



## Towards a new strategic concept for NATO

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### Introduction

Although it is somewhat hard to believe, there is no definition for what a Strategic Concept actually is, what it should contain or what its scope should be. This has not prevented NATO, however, from adopting successive Strategic Concepts since 1952, the date on which the Military Committee approved the first document under this name, known as MC 14/1. The best known Strategic Concepts, however, are the two public versions that have been promoted to date: the Strategic Concepts of 1991 and 1999.

The essential difference between the classified documents produced for the military and the two public versions consists of the operational orientation of the former, given that

these documents essentially contained guidelines of a strategic and military nature, whilst the two public documents not only outline the general strategy on which operations are to be based, but also explain the Alliance's general political objectives, its *raison d'être*, the environment in which it operates and its vision for the medium-term future. That is to say, the public documents have always contained a strong element of public diplomacy.

It is important to highlight this political and public dimension and to bear in mind the geo-strategic context in which both Strategic Concepts were formulated in the years 1991 and 1999. In the first case, the Alliance sought to firmly establish the fact that the organisation's *raison d'être* was unaffected by the

developments in Central and Eastern Europe and even in the USSR itself. Concepts such as "enemy" and "threat" disappeared from the text, replaced by more vague ideas such as "challenges" and "risks", whilst the idea of a deterrent gave way to an approach based on open dialogue and greater cooperation.

The Strategic Concept of 1999 was formulated after the traumatic experience of the Balkans and NATO's involvement, for the first time in its history, in offensive operations outside its traditional sphere of action, in defence of a third party and without any of its Member States having been attacked and without invoking the legendary Article 5 and its well-known joint defence obligation.

Whatever their origin, the common denominator in both cases consisted of a far-reaching transformation of the Alliance's strategic environment and of NATO itself. In effect, over a period of ten years the organisation's role had changed from that of being a military deterrent without any active operations to that of imposing peace through the employment of force.

By 1991 it had become clear that the bi-polar order in which NATO had been created, based on the East-West confrontation, had effectively ceased to exist as an essential condition justifying the Alliance's existence and that NATO had to seek out a new set of reasons that justified the continuation of its work. The idea of providing insurance against the unknown prevailed, in

spite of the fact that the organisation's new Strategic Concept was soon to become obsolete with the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and a Russia that, far from inheriting the Soviet legacy, began its own process to dismantle Communism.

By 1999, NATO had been deploying its forces for several years outside its traditional sphere of action and on missions that had never been contemplated on paper, forced by the hand of circumstance. Although the Strategic Concept did not prevent any measures from being taken - in spite of the fact that it did not provide for them - the moment had clearly come for the organisation to attempt to bring its theoretical mandate into line with practice. In this respect, the Strategic Concept of 1999 consisted, more than anything, of a formulation of the peace operations in the Balkans. It has to be said that this approach did not last very long either, given that, a few months later, the launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) would substantially alter the framework in which the Alliance was meant to operate, at least at an institutional level.

It is with this background in mind that we must consider the current debate regarding the possibility of endowing NATO with a new Strategic Concept. Three questions need to be addressed:

- 1) Have things changed so radically that the Alliance needs to provide another public explanation

justifying its *raison d'être* and its relevance to the present day?

- 2) Is it feasible to provide a vision of what the Alliance is and what it should be in the future, one that is shared by all its members?, and
- 3) Is it possible to anticipate a vision of the Alliance's future tasks that will stand the test of time?

Finally, in this introduction we might also highlight the fact that the debate on the new Strategic Concept is not an academic or purely theoretical matter. First of all, it is obvious that NATO today is not the same as it was ten or twenty years ago, either in terms of structures, members, external partnerships or practical orientation. Second, what has worked well in practice has not always worked equally well in theory and, in spite of the current frenetic activity that takes place within NATO today, Atlantic relations are perceived as being tense and full of frictions, in which respect we need to recognise that the organisation is suffering from a profound crisis. Any attempt to overcome strategic divergences among its members would certainly be an ambitious objective for this new Strategic Concept, if not an impossible mission.

