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ISSUEBRIEF

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STRATEGIC ADVISORS GROUP

Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach

"Amateurs think tactics [first], professionals put logistics and command and control first."

General Sir David Richards, Chief of the General Staff, British Army

Core Messages

- Strategic Concepts tend to have a life of ten years. The focus for the next ten years will doubtlessly remain Afghanistan and, for much of that period, allies will be engaged in hybrid operations under pressure to do more with less. For Canada and European allies, this will place a particular emphasis on tight civil-military synergies. Moreover, a broad approach to security is very much part of the emerging European strategic culture.
- The Comprehensive Approach is the generation and application of security, governance and development services, expertise, structures and resources over time and distance in partnership with host nations, host regions, allied and partner governments and partner institutions, both governmental and non-governmental.
- Given the drafting of the new Strategic Concept and the critical phase into which operations in Afghanistan have entered, all NATO headquarters should be encouraged to further experiment and to share their experiences to enhance the understanding of the Comprehensive Approach through Allied Command Transformation (ACT).
- If the Comprehensive Approach is to work as it should, the concepts and doctrine underpinning such a cross-Alliance effort must also be matched by the efficient generation and use of required resources, political will and strategic patience.

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 Fred Kempe, 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.

The SAG and its activities are generously sponsored by the Scowcroft Group, EADS North America, and Airbus.

- The creation of a new Strategic Concept affords the Alliance an opportunity to restore multinational formations such as the High Readiness Forces (HRF) and, pivotally, the NATO Response Force (NRF) as core planning and effect elements in the Comprehensive Approach. All bespoke NATO forces have suffered from being disaggregated by American commands and from the re-nationalization of the Alliance effort in Afghanistan due to the particular and peculiar organization of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).
- Thus far experience of the international civil-military effort in Afghanistan has emphasized three weaknesses in the Allied effort: a) the creation of national stovepipes that undermine the transnational effort and thus weaken cross-theater cooperation; b) an inability to measure

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progress (or otherwise) in the key areas of governance, such as rule of law and development; and c) an inability to speak with one voice to actors in region.

- However, if the goals established by General McChrystal for ISAF are to be achieved, unity of effort to comprise far more than the merger of the military counter-terror and counterinsurgency efforts will be required. The challenge will be to reach out effectively to include key civilian partners at an early stage in campaign planning.
- High-level political fusion is also critical to both unity of purpose and effort and ideally would be achieved through the driving influence of a senior political figure able to act as a consistent interface between the political level and all partners to an operation.
- This is a tipping point for the Alliance. If the Strategic Concept is not written with at least the understanding of the fundamentals of operational effectiveness in hybrid conflict, then the Alliance might persist as a political organization, but the effective and credible fighting power upon which it is and must be based could well decline to the point where no operational or deterrent role is credible.

Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach: The Next Steps

Promote a Shared Level of Ambition. For the Comprehensive Approach to function at the Alliance-level, the new Strategic Concept must promote a level of ambition to use NATO to that effect. Indeed, the Comprehensive Approach must be seen from the outset as a whole-of-government/s issue with structures built accordingly at Alliance-level to plan, direct and coordinate with the sustained backing of nations to support the theater-level effort. Equally, the Alliance must avoid over-bureaucratizing the process by avoiding the flags-to-post trap that so undermines NATO efficiency.

Operationalize the Comprehensive Approach at Alliance Level. The effective operationalization of the Comprehensive Approach at an Alliance-level is central to the future utility of NATO. In turn, the Alliance, given its significance as an actor in international military operations, is vital to the effective, legitimate conduct of the Comprehensive Approach if mission success is to be achieved in future hybrid operations. The Strategic Concept must state that clearly. However, experience gained from the operational experimentation of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) suggests that a much more systematic approach at NATO command level is needed to generate and sustain all elements and partnerships, with a clear focus on delivering security, governance and development in-theater.

Create a Comprehensive Approach Command. The center of gravity of the Comprehensive Approach must be the four-star theater command with standardized High Readiness Forces (Land) (HRF (L)) fighting the tactical battle.[1] Ideally, the Strategic Concept should call for a bespoke Comprehensive Approach Command under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) to ensure that civil-military integration takes place from top to bottom. The command should flow from the strategic to the tactical, with the strategic headquarters not only ensuring that campaign planning is sound but above all ensuring the organization and delivery of forces and resources to the theater.

