

# NATO Long-Term Defense Planning: Implications for the Future

## - Findings and Conclusions -

Col. Peter FABER<sup>1</sup>

The NATO Defense College recently conducted a Long-Term Defense Planning (LTDP) Seminar for planners from 21 Alliance and Partner nations (Rome, 9-10 October 2003). The primary objectives of the 1½-day-long Seminar included the following:

- To review and analyze best-practice planning tools/methods available to NATO and individual nations.
- To facilitate cooperation in defense planning matters.
- To provide a discussion forum for Alliance members and PfP/Mediterranean Dialogue countries about further developments in defense planning matters.

The Seminar's presentations and discussions, held as usual under Chatham House Rules, fell into three broad categories – “The Long-Term Planning Context”; “The Challenges of Long-Term Planning”; and “Best Practices in Long-Range Planning.” For the purposes of this follow-on synopsis, however, it is more helpful to break down the information discussed into four parts.

- 1- Long-Term Defense Planning (LTDP): Definitions, Advantages, and Principles.
- 2- NATO and Long-Term Defense Planning – Two Foundational (and Necessary) Points.
- 3- LTDP – National-Level Issues and Dilemmas for NATO's Smaller Members.
- 4- A Suggested LTDP Model for individual Nations and the NATO Alliance as a Whole.

### ***1. Long-Term Defense Planning (LTDP): Definitions, Advantages, and Principles***

- General defense planning has many guises, including . . .

- ❖ *Force planning*, which seeks to provide a commander the fullest range of military capabilities possible.
- ❖ *Operational planning*, which involves choosing the best military options available.
- ❖ And *functional planning*, which involves nuclear planning, different forms of standardization, and other forms of specific/localized planning.

- During the Cold War, *force planning* held pride of place in NATO. It “operationalized” all other forms of planning into force goals that ultimately yielded the capabilities needed to blunt aggression by the Warsaw Pact.

---

<sup>1</sup> Col. Peter Faber is Researcher at the Academic Research Branch of the NATO Defense College, Rome.

- In today's post-Cold War environment, *force planning* remains critical to NATO's success, but it is *long-term defense planning* which is one of the two "glues" that now hold the Alliance together (the other is the Alliance's unified command structure).
- A definition: *Long-term defense planning* is more of a process than a desired end state. It is a process that first anticipates possible operating environments in the future, and then develops *force structure development plans* (SDPs) to best adapt defensive organizations like NATO to those environments, despite a host of constraints (constitutional, legal, financial, etc.).
  - ❖ Long-term defense planning relies on at least six types of approaches, used either singly or in complementary/overlapping ways. They include the following.
    - ❖ *Top-down planning*. – i.e., "strategy to tasks" planning. In this case, the planning process begins with the identification of top-level interests and objectives, which then yield strategies designed to support them.
    - ❖ *Resource-constrained planning* attempts to provide viable and sustainable military capabilities while constrained by limited budgets. Within this context, analysts do not investigate force structure options that are too expensive, regardless of the potential performance jumps such "budget breakers" might provide.
      - *Incremental planning* is a risk avoidance planning method. It pursues near-term developments and doable options in order to introduce evolutionary improvements in capabilities.
      - *Capability-based planning* also prepares defense organizations for the future, but not in terms of concrete weapons systems and/or specific manning levels. Instead, this form of planning identifies the tasks to be done and the generic capabilities needed to accomplish them.
      - *Scenario-based planning* is self-explanatory. Planners use hypothetical events and environments as test beds to determine what capabilities and/or force structures they may need to meet future threats in different parts of the world.
      - *Threat-based planning* involves identifying potential adversaries and evaluating their expected capabilities, now and in the future. Outperforming these opponents, both qualitatively and quantitatively, is central to this type of planning. (It differs from scenario-based planning in that humanitarian and other non-violent contingencies are not part of this scenario set.)
- Regardless of how you define long-term defense planning or what particular methodologies you use, it provides NATO with genuine advantages.
  - ❖ It promotes a common worldview.
  - ❖ More specifically, it promotes a common, more realistic view of actual and potential risks, and how to deal with them.
  - ❖ Agreed-upon risks then inspire/permit the development of agreed-upon medium to long-term strategies.