Whatever the case may be, the current debate has been promoted by two important players: the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who has stated that she would like to see a new Concept solemnly passed at the NATO Summit in 2009, and NATO's Secretary General, Jap de Hoop

Schefer, who continues to sell the idea in his numerous public speeches. At a much lower level, a large group of analysts and experts is already working on the matter, in spite of the fact that the North Atlantic Council has not yet given the official green-light to do so. The generally accepted view at NATO today does not revolve around whether the Alliance needs a new Strategic Concept or not, but around when it should be formulated.

### **Is a new NATO Strategic Concept necessary?**

From the formal perspective of bringing theory into line with practice, the answer to this question can be none other than "yes". A further explanation is needed from NATO as to its purpose, as to what it aims to be and as to how this can be achieved.

For example, based on the philosophy underlying the Strategic Concept of 1999, namely that of codifying changes that have already taken place, there is no doubt that the Concept for 2009 will have a great deal to say:

To begin with, we might mention NATO's quasi-global sphere of action. Afghanistan signifies a break with NATO's past in various different areas, but, above all, with regard to geographical distance. However, in addition to its presence in Afghanistan, NATO's has carried out aid missions in Pakistan and the United States following natural disasters (an earthquake and Katrina), as well as providing logistical support for African forces in Darfur,

among other measures. NATO is not a global organisation, but its scope of action and presence are far removed from the limits established by its theoretical framework for intervention, as defined in Article 6 of its founding treaty. Explaining this new scope to the public is no trivial task.

Second, NATO has grown since its first round of enlargement in 1999, whilst its strategic associations are constantly drawing new *partners* closer to the organisation. And this does not always take the form of official or institutional relations. For example, NATO forces are operating in Afghanistan alongside soldiers and officials from other countries, such as Australia and Japan, to name just two. And the Alliance not only has a number of global partnerships on the table, but plans to carry out further rounds of enlargement. This new NATO partnership approach must also be duly explained and justified.

Third, NATO has progressed towards habitually carrying out operations in non-benign environments, based on higher levels of risk exposure for the forces contributed by the member countries.

Fourth, the members of NATO have not worked together as a block. The organisation has simply served to facilitate coordinated action among certain members that have volunteered to take part in tasks or missions that they consider to be opportune or necessary. Some kind of justification for this option, as well as an exploration of the possible for-

mulas for sharing the burden among the various member countries, would also seem to be appropriate for a possible new Strategic Concept, to the extent that this is a new feature when compared to past practice.

Finally, NATO has discovered that, in order to carry out its operations successfully, a global approach is required, in the sense of bringing all the necessary resources together. The military factor is indispensable in terms of guaranteeing security, but the reconstruction work entailed by the new tasks and missions it faces today also requires other civilian forces to be brought into play, forces that are very often in the service of other international organisations. In this respect, it would also be extremely opportune to underline the need for coordinated military and civilian action and the need for cooperation with the EU and the UNO. Relations with the EU are especially important, particularly if the Union's Member States are finally able to overcome the institutional paralysis brought about by the European Constitution fiasco.

A new Strategic Concept that follows the innovative and daring spirit of the 1991 text, also appears to be a reasonable proposition. As at that time, today we can clearly observe the fact that a substantial shift in the security situation has taken place on a world-wide scale. The Cold War Order is a thing of the past and the Post-Cold War Order, which we never managed to find a better name for, has also come and gone. The former dissipated on 11/9

in the year 1989; the second on 9/11 in the year 2001.

