

Old wine in a new bottle? NATO's new Strategic Concept

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>> Recently, a group of distinguished international experts led by former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright presented the report *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement*. This should feed into the drafting process of a new Strategic Concept (SC), to be presented at the Lisbon Summit at the end of November.

The report argues that NATO should stick to its core tasks and refrain from taking on new responsibilities such as energy security and environmental issues. While the report is meant to advise the Secretary General in drafting a new SC, the working group's main objective is somewhat unclear. The report incorporates some text that the experts would probably wish to see included in the SC, while other sections relate to what NATO should ideally be doing instead of what it actually can and will do, the latter being the key purpose of the SC.

Numerous security analysts have long argued that a new SC is necessary to replace the current 1999 version. But it seems that changes to the document are likely to be minimal. The current text needs a serious edit; cutting it down from 12 to a more digestible 4–6 pages, while incorporating a clear vision on key topics. The SC is meant to simply set out NATO's main tasks in accordance with the Atlantic Charter – specific policy documents or NATO Summit declarations can be more in-depth. Although since 1999 the world and the Euro-Atlantic security landscape have changed through the war on terrorism, proliferation of new threats, EU enlargement, an assertive and critical Russia and the development of an EU security and defence policy, the basis of NATO's capabilities and aims remains largely unchanged. As a result, a new SC should be kept simple and flexible.

HIGHLIGHTS

- NATO's new Security Concept should outline the Alliance's position in the debate on European security architecture
- With enlargement on hold, the Security Concept should be innovative in restructuring, deepening and diversifying NATO's diverse partnerships
- NATO should discuss mechanisms to push European allies to contribute more to collective security, thus reducing the capabilities gap with the US

»»»»» Although no serious novelties are expected, the drafting exercise has been useful. NATO went to great lengths to make the SC formulation process transparent. In most member states, debates were held and several Brussels-based think tanks organised conferences, held virtual debates and uploaded blogs. NATO is always concerned with its external image and felt it needed to make a serious public diplomacy effort in which the process became as important as the outcome.

Secretary General Rasmussen is now outlining the main points that NATO wants to address in the new SC. Following this, the consultation process with the 28 capitals will begin, hopefully leading to a concrete draft by NATO staff. This exercise could bring out divisions between member states. Issues such as policy towards Russia, the balance between territorial defence and expeditionary missions, and financial contributions are likely to prove contentious. New Eastern European members will want to focus on territorial defence and take a tough stance towards Russia, while countries such as the US, UK and to a lesser extent the Netherlands and Denmark will be frontrunners in 'out of area' missions, taking a less critical stance towards Russian policies. South European members and Germany will seek to reassure Russia and may be uncomfortable with an overhaul of the more high-risk expeditionary missions.

In any event, NATO will have difficulty developing clear plans and innovative policies for the new SC in three key areas: NATO's position in the evolving European (or Atlantic and Eurasian) security architecture; the Alliance's extensive partnerships; and bridging the gap between US and European capabilities, especially given the current economic crisis.

THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Surprisingly, the Albright report is silent on the debate over the European security architecture initiated by Russian president Medvedev in June 2008. Moscow's regained self-confidence has led to active diplomacy for a new binding security treaty that would override NATO and Organisation for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provisions. Some NATO members have looked favourably at Russia's proposals while others are sceptical.

The main principle of the Russian proposed treaty is the indivisibility of security, a provision that NATO members already enjoy but have a different understanding of. NATO members are unlikely to extend this principle to Russia and other non-NATO members because it will probably be regarded as the right of any participant to initiate consultations if that member feels its security is affected by the actions of another. This would open a Pandora's Box of debates. Moreover, most NATO members feel that collective security is covered through NATO with the option for Russia to increase its engagement in the latter. Indivisibility of security could also be interpreted as veto power for all members. It might lead to harsher dividing lines in Europe, as a member state could prevent another country from joining a security organisation.

After Russia aired its ideas at several international gatherings, the debate was taken up in 2009 by the OSCE, the appropriate forum. The OSCE Corfu process was established in 2009 to guide discussions, but has little to show so far. The Russians, who basically support the OSCE debate, insist on a second-track option with NATO, to whom they delivered a draft treaty last November. NATO shows little interest. But Russia wants the debate to solely deal with hard security issues and feels that the OSCE is too 'soft' with its human rights and democracy emphasis. The Russians believe that these issues belong at the Council of Europe. Interestingly, although the US – traditionally a strong promoter of the human dimension – had stopped regarding the OSCE as a serious security forum, it has made an about-turn under the Obama administration, debating with Russia the indivisibility principle within the OSCE format.

The international expert report proposes strengthening the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) but remains silent on the Russian-initiated debate. Also, it avoids commenting on NATO's relationship and division of competences with the OSCE and the EU. If the new SC is to have an

innovative impact and offer a clear, open view on European, Atlantic and Eurasian security architecture, it should include the following two elements. First, the SC should go further than welcoming increased cooperation with Russia within the NRC. It must remind Moscow that membership of NATO would solve the debate about security architecture in one stroke. Such a move is not as simple as it appears: Russia has not taken the NRC seriously, sending the flamboyant and often offensive Dmitry Rogozin to NATO as its ambassador. Membership would entail years of intense reform in Russia; not only military reform but also in meeting economic and, especially, democratic credentials. Second, the SC should argue that the OSCE is the main forum in the Atlantic and Eurasian area that can enhance all-

inclusive security cooperation and further the notion of the indivisibility of security.

Although this cannot be included in the SC, NATO would do well to persuade the EU and US to hold an annual security

conference with Russia (and possibly Turkey as a fourth power). These are the main actors who agree on security provisions. These could then be taken up in detail by the OSCE with its members' consent. The conferences would be another mechanism for Russia to engage in the development of the European security architecture.

ENLARGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

NATO's enlargement is currently on hold. Georgia saw its chances evaporate due to the war with Russia; Ukraine will show no interest under the new more pro-Russian president Yanukovich; and Greek-Macedonian relations have reached a stalemate over the latter's constitutional name, which blocks Macedonia's immediate entry. The 16 year old 'open door policy' is as valid as ever but, with

the exception of Macedonia and maybe Montenegro in a few years' time, no new members are expected any time soon.

NATO's future lies in the successful evolution of old partnerships and the establishment of new ones. The experts' report covers partnerships in detail, devoting a chapter to the subject. The report sensibly proposes to revise partnerships, expand their list of activities and apply greater differentiation between partner countries and NATO.

The Partnership for Peace (PfP) is NATO's most successful partnership, incorporating European countries such as Ireland and Switzerland and all countries in the former Soviet space. Differentiation is indeed important here, but not through adding new acronyms to the already extensive list of initiatives. Rather, individual partner-NATO relations should be increased. Greater military cooperation is viable with some partners, while with others NATO could augment its assistance to democratic reform of the security sector. The EAPC – the formal framework of the PfP, bringing all the member countries together in regular meetings – could be scrapped; given that differentiation is more important than maintaining ineffective forums that also take place elsewhere. PfP members' consultations with NATO could also be held outside the EAPC remit. Differentiation combined with deepening cooperation is highly advisable for the southern partners of NATO in the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Process. Otherwise, these initiatives risk becoming ineffective 'talking shops'.

NATO's partnership with the EU is of prime importance, as membership of the two organisations frequently overlaps and both often work in the same areas. The link between NATO military capabilities and EU civilian capacity should be further exploited, for instance in Afghanistan. However, the situation is not so clear-cut: the EU has military ambitions of its own. The expert report correctly argues that the new SC should recognise the Lisbon Treaty and the EU's plans to play a stronger military role.

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»»»»» With regard to the OSCE, the report focuses on the value of its human dimension and soft security aspects, as well as early warning and conventional arms control, which seems insufficient. The fact remains that Europe's three main security organisations have long argued that deeper cooperation and policy streamlining is necessary, yet in practice this relates to cooperation on the ground in missions and not between officials at the respective organisations' headquarters.

NATO should also be open to new partnerships. So far it has avoided formalising links with both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation led by Russia and China and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which Russia considers its own counterpart to NATO and which incorporates most Central Asian states plus Armenia and Belarus.

The report seems to resolve the global partnership debate. Up to now it has not been decided whether to include strong democracies outside the Euro-Atlantic area, powerful partners such as China or strategic partners like Pakistan. Differentiation is now the buzzword for NATO's partnerships. The organisation should be more flexible in cooperating with non-members, but collective security still depends on whether a country is 'in or out'.

FINANCE AND FIGHTING

The economic crisis has not left NATO unscathed. Whereas most of NATO's worries have derived from Russia or Afghanistan, the shortage of funding and the discrepancy between EU and US defence resources may become more acute and create dividing lines within the Alliance. Although NATO's budget runs a deficit, NATO troops on mission are still paid for by the member states themselves. This results in financial restraints for member states where the deployment of troops is concerned, and also in free-rider behaviour in the eyes of allies that do contribute to expensive high-risk missions.

Only seven out of 28 members meet the NATO advised threshold of spending two per cent of their GDP on defence. Although it is too late for this SC,

the next summit in Portugal should debate how members can be increasingly made to pay their dues. The burden-sharing debate of the 1990s might resurface, this time including ideas on influence being connected to contribution. Meanwhile the Secretary General has implemented a process of in-house reform, hoping to make NATO more cost-effective and efficient.

The difference between European and US defence spending – and thus contributions to NATO – remains enormous, with the US plus Canada spending almost twice as much on defence in 2008 as European NATO members combined. The level of European defence coordination and cooperation is low; 26 Ministries of Defence (excluding Albania, Croatia, Norway and Turkey) each have their own budgets and bureaucracies, with limited European defence budgets. From these budgets, they must also contribute to maintaining and investing in two international structures; the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and NATO. This difficult challenge is another reason to further integrate EU and NATO capabilities.

Scant financial resources and shrinking defence budgets might have already had an impact on the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, but in the longer term will put the cohesion and strength of the organisation at risk. NATO will need to push on with its military transformation to combine affordable and effective territorial defence with capabilities to deploy peace enforcement missions with fewer national caveats and more interoperability.

NATO will need to pick its battles and plan carefully with other international players. Where NATO overlaps with the EU, it should back down and stay true to its core responsibilities of collective security, out-of-area peace support missions and strengthening security through partnerships.

CONCLUSION

The Alliance still needs to find its place in a less centralised and more complicated international order. The obstacles NATO faces are no more

difficult than those confronting other organisations. One could even argue that the EU and OSCE face much graver challenges due to their internal differences, and frequently ill-functioning mechanisms. In that case, NATO is actually in a fairly advantageous position, with strong Atlantic ties and members who see the organisation as essential to their security.

That said, there is no denying that the challenges remain sizeable. NATO does not only lack answers to what its role should be in European security architecture, partnerships and the economic crisis. Urgent security concerns also include missile defence, cyber wars, military transformation, civil-military cooperation in complex peace enforcement missions and combining an effective mission in Afghanistan with a phased mid- to long-term exit strategy.

It appears that NATO will continue to struggle with these questions but will remain the bottom-line security guarantee for the Euro-Atlantic area. The Alliance will need to be modest in drafting its new SC. As a result, the new concept is likely to be nothing more than old wine in a new barrel. Hopefully this wine will mature with time.

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