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## AN ALLIANCE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY? REVIEWING NATO'S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Self-ascertainment of the 60-year-old North Atlantic Alliance, a modern definition of NATO's purpose, character and role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, recommitment and reassurance of all Allies, answers to today's and tomorrow's security challenges, concrete goals for a continuous reform, rallying of public support: NATO's new Strategic Concept, agreed at the November 2010 Lisbon Summit, has many functions to fulfil. How well does it succeed?

### The need for a new mission statement

The North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, NATO's founding document, finds its concretization in the Alliance's Strategic Concept, constantly reviewed and periodically updated. The Treaty itself remains valid with its commitment to international peace, security and justice, as well as to its peoples' freedom, common heritage and civilization founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and to peaceful settlement of disputes. Also, the Washington

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Treaty's main provisions endure: consultation (article 4), mutual assistance in the case of an armed attack (art. 5) and openness to new members (art. 10).

The first Strategic Concept was issued in 1991, after the end of the Cold War, and revised in 1999. Even the new document was outdated for some time, since it was agreed *before* the terror attacks of September 2001, NATO's Afghanistan mission, the Iraq war, the Russo-Georgian conflict, as well as prior to the growing awareness of globalised security challenges for which there are no military "solutions". Therefore, the question was posed whether NATO, which had been so successful in protecting Western Europe during the East-West conflict, in helping to stabilize the developing "Europe whole and free" and in pacifying the Western Balkans, would develop into an Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and what that required.

However, for several years there was great reluctance in NATO Headquarters and in member capitals to set about a revision of the 1999 document. A "very divisive process" was feared, while proponents of a new Strategic Concept countered this apprehension with the question whether Allies were not so divided on several central issues that a "uniting effort" was urgently needed.<sup>1</sup> To document its continuing relevance in the diffuse security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a convincing new mission statement was indispensable.

## A public and participatory process

That is what NATO finally embarked on during its 60th-anniversary Summit meeting at Strasbourg/Kehl in April 2009, when Heads of State and Government commissioned a new Strategic Concept to be developed. The new Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, chose a procedure drastically different from the way the last two Strategic Concepts had been developed - namely by year-long negotiations among the member nations over numerous revolving drafts, out of the attention of a broader public, resulting in texts fraught with diplomatic formulae, compromise language and "constructive ambiguities".

This time particular difficulties had to be taken into account: *first*, NATO's engagement in an ever more problematic mission in Afghanistan, where it is left with a bulk of tasks taken on by the International Community; *second*, the unwillingness of "post-heroic" societies, exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis, to sacrifice for security; *third*, a lack of agreement among NATO members on fundamental matters regarding its character, role, tasks

and policy; *fourth*, the impression that solidarity among Allies was weakening; *fifth*, with an Alliance membership much more diverse now, quite divergent threat perceptions among Allies and, *finally*, NATO's image particularly in the Muslim world as an instrument of often problematic US policy, or in the perception of its own populations and media as a relic of the Cold War.

Since the questions of NATO's continued relevance and its public support were so crucial, the preparation of the new Strategic Concept was launched by the Secretary General in an "inclusive and participatory approach" and "interactive dialogue with the broader public". A Group of 12 Experts was formed who, under the chairmanship of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in mid-May 2010 presented its Report after a dense series of seminars and consultations. The document "NATO 2020. Assured Security, Dynamic Engagement" reflected agreement among the group members. This did not yet mean consensus among 28 NATO governments, and it can be argued that work on a draft cannot *create* consensus on controversial issues, but that rather the Concept should *reflect* the consensus built, or restored, in political consultations.

It must be recognized, however, that the Albright Group did a good job in "loosening the ground" as it were, in preparing consensus, fuelling public debate and interest in NATO, getting the strategic community involved, providing transparency as well as inducing member states to clarify their positions and "show the colour of their cards". And the Secretary General was probably right in keeping control of the draft developed by him and his closest collaborators, while taking on board comments from the nations, consulting discreetly about contentious aspects and avoiding negotiations proper, square brackets, involvement of several layers of the NATO bureaucracy and many iterations of an ever more diluted text.