- ❖ These long-haul strategies then make short-term ones more coherent and affordable.
  - ❖ Long-term defense planning discourages NATO members from pursuing/adopting “more of everything” philosophies, which has been an Alliance problem in the past.
  - ❖ It also serves as an educational tool, it promulgates new ideas/fresh thinking, and it stimulates in-depth reflection on existing defense policies.
  - ❖ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, LTDP will help Alliance members adopt – more effectively and efficiently – a new out-of-area-operations mindset. (The new mindset requires Alliance members to jettison their stay-at-home, territorial defense biases; it requires a proactive defensive philosophy dedicated to avoiding, containing, managing or resolving crises at their point of origin, and therefore before they grow out of control; it requires new emphases on new capabilities, force structures/arrangements, forms of sustainability, “tail-to-tooth” logistics arrangements, and much more.)
- However, if long-term planners are to exploit the above advantages properly, they must remember and/or adhere to the following principles.
- ❖ LTDP has to be intellectually rigorous if it is going to surmount conservatism, “sacred cows,” and/or entrenched interests.
  - ❖ It has to be cautious about the applicability/believability of recent “lessons learned.”
  - ❖ It must be variables oriented.
  - ❖ National-level LTDP must consciously prepare for multinational operations (the US is the only exception).
  - ❖ LTDP cycles should last from 8-10 years – shorter cycles lack necessary coherence.
  - ❖ LTDP is never just a technical exercise – it is also a highly political process that needs to be debated in political terms (i.e., good and continual dialogue must exist between long-term planners and policy makers). At the same time, if care is not taken to ensure objectivity in LTDP, it risks being seen as merely a political tool and being dismissed.

## ***2. NATO and Long-Term Defense Planning – Two Foundational (and Necessary) Points***

With the LTDP-related issues of definitions, advantages, and principles addressed in Part 1, the next logical step is to highlight the fundamental theme/conclusion drawn by seminar participants, and the various challenges it faces in the future.

- Point#1: Increased NATO-level LTDP is an absolute necessity for the future – lesser (i.e., national-level) forms of cooperation are only workable/feasible in the short run.
- ❖ Increased NATO-level LTDP will encourage . . .

- Collective procurement of military means.
  - A greater division of labor (via task specialization).
  - Enhanced operational cooperation (as in the case of the NATO Response Force).
  - Improved pooling of resources and capabilities.
  - Expanded materiel cooperation.
- ❖ The above practices will further provide . . .
- Improved economies of scale.
  - Significant financial savings.
  - Enhanced interoperability.
  - Improved standardization.
- ❖ However, a truly communal/federated approach to LTDP will also require NATO members . . .
- To accept “national lower limits” on defense.
  - To relinquish a certain degree of political-budgetary sovereignty.
  - To trust “where it counts, and when it matters.”
  - To make substantial up-front investments, especially when it involves combined training.
  - To accept clearly agreed upon standards.
  - To shift away from today’s emphasis on filling capability shortfalls towards tomorrow’s focus on divisions of labor.
- Point #2: The benefits of enhanced NATO-level LTDP will not only accrue if Alliance members take the above steps, but also if they address the following seven questions, all of which have a broad impact on the future effectiveness of Alliance defense planning.
- ❖ How will NATO manage defense planning with 26 members? Will the consensus principle still be practicable for the Defense Review Committee (DRC), which is an ideal long-term planning mechanism for DCI follow-up, counter-terrorism efforts, NATO/EU cooperation, missile defense, etc.; the DRC/Policy Co-ordination Group (PCG), which is ideally suited for NATO Response Force planning; and the Pol-Mil Security Committee (PMSC), which is well-suited for NATO/Russia and NATO/Ukraine planning?
  - ❖ Does the Strategic Concept need to be revisited as the policy basis for defense planning?
  - ❖ How committed are Alliance members to the Prague Capabilities Commitment? Are nations willing to commit the necessary resources to transformation, and are they willing to adopt explicit timetables?
  - ❖ Are new members truly ready for accession? Do they have the analytical capability to debate force planning issues? Are they able to follow through on decisions reached?
  - ❖ What is the future of PfP/PARP in an enlarged Alliance, and how will they impact Alliance-level long-term defense planning?

