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Poland's Priorities in the Debate on a New Strategic Concept for NATO

By Marek Madej

The NATO debate on a new strategic concept is entering yet another stage, one probably crucial to the ultimate outcome of the whole process. Early in May 2010, the Group of Experts will submit their recommendations on the nature, scope, and main provisions of the document. These will serve as the basis for the member states to begin a discussion, led by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, on the shape of a new strategic concept. At that time, the states will make known (in more detail than they have to date) their positions on the different issues addressed by that document, in particular on such vital—and controversial—issues as: the hierarchy of the Alliance's tasks, the extent of its engagement in the non-military dimensions of security, its military transformation, its internal reforms, its relations with partners (including Russia), and its enlargement. Doubtless, Poland will also be among those states who are vocal about their positions. It is worthwhile to show, from a Polish perspective, what the fundamental assumptions and priorities of the strategy can—or should—be.

The overriding guideline for Poland's position throughout the drafting of a new strategic concept should be this: to act on the assumption that the debate on this document—over and above being conducive to the development of an optimal (from Poland's perspective) and ultimate shape for the new concept—should contribute to strengthening the cohesion and solidarity of NATO. The North Atlantic Alliance still offers the best security guarantees available in a political-military context and for which Poland will find no equivalent alternatives, either multilateral (e.g., developed within the European Union) or bilateral (e.g., in cooperation with the United States) in the near future. For this reason, as Poland consistently promotes its proposals among the remaining Allies, it should also take into account to the greatest possible extent the interests of other members and work towards the best possible, mutually acceptable, and lasting compromise. Accordingly, it must decide—and properly signal to the remaining Allies in the course of the debate—which of its proposals it sees as essential requests on which to maintain a relatively inflexible stance. At the same time, it should also indicate those it considers more negotiable.

This emphasis on having the Alliance's unity strengthened by the new strategic concept debate also means that Poland will very likely seek to ensure that the new concept reaffirms the presence and involvement of the US in Europe as an important bonding factor of the Alliance and an assurance of its political and military effectiveness. Presumably, Poland will also expect a firm declaration that NATO remains the main forum for the transatlantic security dialogue, which enables an open debate to be conducted among the Allies on all transatlantic and global security issues of common interest.

Priority of the Alliance's Traditional Tasks and Increasing the Automatism of Allied Support

The main rationale behind Poland's accession to NATO was the desire to obtain effective and enduring security guarantees in the traditional political-military dimension, i.e., the capability to deter armed aggression and to respond effectively should it occur. This traditional function of NATO still retains its importance. Unlikely as armed aggression by other states against Poland (or, indeed, any other Ally) appears today, Poland (much like some of its NATO-member neighbours) cannot entirely disregard the possibility of this type of threat emerging in the long term. Neither can it be ruled out altogether that Poland or other Allies will come under military pressure of a different kind, for instance in the form of the military coercion directed against it or of a sea blockade. Given Russia's military

potential and the nature of its foreign policy, its use of military means in a manner threatening Poland's security interests, though unlikely today and in the near future, must be taken into account in the evaluation of risks.

The present low level of Poland's military vulnerability is largely attributable to its membership in NATO, a political-military alliance based on credible mutual aid commitments. This means, however, that should the credibility of these commitments decline, the level of Poland's military risk might increase. Last but not least, Poland's membership in such a political-military alliance, recognized by its members (and by third states) both as an effective mechanism of response to aggression and an expression of the security community of the Allies, has to some extent also discouraged non-NATO states from taking hostile action against Poland in other, non-military dimensions.

All these factors show that Poland's chief stipulations in the new strategic concept debate will be to reinforce the priority of the Alliance's traditional tasks and to ensure the greatest possible automatism of an Allied response to threat (if any). The strategy document should state unequivocally that the key function of the Alliance remains its capability to deter any aggression against the territory and population of member states and to collectively respond to such threats if necessary.

Yet it is important that the priority accorded in the hierarchy of NATO's tasks to collective defense and deterrence capability be real rather than simply declared. To this end, the document's outline of the central significance of the Alliance's traditional tasks should be supplemented with additional provisions on a range of means for strengthening and developing the Allies' mutual aid and collective-defense capabilities. Such means would play the role of an additional Allied reassurance, possibly consisting of:

- up-to-date, precise, and realistic contingency plans in the event of aggression;
- deployment and development of Allied infrastructure (including the stationing, whether permanent or temporary, of other Allies' forces) in the territories of Allies who joined NATO after 1999, and integration of these members' national military installations into NATO's infrastructure, as well as their expansion and modernization, if and as required;
- appropriate shaping and preparation of the Allied forces' military capabilities (national- and international-level training programs as well as joint exercises to improve their capability to respond to aggression against individual Allies);
- maintaining the role of nuclear weapons (particularly strategic arsenals) and developing missile-defense systems as a means of deterrence.