Adopt a Holistic View of Operations. The new Strategic Concept should reinforce the notion that operations within the compass of the Comprehensive Approach must be based on a holistic view of strategic objectives. It is particularly important that all partners in an operation share a common assessment of the possible impact of tactical operations on overall mission success.

Understand the Critical Role of Influence. Influence is the central organizing concept for hybrid operations and successful implementation of the Comprehensive Approach. All other elements (campaign planning, targeting policy and strategic communications) are part of a holistic approach to the generation of influence both in theater and at home.

Create Flexible and Innovative Command and Control. Flexible and innovative command and control arrangements across the civil-military spectrum should be one of the big ideas in the new Strategic Concept. To that end, NATO strategic commands must become far more rigorous in their application of a standard model of effective and flexible command and control, able to embrace and reach out to key civilian partners (civilian agencies of member and partner nations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations), supported by High Readiness Forces that are able to operate at a tactical level as a rotational planning and command nexus for sustained operations.

1 The seven HRF (L) HQs of NATO's Force Structure include, in addition to the ARRC, the Eurocorps, the 1st German-Netherlands Corps, the NATO Rapid Deployment Corps-Italy, the NATO Rapid Deployment Corps-Spain, the NATO Rapid Deployment Corps-Turkey, and the Rapid Reaction Corps-France.

Further Reform the NATO Command Structure. NATO has too many headquarters justified on the basis of politics and geography rather than function. Ideally, the Allied Joint Force Command at Brunssum in the Netherlands would be the supporting command for Headquarters ISAF (HQ ISAF) in Kabul, with responsibility for pre-deployment training, deployment of forces and long-term resource planning with HQ ISAF reporting directly to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium. Without such reform, the tendency of nations to retreat back into national stovepipes during deployments will persist and all the effort invested in both a trans-national Comprehensive Approach (worthy of the name) and multinational formations designed to generate cost-effective, strategic, theater and tactical effect will wither.

Build Systematic Relationships with Partners. The new Strategic Concept should urge the Alliance to seek the establishment of more systematic relations between partner institutions, such as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN). Such relationships must also be further extended to major non-governmental organizations and all states engaged in hybrid conflict to promote a better understanding of achievable aspirations, enhanced campaign planning and where and when partnership is essential and possible.

Make the Comprehensive Approach Central to a New NATO-EU Relationship. NATO-EU relations should be built on and around the Comprehensive Approach, and the new Strategic Concept should promote such a vision. The method implicit in the Comprehensive Approach is central to the emerging European strategic culture for all its many failings. Indeed, given that the Comprehensive Approach is the chosen tool for dealing with complex challenges in complex places over time and distance, the identity of a deployed force matters almost as much as the force deployed. There will be times when it would be politically more efficient to have an EU rather than a NATO flag on a mission. To that end, a new EU Strategic Headquarters could be justified alongside a NATO Comprehensive Approach Command.

Encourage Operational Experimentation. If the operational experimentation undertaken by the ARRC is to be capitalized upon, far more work needs to be done to promote truly credible and effective combined, joint and comprehensive (CJC) civil-military command and control. The NRF (or rather a new NRF concept) should lead the effort to promote operational experimentation to identify what is really needed in command and control terms.

Schedule Regular Meetings and Exercises. The Alliance should call for regular meetings and exercises to enhance a better understanding of the opportunities for cooperation (and constraints) and lead to a better understanding of achievable goals within likely agreed timeframes. Therefore, building on the Mid-Term Exercise Program, a more systematic set of exercises is needed with a detailed audit process with the results shared with all partner institutions and partner states. Often such exercises should be civilian-led.

Enhance NATO Civilian Capacity and Capability. NATO lacks a capability beyond short-term infrastructure development that is itself limited to the direct support of deployable forces. To operationalize the Comprehensive Approach, NATO requires a broader understanding of capacity and capability development, assured access to resources and a determination to become involved in these sectors.