- ❖ Is the NATO/EU relationship sufficiently solidly based for defense planning purposes?
- ❖ How can the Alliance develop its relationship with Russia in the defense-planning field?

### *3. LTDP – National-level issues and dilemmas for NATO’s smaller members*

Although seminar attendees drew the above conclusions about the needed future of long-term defense planning at the Alliance level, they also mulled over LTDP problems at the national-level, especially in relation to smaller states. The core assumption behind this analysis was that European nations will retain “full service” militaries for the foreseeable future. They will not relinquish a key component of national sovereignty to create a task-divided, composite, European-level force. So, the next logical question is simple enough: How can national-level LTDP best serve two masters – i.e., the local one and the NATO Alliance proper?

- In an Alliance increasingly posturing itself for out-of-area operations, the key defense planning issue for smaller nations is affordability.

- ❖ The dilemma: Stable or lower national-level budgets plus increased operating costs mean less investment capital for defense. At the same time, a growing and more complex range of NATO missions & tasks will require a broader “toolbox.” So, what should this toolbox look like at the national level? How will it effectively balance tasks with means, and yet provide for needed investments in future Alliance-level capabilities?
- ❖ A “wide” toolbox is one possible option – it provides a broad range of capabilities, and its greater flexibility leaves all (political) options open.
  - At the same time, such a toolbox has its downside – it leads to mounting running costs; it spreads out capital, thereby providing “wide” capabilities at the expense of “deep” ones; and it typically stints on training, maintenance, and readiness costs. The results are thus a toolbox that can become unaffordable and, worse yet, militarily irrelevant.
  - One way to ensure a nation’s military toolbox is properly balanced is to determine its “national ambition level.” For example . . .
    - Does the nation want to pursue a high “power projection” ambition level or not? If not, does it want to focus on creating a stabilization, “other operations,” or homeland defense force instead?
    - Does it want a first in and first out force, or a last in and last out one?
    - Should the force be green (land-centric) or blue (air and/or sea-oriented)?
    - Should it be high profile and yet low risk, or low profile and low risk?
    - And in all these cases, what are the number, type, and length of (concurrent) operations a nation wants to be able to conduct? Does it want to concentrate on specialised or niche capabilities, or not? What are the number and size of combat units it wants? In what combination(s) does it want to use them, and for how long?
- ❖ The above questions can only be systematically answered through a top-down analysis of what kind of armed forces a nation wants. Long-term defense planning is

at the center of this type of analysis, both at the NATO and national-level. But if national-level planning is to remain important at least in the near-term, what possible models might NATO members and especially partner nations pursue? In theory, they might pursue any one of eight possibilities, but in order to support out-of-area NATO operations, most of these nation-based models must include some degree of “high intensity” capabilities.

- The eight possible models include the following.
  - Model #1: A *wide toolbox*.
  - Model #2: A *full-spectrum combined & joint force*.
  - Model #3: An *entry, power projection, and stabilisation* force (i.e., a split-works force where air and sea forces concentrate on access and power projection, while land forces primarily focus on stabilisation functions)
  - Model #4: An *Entry, power projection, first in first out* force (i.e., a combat force with no stabilization functions).
  - Model #5: An *Entry, power projection, high profile-low risk* force (i.e., a variation of Model #3 . . . “air” focuses on access and power projection; “sea” does the same, but at a lower level, and “land” concentrates fully on stabilization tasks at the lower end of the conflict spectrum.
  - Model #6: An *Entry, power projection, stabilization, high profile-low risk* force (i.e., a weaker version of the previous model; the offensive part of “sea” is reduced further. “Sea” now focuses on access, “air” concentrates on power projection, and “land” zeros in on stabilization).
  - Model #7: A *Stabilisation, first in and last out* force (i.e., a force for peace support operations. Combat tasks can only be performed in a very local and limited manner).
  - Model #8: A *Stabilisation, last in and last out* force (i.e., a force that has no significant fighting power. Only peace keeping and humanitarian aid-type operations are feasible).
  