I am not going to elaborate upon the thesis that have already been published in the report, "NATO: An Alliance for Freedom". I shall simply offer a brief reminder. In my view, we are immersed in a war that Islamic radicalism has declared on the Western World and the spearhead of this general world-wide offensive is Islamic terrorism, beginning with Al Qaeda. Being faced once again, as we are, by a threat to our very way of life, NATO should reconfigure in order to respond to this danger. It should do so in a two-fold sense: by guaranteeing domestic security, effectively defending the population on our own soil (*homeland defence*), whilst also waging the war in regions as far away as possible from our borders, on enemy territory. In this respect, there is no better strategy than that of being able to rely on partners on a global scale, ranging from Japan and Australia to Israel. NATO should be a club for liberal democracies, countries that are prepared to eliminate the threat of Islamic terrorism and capable of doing so.

However, it is not essential to buy into this revolutionary vision of how much NATO needs to change. The organisation's presence in Afghanistan, or its much more timid role in Iraq, already entail a profound change for NATO, since these actions are of global scope in practice, even though they may not be global in theory.

And then there is also the question - one that requires an answer - of the true meaning and point of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, especially in relation to missions in progress and, very particularly, in relation to collective defence commitments in the case of non-conventional attacks, which is to say, attacks not made by States but by sub-state groups.

It is evident that, although this may not be its primary responsibility, NATO is carrying out counter-terrorism tasks, at least in terms of its surveillance of maritime lines of communication with the *Active Endeavour* operation. And terrorism has been declared the main threat to collective security at the present time, at least in NATO's documents (see, for example, the *Comprehensive Political Guidance* approved at the Riga Summit last November).

Furthermore, the former climate of growing cooperation with Russia is dissipating at a rapid and alarming rate, which requires us to reconsider the relations between the Alliance and Russia, as well as the possibility of developing new joint-support policies that have never been contemplated at a collective level before. An obvious case in point is the question of energy security.

In short, the new strategic environment means that NATO not only has to do things differently, but that it also has to do new things. Responding to this reality and preparing the necessary changes in terms of the political and military transformation of the Alliance certainly would require a new reference

framework or Strategic Concept to be drawn up.

**But is it feasible to give shape to a shared vision of the Alliance in a new text?**

There is one school of thought within the Alliance that places greater value on the process of generating a new Strategic Concept than on the end-product itself. That is to say, the essential value of the new text to be prepared for the year 2009 would consist of the possibility of creating a new consensus, one that might stanch the multiple wounds that the Transatlantic Relationship has suffered in recent years.

According to this view, problems among the Allies, essentially between the United States and Europe, simply come down to the poor relations that exist between the current Administration of George W. Bush, which is always tempted to go it alone and is somewhat distant with its Allies, and the leaders of the Old Continent, who are always more cautious when it comes to military intervention. From this perspective, Iraq would be the culminating point in the rift.

If this were the case, the solution to future Transatlantic relations would simply consist of a show of humility on the part of Washington, as a kind of rejection to these last years of Neo-Conservative domination.

Unfortunately, the situation is not quite that simple. Without denying the importance of Iraq in creating heightened tensions among the Allies, the differences between Bush

and certain leaders in Europe are not the ultimate cause of the current state of affairs. The current situation is the result of much deeper forces at work, forces that have, perhaps, been latent, or not clearly visible until now.

Within NATO itself, there have always been two abiding visions, that of the United States and that of France. Everything else can be explained by an attempt to find an intermediate point or to provide support for one side or the other, according to the circumstances. The 11th September was to change the unstable balance that characterised the inner workings of the Alliance. America was obliged to react - and wanted to react - with sufficient force on all possible fronts, whilst its European Allies were more concerned about the US reaction than about the attackers themselves. The United States went on to develop a new national security strategy that justified anticipatory measures, whilst the Europeans responded with a concept of security that condemned preventive measures and unilateral action, placing the vigilance of international legality in the hands of the UNO. Even though all parties were addressing the same problem, the responses could not have been more different.

NATO really faces two problems: on the one hand, the Europeans have refused to recognise the legitimacy of the United States' actions, especially in Iraq, but also with regard to the US conception of a war on terror; on the other, the Europeans have lost all credibility in Washing-

ton due to their lack of military capacity, one that would enable them to join forces and fight alongside the Americans. They lack both the capability and the will, Bob Kagan might add.