The new Strategic Concept was agreed at NATO's Lisbon Summit by the Heads of State and Government on 19 November 2010 under the title "Active Engagement, Modern Defence". Even though the 11-page document, half the size of its predecessor, papers over some of the persisting divisions, on the whole it is a credit to the Secretary General's chosen procedure and his political energy. Analysts had always said that the *process* would be as important as the *result*. And as significant as the outcome might be the fact that in the course of this work NATO member nations had to reflect on their own security policy, interests, priorities and the demands of Alliance solidarity. This resulted in many "non-papers" laying out national priorities, many of which were aptly accommodated by the final draft. In sum, the new

Strategic Concept is a good achievement as it rallies Allies behind NATO's purpose, recommitting them to it and to Alliance solidarity. How solid that is will be discussed further down.

## Ambitious content

The content of the document revolves around three “core tasks”: *Defence and Deterrence*, *Security through Crisis Management* and *Promoting International Security through Cooperation*. They are introduced by enduring principles: NATO's purpose to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members, its character as a unique community of values, the affirmation of the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council, and the critical importance of the political and military transatlantic link between Europe and North America. All this is to ensure that “the Alliance remains an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, security and shared values”.

With regard to Collective Defence, the central character of article 5 of the Washington Treaty (mutual assistance in the case of an armed attack) is restated unequivocally, a commitment that “remains firm and binding”. This was important in the light of concerns expressed particularly by new Allies who feared that this commitment could be diluted or taken less seriously by NATO members who, “surrounded by friends and Allies”, might put out-of-area operations and harmony with Russia first. In a long discussion process, reassurance of all NATO member states came to be seen as the precondition of everything else NATO does.<sup>b</sup> So it is significant that the Strategic Concept pledges to “carry out the necessary training, exercises, contingency planning and information exchange for assuring our defence against the full range of conventional and emerging security challenges, and provide appropriate visible assurance and reinforcement for all Allies”.

Not focusing this task too exclusively on NATO members' territorial defence (“The Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low”), the relevant section unfolds the array of security challenges of the present and the foreseeable future, including proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles, cyber attacks, international terrorism, threats to critical energy infrastructure, emerging technologies. These are all seen as areas of Alliance solidarity, without implying that they can be countered mainly with military means or necessarily fall under article 5. So the threat assessment is very broad, the security challenges are seen as diffuse,

volatile and unpredictable, and possible NATO action will have to be decided on a case-by-case basis. The reference to climate change, whose long-term consequences can have heavy implications for global security, is remarkably vague, though.

The new Strategic Concept does not prioritize between defence and crisis management tasks. Recognising that crises and conflicts beyond NATO's borders can impact on the Alliance's security, it declares prevention and management of crises as well as stabilization of post-conflict situations and support of reconstruction as necessary NATO engagements. Monitoring and analyzing the international environment, are important contributions to prevention, which calls for broader and more intense political consultations among Allies and with partners, "dealing with all stages of a crisis".

The statement, however, that "NATO will be prepared and capable of managing ongoing hostilities" is a tall order, given the current Afghanistan experience. An explicit lesson drawn from that is the need for a comprehensive political, civilian and military approach. In order to foster it, after controversial debates it was decided that NATO would create "an appropriate but modest civilian management capability" as an "interface" with civilian partners. Rightly, the training of local security forces is highlighted.

Characteristically, the elaboration of the third core task, "Promoting international security through cooperation", starts with arms control, but its commitment to "create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons" is limited to the goals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Further reduction of nuclear weapons is linked to concomitant steps by Russia. On conventional arms control, the statement ("to strengthen the conventional arms control regime in Europe") is rather bland and does not present the necessary novel ideas.

Partnerships (including, oddly, also cooperation with other institutions such as the UN and the EU) are emphasized, building on the existing formats (Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, Ukraine, Georgia) and seeking to enhance them.

Regarding other security-relevant institutions, only the United Nations (with the intent to give life to the 2008 UN-NATO Declaration) and the European Union are mentioned. Some space is devoted to the relationship with the latter, but as long as this cooperation is blocked for political reasons, the statements remain largely declaratory.