- For purposes of analysis and greater information sharing, it is helpful to look at these eight options in greater detail.
  - Model #1: The already discussed *wide toolbox* is the model most NATO nations pursue today. To repeat – this particular toolbox provides a variety of capabilities for a broad range of operations and tasks, both at the high end and low end of the spectrum, and for shorter or longer periods of time. It buys you political and military flexibility, but it is expensive and runs the risk of being too broad and too shallow (in terms of capabilities).
  - Model #2: A *full-spectrum combined & joint* force – This particular force has a wide variety of means at its disposal. It may be deployed in all phases of a conflict and for an indefinite period of time, both in a national and in a coalition context. Only the US - and to some extent the UK - has such a functioning “full works” force in the Alliance today.
  - Model #3: An *entry, power projection, and stabilisation* force – This force is a variant of the previous model. It also has a wide variety of means at its disposal and may be deployed in all phases of a conflict, and for a prolonged period of time. However, a minor form of task specialisation is also part of the model. Air & sea forces would be

prominently deployed during “access” and “power projection” phases of an operation, while land forces would be primarily engaged in prolonged stabilisation activities. In other words, this model advocates a split-works force, with “air” and “sea” first in and “land” last out. It is a high profile, high-risk force. Further, the shorter deployment period for “air” and “sea” permits a smaller - and cheaper - force structure for those components. “Land,” because of its requirement for prolonged sustainability, remains quite costly. With some reservations, the armed forces of France and the United Kingdom may be regarded as “entry, power projection & stabilisation” forces. Smaller NATO members basically can’t afford this model of military power.

- Model #4: An *Entry, power projection, first in first out* force – This force is a further variant of the previous two models. It still has a wide variety of means available to operate throughout the conflict spectrum. The major difference in this model is the expected period of deployment, which would be substantially shorter because it does not include stabilization tasks. This therefore is a specialized “combat” force and not an “other operations” force. Like the previous two models, this is a high profile, high-risk force, but in a “lean & mean” kind of way. This results in a less extensive force structure for all components, leading to a substantial cost reductions. In itself, the capabilities required are still quite costly, but through the exchange of “time” capabilities for “intensity” capabilities, budget options increase. The United Kingdom has indicated that it is moving or will move towards this type of armed force, while France is seemingly moving in the same direction.
- Model #5: An *Entry, power projection, high profile-low risk* force – This variant differs from the previous ones in the clear task specialization assigned to air, sea and land forces. In comparison with the previous model, “air” is focused on access and power projection. The same applies for “sea”, but at a lower level. “Land” is fully concentrated on stabilisation tasks in the lower end of the spectrum, which means that it can be of lower quality (in the sense of fighting abilities). By abandoning the high intensity ability of “land” - and to a lesser extent of “sea” – the budget can concentrate on maintaining an overall “first in last out” capacity. Scandinavian armed forces, notably Sweden, share some of the important characteristics of this model.
- Model #6: An *Entry, power projection, stabilisation, high profile-low risk* force – This force is a weaker version of the previous model. The offensive part of “sea” has been reduced further. The three-way partition between the components is now fully evident. “Sea” is focused on access, “air” is aimed at power projection and “land” on stabilisation. Because this model lacks the high intensity capabilities of “sea”, it would most likely be cheaper than the previous model. No existing armed forces have a layout similar to this model at this time.
- Model #7: A *Stabilisation, first in and last out* force – All the above models display some form of “force projection” capability. However, other kinds of forces are conceivable - and indeed exist - that are not aimed at force projection at all. This model, for example, has little to do with access and power projection, unless the conflict is at the low end of the intensity spectrum. It focuses on combat support roles. It is a low risk-low profile force designed for peace support operations. Combat tasks can only be performed in a very

local and limited manner. However, because of the “last out” principle, sustainability must be guaranteed. This could be costly, but such a force is normally considered to be affordable for smaller nations. Possibly the Belgian armed forces has some similarity with the “flat” force model described here. Maybe the armed forces of Denmark and Norway also have some similarities, or are moving towards this particular model.

