is whether the operational need of NATO nations is so great and immediate, and whether the budget conditions are so dire and lasting, that options for addressing the capability gaps of NATO nations that have been heretofore rejected or thought beyond consideration are deemed now to be within the scope of the possible.**

We have grouped our recommendations in ascending order of difficulty. It is worth recalling that what we are discussing is neither technically difficult (e.g., nuclear science), nor militarily difficult (e.g., executing a counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan), nor even fiscally difficult (e.g., increasing defense spending to 3% of GDP). The metric of difficulty in discussion is the degree of political will required to accomplish each goal - perhaps the most difficult of metrics for our governments to meet.

## **Straightforward Steps: Initiatives within current NATO processes**

### **1. Greater use of multinational approaches to address both capability shortfalls and the high cost of sustaining operations beyond national borders.**

The successes of the **Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC) initiative and the Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS)** are excellent examples of NATO's adaptation to meet a high priority operational need for a capability that is beyond the fiscal limits of most nations to procure on their own. NATO's long-standing mechanisms, such as the **NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP)**, are also important tools that should be used to greater effect.

The most pressing candidate for the next consortium is NATO's need for heavy vertical lift capability. The NATO HIP Helicopter Task Force is a useful, creative step but not sufficient to meet the need. A SALIS-type arrangement for Russian-crewed heavy-lift helos would have to be thought through carefully given the close integration of lift assets with combat forces. Alternately, a full SAC approach with procurement of a new NATO squadron utilizing new, leased or borrowed heavy-lift assets should be explored.

NATO nations could also make more effective collective use of the **NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP)** to support on-going operations. The NSIP budget, approximately \$950M per year, funds in equal measure a number of important facilities in Afghanistan, such as runway and hanger improvements at Khandahar Airbase and at Mazar-e-Sharif Airbase, and communications equipment at Kabul Airport as well as in Europe.

The NSIP account, however, retains some of its traditional, "national return on investment" approach to funding. A full review of the NSIP and its funding priorities with the objective of building a program that supports truly common NATO military requirements would be productive.

### **2. Inclusion in the NATO planning process of defined goals for cyber defense of national critical infrastructure.**

NATO has grappled with cyber attack and defense issues since 2002, has established a cyber center of excellence in Estonia to share information and best practices and in

2008 agreed on the need to continue the development of NATO's cyber defense capabilities and the linkages between NATO and national authorities.

The long-overdue step is for NATO to incorporate cyber defense capabilities into its formal planning process for nations and their critical infrastructure. This step would acknowledge the seriousness of the cyber threat to each nation's sovereignty and security and initiate an active, Alliance-led process focused on improving national capabilities to protect military and civil critical infrastructure. The extent of our vulnerability to cyber attack and the pervasiveness of the threat are well-documented.

### **3. Specialization – the allowance for nations to differentially invest and develop a national expertise in a particular capability.**

The current approach to force planning by NATO countries emphasizes that each nation should maintain a broad-based defense capability and therefore be able to participate in a range of potential security and defense operations. Even during the Cold War, however, certain allies – notably Iceland and Luxembourg – were not enjoined to have a full defense capability and relied on the Alliance as a whole for their security.

Today, with many nations assessing their existential risk as very low, there is significant margin for some to invest in niche capabilities for the Alliance. Would the Alliance be less secure if Belgium decided to divest the majority of its ground forces and invest solely in its air force of fighters and airlifters? While the Alliance has begun to take incremental steps toward this notion of "specialization," much more could be done.

## **Stretch Objectives: Initiatives that expand NATO's planning processes**

### **4. Maximize the use of scarce budgetary resources through coordinated development efforts for new defense programs.**

The material benefits available to nations through collaborative development and production of defense capabilities are substantial, and never more necessary than in a time of extreme fiscal austerity. NATO nations have undertaken signature joint programs, such as the A400M and the Joint Strike Fighter, because individual

nations could not bear the costs. These programs, however, are the exception.