And this two-sided problem did not arise out of the Iraq crisis, but emerged from the collapse of the bipolar situation in 1989, from the rampant development of globalisation, on the one hand, and from the defensive negligence of the Europeans, on the other.

It is certainly true that personalities make a difference, a considerable difference, in the international arena. However, it is more than doubtful whether a new face in the White House in early 2009 will substantially change the current equation.

Certainly, changes such as Sarkozy's elevation to the French Presidency are important to the future of NATO and the development of a more homogenous vision of the organisation's tasks and missions. We know that the French President aspires to reintegrate France into the NATO command structure, but the conditions he has established for this reincorporation to take place make this a rather remote possibility. Under Nicolas Sarkozy, France has clearly continued to support the policy of strengthening the security policy within the EU, especially if the constitutional question can be cleared up and an abbreviated Constitution Treaty can be achieved.

*Unfortunately, although the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)*

*has given rise to an intricate institutional structure, it has not been able to halt the deterioration of Europe's collective defence capabilities. As things stand today, in military terms, the EU is the sum of the weaknesses of all its members. And the corresponding figures, both human and financial, do not promise any substantial change in the current gloomy situation. What is worse, as more resources are shifted towards strengthening the EU's military capacity, efforts are duplicated and fewer resources are devoted to the Alliance. Not only has the commitment of spending 2% of GDP on defence not been fulfilled (does anyone recall the famous 3% of 1979?), but the allocation of forces to different groups has even placed the NATO missions contingent in danger.*

In short, in view of this alarming background situation, it is not surprising that some observers have questioned whether it is even possible to agree on a new Strategic Concept or whether this would simply degenerate into a further round of mutual recriminations. Two governments, so far, have unofficially expressed their scepticism regarding this process. And these countries are no less important than the United States and France. Each country has its reasons and neither is especially optimistic that a common position can be found between now and the Summit in 2009.

For example, Washington wants to see a text that reveals clear and committed support for a global Alliance, based on the establishment of partners in different parts of the world, starting with South Korea, Japan and Australia. Furthermore, it

would like to see a stronger sense of unity among the Alliance members, a far cry from the two-track Alliance in which certain members pay for the operations and suffer the casualties and others simply provide political support and offer criticisms from the sidelines. The United States believes that NATO should be a community of countries made up of members who are prepared to take action, not simply a club in which the members share certain values.

France's view is precisely the opposite: "No" to a global NATO; "No" to preventive measures; "No" to new members from outside Europe; "No" to NATO serving as a world policeman and "No" to its role as a guarantor of global security. NATO must be, above all, a joint defence force for Europe. That is why it is not in favour of the Nato Response Force (NRF) being employed in any operations other than high-intensity missions, leaving NATO as an existential defence organisation.

However, France would welcome a document in which NATO and the EU might undertake a strategic dialogue on an equal footing. This is something that the Americans are extremely unlikely to accept and that has even created divisions among the Europeans themselves.

In spite of these irresolvable differences, I am convinced that if the North Atlantic Council were to commission its international staff to draw up a Draft Strategic Concept, NATO's officials would come up with a document that all parties could agree to (they are experts in

doing that), although this would be a somewhat limited Concept statement that would revolve around what the Alliance has already achieved. Little, perhaps, would need to be added to NATO's *Comprehensive Political Guidance*. Whatever the case may be, NATO would then be able to celebrate its Sixtieth Anniversary with a new text, be it a somewhat marginal text.

### **The Acid Test of Afghanistan**

The key to the possible success or failure of a new Strategic Concept may depend, perhaps, on what happens in Afghanistan. If NATO proves incapable of ensuring peace and stability throughout the country, effectively failing to wipe out the Taliban threat, then reconstruction will be impossible and the project for a stable Afghanistan will collapse. This would certainly be a dramatic turn of events for those Afghans who aspire to a better life. But it would be no less traumatic for the Alliance.