Poland should work towards building such reassurances, for itself and for Alliance members in its immediate environment, into the new strategic concept to the largest possible extent. Presumably, in the main text, which is general by nature, only general principles for these kinds of activities can be laid down—provisions concerning activities such as regular military exercises that cover various defense scenarios, regular revisions of contingency defense plans or a pledge to spread the NATO infrastructure evenly over the territory of all members. Detailed arrangements, even if they are discussed at this stage of the NATO debate, are more likely to be made as the strategy is implemented and as documents and decisions on related issues (such as concrete contingency plans or investment programs) are developed.

Besides including statements affirming the priority of the Alliance's traditional functions in the new strategic concept, provisions concerning its remaining tasks (including out-of-area operations, activities in non-military security areas, and the nature of its cooperation with outside partners, Russia in particular) should be properly structured. The reason is that even if the primacy of the traditional mission is formally guaranteed in the document, provisions on other tasks may tie up the Alliance's resources for their implementation or otherwise negatively affect NATO's capability to perform the professed fundamental functions.

Criteria and Principles of the Alliance's Engagement in Out-of-Area Missions

From the Polish perspective, it is in the interests of the entire Alliance that the scope of its out-of-area activity—including the criteria for undertaking and the rules of conducting such missions—be set forth with utmost precision in the new strategic concept. One reason for this is the already mentioned possible impact of issues relating to out-of-area activities on the effective rank of the traditional functions in the hierarchy of the Alliance's tasks. The other reason is that this is a consequence of the push to improve the effectiveness of out-of-area operations. The new strategic concept should take into account the lessons of previous operations of this type, in particular of the ISAF mission in

Afghanistan, for this experience shows that where the goals of an operation have not been clearly determined and are not regularly updated, the Allies' assessments of the degree of different NATO members' participation required for the effective fulfillment of the mission can be widely disparate.

Except for activities to prevent or counter direct risks to the security of the territories and populations of member states, out-of-area missions should be undertaken only when they do not impair the Alliance's preparedness to perform its traditional tasks and only if they are in the interests of all states in the transatlantic region. The criteria for making decisions regarding NATO's out-of-area engagement should be determined as clearly as possible. This could be done by invoking NATO member states' interests, geographical factors (e.g., by identifying regions of particular interest to the Alliance and areas where its engagement would be lower), legal considerations (e.g., the requirement to secure the host country's consent or a mandate from the United Nations or another international organization for a NATO action), or pragmatic considerations (e.g., the need to allow for the character of NATO resources or the Alliance's capability to determine the parameters of a mission). Whatever concrete arrangements are chosen in this regard, Poland will probably seek to have the provisions on NATO's operational engagement outside the Treaty area articulated so as to ensure its selective nature.

Scope of NATO's Responsibility in Non-military Dimensions of Security

Given (from the Polish perspective) the key significance of maintaining NATO's political-military character and of enhancing Allied solidarity and readiness for deterrence and for collective defense, Poland should work towards ensuring that in the new strategic concept the scope of the Alliance's responsibility and activity in non-military dimensions of security is defined with caution. The Alliance's resources being limited, an overextension of commitments and competencies in this area could be prejudicial to its preparedness to respond to traditional challenges. At the same time, it is in Poland's interest that NATO should enhance its capability for solidarity in response to pressure brought to bear on its members using non-military means, whether by states or by non-state actors. Of particular importance in this respect is the capacity to influence Allies' security through actions undertaken in the spheres of energy security (by restricting resource supplies) and information technology and infrastructure.

Presumably, Poland will seek to have the matter of response to such activities duly addressed in the new strategic concept. This, however, should not mean re-interpreting the tasks under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in such a way that they would then be extended to the range of responses to energy and information technology security risks (or other non-military threats). It would lead to different ways of implementing Article 5 — i.e., to various responses to traditional threats and to energy and information technology threats. This would result in the weakening of both the automatism of the mechanisms of Allied support under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and the categorical nature of the obligation to support Allies in the event of threat. Therefore, a more appropriate approach would be to highlight the possibility of employing the mechanisms provided for in Article 4 of the Treaty (Allied consultation) with respect to non-military risks. A middle-of-the-road solution should also be considered with respect to the Alliance's response to any damaging impact exerted on Allied states in non-military areas, specifying the Allies' obligation to assist a NATO member so affected in remedying the adverse effects of such an event (e.g., through the provision of technical or expert support or resources). Clearly, when stipulating such provisions, the nature of the Alliance's available resources, the possibility of their development, and the scope of other NATO commitments must be taken into account.