There are significantly greater savings to be reaped through coordinated development processes that eliminate redundant investment, promote interoperability and reduce logistical burdens. Yet given the political volatility of mutual dependency among countries, technology transfer issues and industrial base evolution, it is necessary to pick a few high leverage opportunities – the low hanging fruit – and capitalize on those programs first.

The Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS), the sole effort for modernizing air defenses throughout the Alliance, is one such opportunity. Similar focus is required in other areas, foremost of which is advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. The recently launched (and much delayed) Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) program, which brings advanced Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) abilities to the battlefield, is one such crucial collaborative modernization program.

NATO nations are already addressing their mobility shortfalls through trans-Atlantic trade. European nations are modernizing their C-130 fleets, procuring C-17 aircraft, as well as developing the A400M. The United States similarly has selected the European C-27J and CASA 235 aircraft for its forces. Such transatlantic defense trade is a healthy sign, but is not enough. As the United States and European nations look to development of a new heavy-lift helicopter, is there an opportunity for a collaborative program either under NATO, the European Union (EU) or both? Or, would Boeing and Airbus agree on running a single, joint program for a new tanker transport aircraft? Even with two platforms, there could be savings in program management and administrative overhead.

**5. Transformation of training of NATO forces to enhance their ability to respond and adapt quickly to crises and changing circumstances in operations.**

While NATO commanders regularly express frustration about national caveats and equipment shortfalls, the lack of effective training of national forces in many cases creates “non-swimmers” in an operation, i.e. forces that

must be carried along rather having the ability to fully contribute to the operation.

Successful militaries in operational environments today – whether in Afghanistan, Bosnia or off the coast of Somalia – are those that are able to transform themselves faster than their adversaries. Military equipment is slow to develop and deploy and in many cases will not keep up with the pace of change in an operational environment. Training is essential.

NATO’s Allied Command Transformation (ACT) has developed the Joint Warfare Center (JWC) to train command staffs prior to deployment. Anecdotal reports indicate that staffs that utilize the JWC are significantly more effective in-theater than those whose nations choose not to make use of this NATO facility.

NATO through ACT should develop and adopt rigorous training standards for national contributions to NATO-led operations. ACT would have the responsibility for assessing the training of national units prior to deployment and providing to the nation and to NATO commanders a confidential report prior to the deployment of that unit.

**6. Expand the NATO planning process to include the pressing and obvious need for capabilities to address civil requirements.**

NATO leaders in endorsing the **Comprehensive Political Guidance** (2006) agreed that conflicts such as Afghanistan need to be addressed through the comprehensive application of all aspects of power – military, political, civil and economic. Events in recent years have confirmed this judgment.

Unfortunately, internal political disagreements have blocked NATO from doing more in the area of civil reconstruction. NATO has endeavored to coordinate information sharing among nations about national civil capabilities, but this does not address the fundamental need for additional national capabilities on the ground, regardless of the political framework for their use – UN, EU, NATO or other.

Currently for EU-led or national civil efforts, nations attempt to recruit volunteers from current positions in local law enforcement, the judiciary, academia and other relevant occupations on an ad-hoc basis. These efforts

are hampered by the lack of a planning or development process to make additional personnel available. If civil reconstruction is important, even essential, it should be planned and trained for in a professional manner and not learned on the job by recent recruits from other occupations. The quality of the force should not be sacrificed for quantity.

NATO should move beyond the sharing of information on civil capabilities to the development of additional national capabilities. This should be codified through the inclusion in the NATO force planning process of those capabilities relevant to civil crisis management and reconstruction. This planning process would be solely for the purposes of developing additional capabilities and without reference to how and under whose guidance the national capabilities would be employed – nationally, under the EU, UN or another ad-hoc structure.

## **Transformational Measures: Initiatives that remake the planning processes**

### **7. Develop a single, combined NATO-EU planning process to encompass the military and civil requirements to support a comprehensive approach to security matters.**

National leaders across NATO and the EU are in agreement that the threats and challenges facing nations today and for the foreseeable future need to be addressed “comprehensively” through political, military, civil and economic measures.