Identify and Recruit Subject Matter Experts. NATO Subject Matter Experts (SME) are needed both at the center and within operational headquarters. The Strategic Concept process should result in NATO overcoming political constraints and acting to meet this personnel requirement. Certainly, NATO needs to build civilian capability within structures with seconded, civilian experts at SHAPE, Joint Force (JF) and HRF levels. This is different from merely looking after civilians the Alliance has deployed to a mission, but rather involves the creation of specific command and control structures to support such civilian efforts together with systematic access at short notice to relevant expertise prior to other actors taking the lead.

Build Deployable Civilian Expertise. Civilian expertise will need to be deployed forward to support headquarters such as the ARRC. A more systematic approach to training and education is also needed as part of a Comprehensive Approach doctrine with a particular focus on how to operate in a multinational military organization, understand the contemporary operating environment, build networks with civilian organizations, and apply different planning methodologies. To that end, NATO should seek to harmonize national efforts to create pools of deployable civilian expertise, as well as further develop its own civilian capabilities.

Create Dedicated Civilian Planning Elements. HRF headquarters must be able to effectively "plug and play" with a cadre of civilian experts built around a dedicated Civilian Planning Element (CPE) itself embedded in the civil-military planning and civil support elements of a headquarters. The CPE must be able to transfer knowledge and know-how to successors to ensure campaign momentum.

Ensure Continuity at the Politico-Military (Pol-Mil) Level. Continuity at the pol-mil level is vital. Indeed, NATO is best placed to develop in-theater leadership and coordinating mechanisms such as a Policy Steering Group (PSG)/Policy Action Group (PAG) and a Civilian Planning Element vital to the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Approach. However, a PSG/PAG will by its nature be theater-specific, but CPEs must be developed for all NATO headquarters and fully integrated into the best practice of SHAPE and Brunssum. This will ensure that all partners critical to mission success are brought into the process (physically as well as figuratively) and thus embrace both concept and design early in the operational cycle.

Craft Effective Strategic Communications. Promoting effective strategic communications through the Alliance must be a central theme of the new Strategic Concept, vital as it is to the Comprehensive Approach. NATO needs a public diplomacy effort in support of strategic communications that goes beyond current structures and which is properly plugged in to all planning and command processes. Effective strategic communications explain why actions are necessary. Effective targeting policy must always be able to justify such actions in terms of both mission and public opinion. Broad consultation over policy with key civilian partners, a wider understanding of what comprises a strategic communications target (both friends and foes) and a strategic communications strategy that places all actions within a broad context would help synchronize and de-conflict efforts among partners.

Understand the Consequences of Failure. Failure will mean that the Comprehensive Approach will only ever "work" if one member (the United States) leads which, while attractive in the short term, will tend to undermine the legitimacy and multinational ethos that is vital for mission success. This would reinforce the tendency of member nations and partner institutions to retreat into stovepipes and thus undermine unity of purpose and effort.

Conclusion

The new Strategic Concept must make the operationalization of the Comprehensive Approach central to the future development of the Alliance and its modernization. While the ARRC is to be commended for its attempts to create a multinational, multi-disciplinary hub, such transformation will need to go significantly further if a truly multinational culture is to be created throughout the Alliance. While the United States is not exempt from the challenge of matching tight forces and resources to broad horizons, such dilemmas are acute for Europeans and Canadians. Indeed, only through innovative and imaginative use of all national security tools (civilian and military) through institutions such as the Alliance will Europeans and Canadians be able to plausibly close the gap between a world that increasingly buffets them and the implicit and explicit security task-list that emerges from a changing strategic environment. Indeed, a balance between protection and projection will be pivotal to the functioning of the Alliance.

NATO is of course the sum of nations' ambitions. At present there is a growing gap between aspirations/agreed concepts and the willingness of nations to meet commitments. Hybrid operations invariably require nations to demonstrate strategic patience. Given that the public finances of most allies are under severe pressure, investment in quality personnel would offer a cost-effective opportunity to enhance Alliance effect. If the Alliance could embrace such a level of ambition, then the transformational would become the credibly operational and the Comprehensive Approach would be realized in full. NATO's new Strategic Concept must embrace that vision.

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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** or Program Associate Director Jeff Lightfoot at **jlightfoot@acus.org**.

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