- Model #8: A *Stabilisation, last in and last out* force – This final model has no significant fighting power. Only peace keeping and humanitarian aid-type operations are feasible. An organization with such a profile is in many respects quite similar to an NGO. Because of the “last out” principle, this “lower risk lower profile” force does require sustainability. However, since high technology/quality capabilities are hardly needed, the cost of such a force is relatively low. Some of the former Warsaw Pact nations seemed to fit this model.
- Some concluding remarks about national-level LTDP . . .
  - NATO’s current “pol-mil landscape” requires top-down planning that identifies/ factors in a member’s “national ambition level” as a starting point for LTDP.
  - International “resource pooling” and “task specialisation” are only implicit in the above eight models/options. They may (i.e., they should) feature more prominently in the mid- to long-term, but at present Alliance planners must account for national-level approaches. The nations, in turn, need to pursue planning models that are as compatible as possible with NATO’s growing preference for potentially high intensity, out-of-area operations.

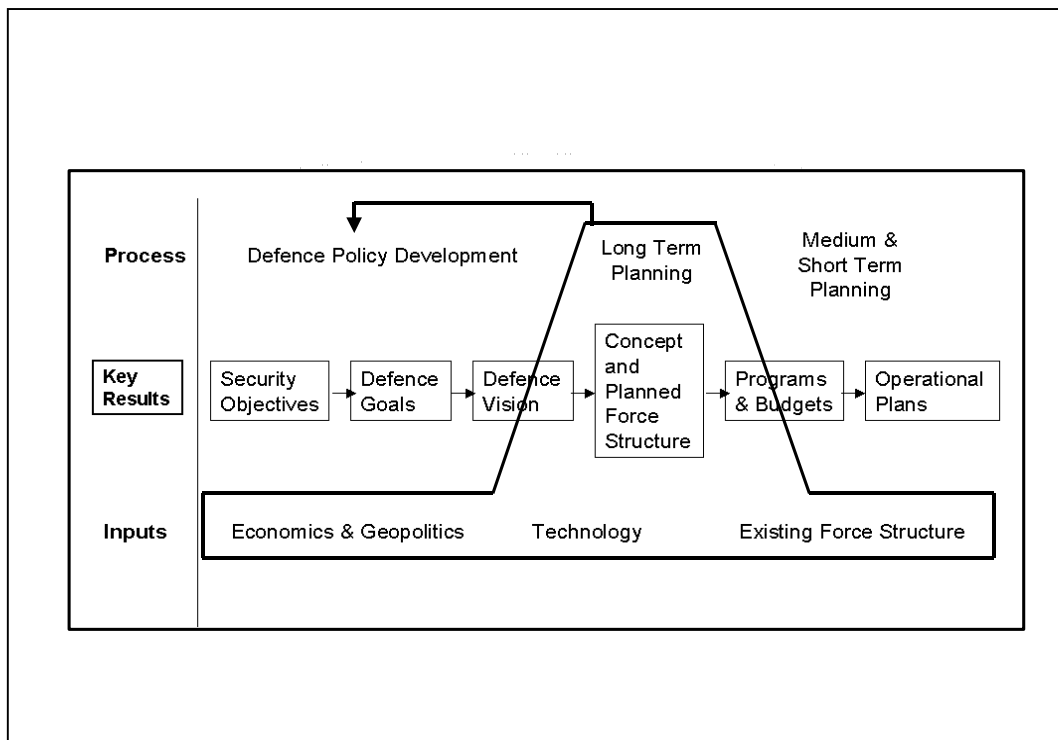
#### **4. A Suggested LTDP Model for individual Nations and the NATO Alliance as a Whole**

- Long term defense planning is but one component of overall defense planning. As such, it must accept inputs from and provide outputs to other processes. The relationships within the defense planning process are shown in Figure 1.

- ❖ The rectangle indicates the entire context, while the “hat” outlines LTDP.
- ❖ The splitting of “Defense Vision” and “Programs and Budgets” illustrates that LTDP seeks to convert broad goals into operational tools for force structuring (left hand side) and turn broad force concepts into first-cut programs and budgets (right hand side).

