



## **NATO's Strategic Concept: Back to the Future**

**Interview with Giampaolo Di Paola  
by Alessandro Marrone**

### **Abstract**

The NATO reflection on the new Strategic Concept is moving to its conclusion, and there are some steps forward about important issues such as missile defence and cyber security. The NATO Military Committee Chairman, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, comments on that in this interview focused on the upcoming Lisbon Summit where the new Strategic Concept will be approved.

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## NATO's Strategic Concept: Back to the Future

Interview with Giampaolo Di Paola by Alessandro Marrone\*

The NATO reflection on the new Strategic Concept is moving to its conclusion, and there are some steps forward about important issues such as missile defence and cyber security. The NATO Military Committee Chairman, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, comments on that in this interview focused on the upcoming Lisbon Summit where the new Strategic Concept will be approved.

### **NATO's Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministers in their meeting last October discussed, among other things, the draft of the new Strategic Concept. What was said about it?**

During the Ministerial meeting Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen presented his draft of the Strategic Concept, in order to have a validation by the Ministers that his work is going in the right direction. He wanted a political guidance at the Ministerial level, then the Heads of State and Government gathering in Lisbon on the 20th of November will have the last word on the Strategic Concept. It seems to me that there has been a very strong convergence on the draft presented by the Secretary General, perhaps beyond expectations. Now Rasmussen can make the necessary, slight modifications to the document prior to the Lisbon Summit.

### **Did the Ministers reach an agreement on the missile defence of Europe? What are the perspectives on that issue?**

As the Secretary General has repeatedly said, missile defence is a NATO priority and the Lisbon Summit will have to take a decision on that. In the Ministerial meeting there was an acknowledgment that the missile threat to Europe is real, and that the technical solutions to address it exist. Now it is up to the Lisbon Summit to take the political decision to extend the missile defence, which already covers our troops deployed in the field, to the territories and citizens of NATO countries, against a threat that could be well included in the Art. 5 umbrella related to collective defence. If the Heads of State and Government decide to proceed with missile defence, there will be a clear willingness by all member states to initiate a dialogue with Russia. The Russian Federation may be the target of missile attacks and may have an interest in a missile defence including also the Russian territory. If NATO decides to move forward on this issue it will be up to Russia to make its own reflections and decide whether to work together with NATO on missile defence.

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**Will cyber-security be included in the NATO tasks? Shall a cyber attack against member states' cyber infrastructures be considered an Art. 5 case?**

There is an absolute convergence among member states about the fact that cyber security is one of the new challenges to Allies' security, and that NATO shall develop adequate capacities to address it. Art. 5 has a clear formulation, but what has to be considered is that an Art. 5 attack is decided on a case-by-case basis. We have to keep in mind that so far this Article has been activated only once, in relation to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, and in the previous decades nobody had thought that such a non-military attack would be considered under the Art. 5. Therefore, Art. 5 will continue to have a flexible interpretation in the foreseeable future. With regards to cyber security, it will depend on the attack's characteristics, its size and effects, as well as the possibility to identify its authors. This is true for cyber security as for other asymmetric threats like terrorism. In the Stone Age the weapons were made by stones, during the Cold War by tanks, in 9/11 by civilian airplanes, and in the future they may be missiles or cyber attacks.

**What role will NATO have with regard to energy security?**

Energy security is obviously a central issue for all member states, and NATO is thinking about it. But we have still to define what role the Alliance can have on that. NATO may carry on tasks like the protection of member states' critical infrastructures and of maritime routes where energy flows: these tasks directly contribute to energy security. In addition, the creation of a positive atmosphere among energy producing, importing, and transit countries through political-military cooperation indirectly contributes to energy security. For example, if NATO improves relations with Russia, it indirectly reduces energy security risks. On the other hand, the Alliance has nothing to say and nothing to do on the development or diversification of energy sources.

**What impact does Afghanistan have on the Strategic Concept's elaboration? Out-of-area missions as the Afghan one will remain part of NATO tasks?**

The approach "never Afghanistan again" has to be rejected. It has no sense to state that operations as the Afghan one are carried on "never" or "always". If there will be situations where NATO will consider it has to intervene according to its threat assessment, the Alliance will do it deciding on a case-by-case basis. We have learned from Afghanistan that threats to transatlantic security come also from outside the transatlantic area, and if we decide to intervene we'll act accordingly. The transatlantic security is not "Euro-centric" anymore. Security challenges as the Afghan one can be addressed only through the comprehensive approach and the international cooperation. Therefore, partnerships and a global political dialogue with countries so far out of NATO reach, like China and India, become more and more important. Dialogue and partnership are strategic and political tools, aimed to build up international security and do crisis prevention, and not just a way to obtain troops from contributing countries for one mission or another.