Development of NATO-EU Relations

Poland certainly has a vital stake in developing the cooperation between NATO and the European Union, two institutions which are the principal multilateral instruments of its security policy, and in overcoming the current impasse in this area. For this reason, it would probably give cooperation with the EU a high rank in the new concept, in particular regarding the extent of the Alliance's activities outside the Treaty area and the non-military dimensions of security. This end could be served, for instance, by emphasizing expressly in the document the central significance of cooperation with the EU on out-of-area operations in line with the Alliance's current "comprehensive approach." Poland would also have considerable interest in an adjustment of the present-day conditions of the Berlin Plus formula-based model of NATO-EU cooperation. One way to address this in the new strategic concept would be to identify concrete areas of practical cooperation between the Alliance and the European

Union in the course of NATO-undertaken activities (intelligence cooperation or post-conflict reconstruction missions outside the Treaty area might be suitable examples of such cooperation). Poland should also support all constructive initiatives to remove existing obstacles to a deeper cooperation between NATO and the EU, including differences and frictions among Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus.

Relations with Outside Partners Including Russia

It is in the interest of Poland as a country with a stake in effective cooperation between NATO and non-NATO states, in particular in Eastern Europe, to see the structures serving this purpose, notably the Partnership for Peace (PfP) mechanism and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), improved. The significance of boosting this cooperation is evidenced by the fact that now—regardless of the outcome of the new strategic concept debate—a slowing down of the Alliance's enlargement is to be expected.

The existing institutional structure for NATO's cooperation with outside partners is highly complicated and nontransparent in terms of both its mechanisms and aims. As a result, its efficiency is limited. For this reason, the new strategic concept should provide the occasion for a comprehensive review of cooperation with the partners and for reforming and streamlining its institutional structures. It would be advisable to highlight the need for better, more precise identification of the objects of cooperation with partners and the requirement that cooperation must be useful from the perspective of the Alliance's interests. That said, a reform of the system of NATO partnerships should not involve discarding the current rule that the shape and scope of cooperation is at all times tailored to the needs of the different partners; rather, reform should only serve to restore its compatibility with the fundamental principles and values of the Alliance.

Doubtless, Russia remains the Alliance's most demanding partner. The new strategic concept should reaffirm NATO's openness to dialogue and cooperation with Russia and enable the broadest possible collaboration in all areas where the partners' interests converge, particularly in some out-of-area operations and non-article 5 tasks. Yet the new strategic concept should also include statements indicating expressly that the progress and development of further cooperation require from both sides respect for the fundamental principles and values governing relationships in the Euro-Atlantic area and for the interests of third parties, in particular of the non-NATO East European countries. It is also important to ensure that nothing in the wording of the new concept enables Russia to claim the right to co-decide on matters in the Alliance's exclusive jurisdiction. Also, it would be desirable for the new strategic concept to reaffirm the usefulness of the existing institutional structure of cooperation based on the Russia-NATO Council, while calling for the potential of the Council to be employed to a fuller extent.

Maintaining the Alliance's Openness

Poland will continue to support the enlargement of NATO and it should make efforts to have this matter duly taken into account in the new strategic concept. At the same time, Poland's position in this respect must take into account changes underway in the Alliance (the flagging "enlargement enthusiasm"), shifts in the international situation in the Euro-Atlantic region, and the candidate countries' transformations which bring in their wake the reduction of either these countries' level of preparedness for membership (e.g., Georgia) or of their interest in accession to NATO (Ukraine). Poland and the other Allies should also allow for the impact of enlargement (if any) on the efficiency of the Alliance and its preparedness to perform its tasks, in particular in the areas of deterrence and collective defense. Under the circumstances, Poland will presumably look to the Alliance to expressly confirm its commitment to continue the "open door" policy, albeit without suggesting concrete candidates. Presumably, Poland would consider it advisable for the new concept to emphasize that any enlargement of the Alliance must be conducive to its strengthening. At the same time, it would rather firmly oppose attempts to introduce additional conditions, different from those agreed upon to date, to be applied to any potential candidate.