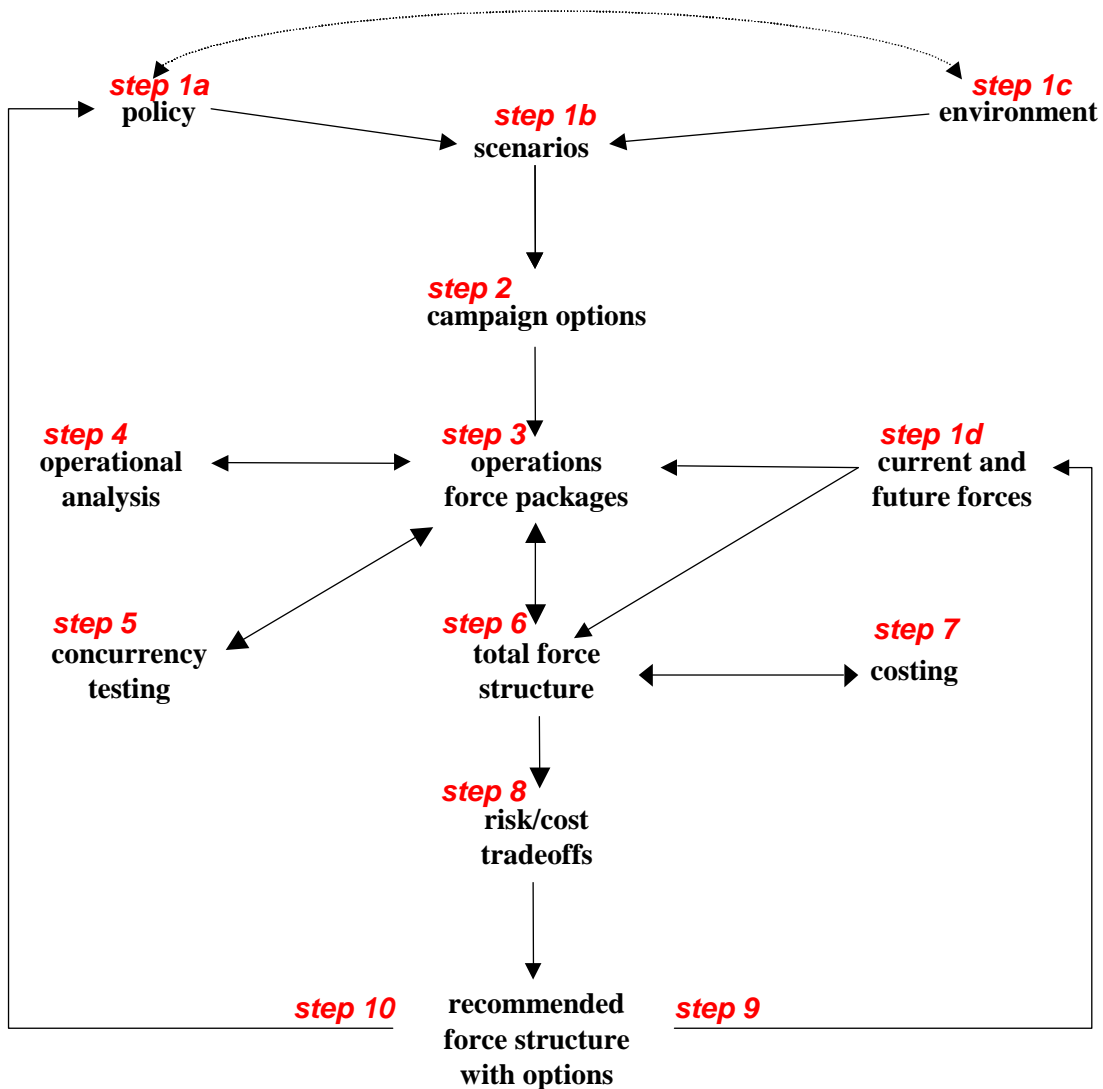


*Figure 1: Long term defense planning and its context*



- Having looked at the definitions, advantages, and principles associated with LTDP, having raised foundational (and necessary) points about the planning process itself, and having addressed the continued role of national-level LTDP within a NATO context, the final step in this synopsis is to focus on NATO-level defense planning itself. Within this context, there is a notional LTDP model that NATO and national-level planners might use to address long-term planning challenges in the future.
- This “Best Practice” model appears in the *Handbook on Long Term Defence Planning* (see NATO Research and Technology Technical Report 69 – i.e., RTO-TR-069, AC/323(SAS-025)TP/41). Figure 2 illustrates the 10 steps involved in this particular type of LTDP. Explanations of the steps are as follows.