From Lord Robertson's mantra, "capabilities, capabilities, capabilities", NATO has progressed towards "operations, operations, operations". However, one thing is to wage a war (and even Kosovo was difficult to win) and another is to rebuild a country, especially within the context of a hostile and insecure climate. However, the Alliance has staked its future on success in Afghanistan. The problem is that it has done so in a very unequal manner among its members, given that, when all is said and done, the International Security Assistance Force

(ISAF) has always been regarded as a free-choice operation.

The test resides in the fact that, in spite of the considerable good that the Allied Forces have done in the country, the problems they are experiencing could be resolved with a relatively low injection of additional support. It is not a question of doubling the contingent. The military authorities are simply requesting 2000 to 3000 additional soldiers and, among other things, half a dozen helicopters. But nobody seems to be prepared to hand them over. Like all wars, Afghanistan has shown the best and the worst sides of each NATO member.

If, throughout the coming year, the situation on the ground fails to improve and the Allied squabbles fail to be successfully resolved, there will be little hope of achieving a new Strategic Concept.

What is more, Afghanistan is highlighting the fact that, in order to be successful, NATO must transform itself at the same time as it carries out its missions. The two processes cannot be implemented separately over time. However, this requires greater resources; operations are not cheap, and neither is the transformation process. These two factors together demand a provision of funds that almost none of the members of the Alliance are prepared to contemplate.

Afghanistan is also forcing the question of collective unity. And this is an issue that the Alliance must consider as a whole. Stabilisation measures are one thing, but NATO may

need to apply the provisions of Article 5 again if another situation occurs such as that of 11th September. In this respect, we should not forget that the two attempts that were made to appeal to collective defence, namely after 11th September and in the case of Turkey and military intervention in Iraq, both ended in relative failure.

### **What to Expect**

The new text should heal the two major wounds that are bleeding the Alliance dry: the gap between purpose and capabilities, on the one hand, and the distance between America and the European Allies, on the other. That is to say, it should serve two highly important purposes: to convey a new commitment on the part of the Member States with regard to the issue of collective security, and to promote the military transformation of NATO's forces and structures.

Furthermore, the text will need to explain how the Alliance regards the future, including all its risks and threats, and describe the new order it aspires to build and how it plans to achieve it. Even when accompanied by a basic consensus, this is not an easy task. Without any sense of consensus between the main partners and weighed down by the burden of antagonistic views regarding what NATO should be and should do, this task is doomed to failure. Nevertheless, in my personal opinion this is an exercise that must be undertaken. Simply to leave NATO to carry out isolated operations, without any ultimate goal in mind,

would be to condemn the organisation to a progressively marginal role. It might carry out its missions well or poorly, but it would no longer constitute our main forum for consultation or the backbone of our security.

And we are interested in guaranteeing a NATO that is effective and smooth-running in both strategic and operational terms.

Both Spain and the Partido Popular (PP) are interested in securing a Strategic Concept that is feasible, one that works towards achieving a very specific goal: the Alliance must play an active role in protecting our territory from non-conventional threats and a joint debate must be launched regarding security matters that fall outside NATO's sphere of action or traditional ambit, such as immigration flows. We would also welcome closer attention being paid to North Africa.

Based on our experience of former texts, we imagine that the elaboration of a new Strategic Concept for the year 2009 would begin in the spring of 2008, at the very latest, which is significant in terms of our electoral calendar. If Rodríguez Zapatero should remain in power, we cannot expect any active role in this process for Spain. If, on the other hand, the PP should win the elections, we would be prepared to contribute new ideas to the project.

One last note of warning: having established the Year 2009 Summit as the deadline for this text may make it impossible to actually formulate the new Strategic Concept, especially in view of the fact that a new President will be sitting in the White House by January of that year and that the new Administration will need several months to get its team together. Once it has done so, it will require further time to define its security policy and its position regarding NATO. This would be a veritable race against the clock.