**Will NATO remain a priority of the US foreign policy?**

According to the statements of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defence Bob Gates, as well as of President Barack Obama, the American commitment to NATO continues to be strong. Of course, we have to acknowledge that the centre of gravity of our security is moving from the Euro-Atlantic area to Asia and the Pacific, also in geopolitical terms. This is one of the reasons for developing a new Strategic Concept. NATO has to be aware that transatlantic security does not depend only from Europe as it did in the past. If NATO maintains this awareness, also expressed in the Strategic Concept, the US will renew their commitment to the Alliance.

**With regard to the elaboration process of the Strategic Concept, what impact has the Group of Experts chaired by Madeleine Albright had?**

It has had a very strong impact. The Secretary General is writing the Strategic Concept, he practically "holds the pen in his hands," but he has also clearly said that his writing is largely based on the Group of Expert report "NATO 2020: assured security, dynamic engagement." The elaboration of the report has involved a broad range of actors, and its results have been broadly appreciated. As a whole, the Group of Experts has had a very significant role in the elaboration process.

**What difficulties is the Alliance having in finalizing the Strategic Concept? Are there disagreements on NATO global reach or relations with Russia?**

We are not debating about a "global NATO." The goal of the Alliance remains the same: the defence of member states. Yet NATO operates in a world which has changed and therefore cannot avoid having a "global awareness": the awareness that threats to our security can come from far away, be it the Somali coast or Afghanistan. Nowadays, all member states are aware that threats can arise within or outside the NATO perimeter, nobody wants a "global NATO," and all acknowledge the necessity of a "global awareness."

Regarding Russia, all member states recognize the opportunity and the importance of establishing cooperation with Moscow. Of course there may be different perspectives among Allies. Nevertheless, the Pratica di Mare Agreement, which, in 2002, established the NATO-Russia Council, contains fundamental principles still valid for NATO members. On that basis all of us want to realize a partnership with Russia. The point is that it takes two to cooperate; therefore the hope is that Russia will want to cooperate with NATO as we want with Russia. Among the Allies some think that it will surely happen while others believe it is unlikely. However, even the most prudent NATO member states recognize the necessity of a serious and cooperative partnership with Moscow.

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**During the event organized in September in Rome by IAI and Aspen Institute<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Rasmussen focused his speech on Russia. What are the perspectives of cooperation with Moscow, particularly with regard to the Treaty on the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) and on the Russian proposal for a new pan-European Treaty?**

Generally speaking, there is the willingness for discussion on every issue with Russia, yet, right now, there are enough international treaties on European security. The point is rather to implement them. The CFE shall be discussed in the adequate forum, that means the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), because it is fundamental for the European security. The Alliance is indeed very interested in a renewed CFE based on fundamental principles such as transparency, reciprocity, mutual restraint and host nation consent. We are ready to discuss on the basis of these principles, now it is up to Russia to demonstrate its commitment. We hope this will happen, although this is not clear so far and some Allies are more cautious than others. The Alliance has demonstrated its willingness to establish a dialogue through the invitations of the highest Russian representatives to the NATO-Russia Council, which will take place in Lisbon alongside the NATO Summit aimed to approve the Strategic Concept.

**How do you evaluate the status of NATO-EU relations? What will the new Strategic Concept say about it?**

It is expected that the Strategic Concept will strongly re-affirm the strategic character of NATO-EU relations. There are well-known political problems regarding this relationship, which need a clear political willingness in the NATO and in the EU frameworks to be solved. The operational cooperation between the two organizations is very advanced, for example, when NATO and EU missions are deployed together in the same theatre. It is quite normal that when there are political-institutional problems the officials on the ground pragmatically try to work together. If those problems would be resolved, the operational cooperation would work much better.

*Updated 16 November 2010*

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<sup>1</sup> See Lecture on "Challenges for the alliance ahead of the NATO summit and beyond" with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, organized by Istituto affari internazionali (AI) and Aspen Institute Italia, Rome, 17 September 2010, [http://www.iai.it/sections\\_en/convegni/archivioconvegni/conferences\\_2010.asp#Rasmussen](http://www.iai.it/sections_en/convegni/archivioconvegni/conferences_2010.asp#Rasmussen).



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