Current EU and NATO planning, however, occurs separately, in which each organization develops its own planning objectives, sharing information intermittently, runs the risk of redundant effort in some areas of defense planning, conflicting efforts and guidance in others and, worst, missing potential risks altogether. And, as has been often noted ruefully by NATO and EU military leaders, there is only a single set of military forces held by nations to support the political objectives of NATO, EU and national governments.

Breaching deeply entrenched national positions that prevent practical EU and NATO cooperation will likely have to await a larger, more dangerous crisis to spur action. In the interim, would it be possible to move the

NATO and EU planning processes to a single forum? First, nations would be able to assess and address in a single forum potential uses of their defense forces across a wide range of potential operations – from crisis management, support to civilian operations, peacekeeping, limited engagements and large scale operations.

Second, nations would be able to address the wider range of non-traditional national capabilities they will need for their security, including civil response.

Third, nations would be working in a single forum to address the necessary interaction and coordination between civil and military efforts as part of security operations and begin to assess and potentially address the tradeoffs across capabilities in national accounts.

The European Defense Agency and NATO's Allied Command Transformation should be charged with developing a single, combined planning process addressing the range of military and civil capabilities needed to address a range of potential operations.

## **Strategic Advances: Fundamental changes to policy that are completely within the power of each nation**

### **8. Rebalancing the allocation of resources for NATO forces among the three priorities of personnel, training and equipment.**

Many NATO nations currently allocate 50% and more of their defense resources to personnel costs. In consequence, nations sustain larger numbers of personnel in uniform than are trained and equipped to be useful in military operations. Allies maintaining conscription face legal prohibitions against deploying conscripts – often assigned through the armed forces. The result is the odd circumstance that Europe as a whole, with a much larger number of troops than the United States, is able to deploy and sustain a much smaller number and proportion of that total.

When France dropped the draft and adopted a professional military system, the Ministry of Defense reduced the overall size of the armed forces in order to sustain the level of equipment and training and thereby the overall quality of the force, albeit at a lower level.

Nations should adopt a standard of 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 for the allocation of their defense budgets among personnel, training and equipment. For nations whose spending is unbalanced towards personnel and that are unable or willing to allocate greater resources to defense, a reduction in overall force numbers and reallocation of saved resources would be a difficult but viable option.

## A time for action

Crises can breed creativity and action, or confusion and inaction. Few organizations or military establishments have transformed and adapted absent a glaring and persistent problem. NATO's current situation could provide the necessary sustained motivational force for transformation to occur.

Of course, some of these decisions are not easy. As we have seen, the amount of blood and treasure a country is

willing to sacrifice to meet security objectives across the globe varies greatly among countries. However, without a shared human burden among nations, the long term success of the Alliance is cast into doubt. The new Strategic Concept must address these issues. Together, these questions encompass NATO's mission – its reason for existing. By transforming to meet these challenges, NATO will continue to contribute to global security.

Are we now at a time when the operational demands of war and the pressure of financial constraints are sufficient to generate the political will necessary to overcome long-held obstacles in order to achieve greater capabilities to today and tomorrow at minimal cost? A key test of the new Strategic Concept is whether it will help the Alliance answer in the affirmative with specific, near-term actions to enhance NATO's capabilities.

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## STRATCON 2010

The Strategic Advisors Group's STRATCON 2010 project seeks to shape and inform the transatlantic debate over NATO's new Strategic Concept. STRATCON 2010 will issue publications to define the critical issues NATO must confront in drafting a new Strategic Concept. For more information about the SAG or STRATCON 2010, please contact Vice President and Director of the Program on International Security Damon Wilson at [dwilson@acus.org](mailto:dwilson@acus.org) or Program Associate Director Jeff Lightfoot at [jlightfoot@acus.org](mailto:jlightfoot@acus.org).

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