Figure 2: Long-term planning process “Best Practice” Model



- ❖ *Step 1: Inputs* – LTDP inputs derive from the international environment and a defense policy specifically designed to deal with it. Both variables should then “feed” a scenario set that includes situations in which military forces might be used. (If specific scenarios are too sensitive politically, it is still possible to have overarching generic scenarios and use specific ones as representative cases at a working level.)
- ❖ *Step 2: Campaign options* – Campaign plans need sufficiently detailed scenarios to build upon. More precisely, the objectives, aims and missions of potential opponents need to be assessed and clarified, especially when dealing with non-warfighting operations. Apparently perverse courses of action may also need to be examined, especially if they involve potential asymmetric/terrorist threats.

- ❖ *Step 3: Force packages* – The preliminary force packages coming out of this step are an initial best guess – a starting point – of the force structure more precisely developed during Steps 4-10. The aim here is to obtain the minimum number of force package(s) needed to achieve success in a chosen scenario, and within an acceptable level of risk.
- ❖ *Step 4: Cost/Effectiveness testing* – This step involves optimizing force packages. It can be done mathematically, but more often than not it involves an iterative process – i.e., you test and refine force packages within individual scenarios and across all of them. Also, this step typically involves sensitivity testing against a range of possible uncertainties in threat, environment and alliance capabilities.
- ❖ *Step 5: Concurrency testing* – The discussion so far assumes that scenarios occur one at a time, without concurrency. However, since operations may well need to be conducted in parallel, it is appropriate to examine a wide combination of scenarios and tasks at the same time. Within this context, a single combination of scenarios is unlikely to identify the maximum level of force elements needed.
- ❖ *Step 6: Force structuring* – Thus far, Steps 1-5 seek to provide an “optimal” force structure that is able to meet the challenges posed by different scenarios, concurrent operations, and rotation/manpower limitations. However, manning and capability numbers derived from operational scenarios typically need to be adjusted upwards to allow for various other factors (force production requirements, training needs, recurring and unanticipated repair cycles, peacetime attrition, etc). Basically, here then is where you adjust your numbers upward to account for unanticipated variables.
- ❖ *Step 7: Total force costing* – As already shown, costing occurs several times within this process. In Step 7, you assess total force structure costs, but from a long-term perspective. As a result, you ensure that the entire force structure is within the budget constraints first identified in Step 1.
- ❖ *Step 8: Risk/cost tradeoffs* -- At this stage, you have ideally identified the cheapest force structure(s) required for given scenarios. However, they may not be fully affordable, or they may still be incompatible with Step 1 policy goals. Here then is where you explicitly face these dilemmas. You take another look at the “ambition level” of your policy goals, you try to reduce costs (by eliminating some of your force structure elements), and you typically reintroduce a higher level of risk back into your planning.
- ❖ *Step 9: Structure development assessment* – At this stage, the planners have weeded out the obvious non-options from Step 8 and are ready to present their recommended force structure (in the form of a Structure Development Plan where “organizational units and consequent investments and major competence building programs are made explicit”).
- ❖ *Step 10: Feedback* – The long-term planning process is both iterative and bi-directional. There is a feedback loop between the end product and initial policy goals and constraints. However, there is also continuous feedback between and within all steps. In both cases, the feedback must be disciplined and timely.

## ***Conclusion***

Long-term defense planning is one of the two fundamental “glues” that hold today’s NATO together. No matter how you define LTDP, it provides many benefits, but also faces many challenges. Foremost among these challenges is promoting increased NATO-level LTDP, which is an absolute necessity for the future (lesser, national-level forms of cooperation are only workable/feasible in the near-term). Having said this, national-level long-term defense planning remains a fact of life. Alliance members need to pursue planning/force structure models that are compatible with a new out-of-area NATO. One way to “kill two birds with one stone” – i.e., to address local AND Alliance-level planning imperatives at the same time – is to use the “Best Practice” LTDP Model included in the *NATO Handbook on Long Term Defence Planning*.