The Lisbon Summit was widely interpreted as a breakthrough in NATO's cooperation with Russia, as a contribution "to creating a common space of peace, stability and security". NATO, not posing a threat to Russia, is seeking a "strategic partnership" with the expectation of reciprocity from Russia. Convinced that "the security of NATO and Russia is intertwined", NATO proposes enhancing political consultations and practical cooperation in the areas of shared interest, such as missile defence, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy, as well as using the full potential of the NATO-Russia Council for dialogue and joint action. A cautious agreement to "exploring" missile defence cooperation by the Russian President, who had come to Lisbon, was seen as an important advance also in this regard. In turn, NATO did not overly emphasise its "open door" policy, limiting itself in the Strategic Concept to the conventional statements of principle.

Finally, on "Reform and Transformation", the Concept states intentions read before: sufficient resources, deployability and sustainability of forces, coherent defence planning, interoperability, commonality of capabilities, standards, structures and funding. A continual reform "to streamline structures, improve working methods and maximise efficiency" is pledged, once again.

## A courageous document

The new Strategic Concept is a courageous document, because it contrasts the *Zeitgeist* in several regards: *First*, in spite of the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world, it emphasizes the need for nuclear deterrence as long as such weapons exist; *second*, although many global security challenges are not of a predominantly military nature, NATO enlarges its ambition as a security provider; *third*, while it remains a regional organization, it avoids an insular, euro-centric perspective but looks towards the global horizon; *fourth*, in spite of recent problems with the enlargement process and Russian indignation about it, the Alliance maintains its "open door" policy for European countries fit for accession and able to make their contribution to European security; and, *finally*, without antagonizing Russia it takes seriously the concerns of Central and Eastern European Allies.

The development of the new Strategic Concept was dissimilar to the general experience in the sense that normally such basic documents are not particularly visionary and forward-looking. They rather tend to be mainly the codification of previous decisions: theory follows events, concepts come after

reality. This was the case with the 1999 Strategic Concept, whilst the 1991 document was an exception because of the revolutionarily novel situation. It is to the credit of the Expert Group and the Secretary General that the Lisbon Strategic Concept is impressively programmatic and future-oriented.

## Not all that shines is gold

A number of small, but not unimportant flaws should have been avoided: The extension of the term “partnership” to include cooperation with International Organizations (e.g. the UN and the EU) dilutes and devalues NATO’s successful concept of “Partnership” (with a capital P). Also, at a time when conflict prevention appears ever more important, it is difficult to understand why the Strategic Concept makes no mention of the OSCE, let alone the African Union. Furthermore, although the staunch stand on nuclear weapons is commendable, NATO’s characterization as a “nuclear alliance” goes somewhat over the top and might prove counterproductive. In addition, the document is weak in the reflection of lessons from the Afghanistan mission - lessons pertaining to the broader International Community, who leaves many of the responsibilities to NATO, and internal lessons regarding command and control, coordination, multinationality, national caveats etc. Finally, since NATO’s much broader involvement with global security challenges proclaimed by the Strategic Concept will have to happen through a rigorous activation of article 4 (consultation) of the Washington Treaty, it would have been logical to add “Consultation” as a fourth “essential core task” to the triad proclaimed (collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security).

Moreover, it must be stated that the elegant text conceals that there is not really solid unity on a number of issues, such as the question whether NATO is a regional or a global organization, its political or military character, the balance between collective defence and expeditionary orientation, the assessment of certain security challenges and their emphasis in the view of individual Allies, the NATO-EU relationship and its political “blockage”, the UN mandate issue, the approach to Russia, nuclear weapons policy etc. In some of these areas, the verbal consensus may quickly collapse in light of concrete tasks, requirements and challenges.

On NATO’s reach and character, one can read from the Strategic Concept that NATO continues to regard itself as a regional organization, but one with a global perspective, which brings emphasis to the consultation among Allies,

as envisaged in article 4 of the Washington Treaty. And the perennial debate whether NATO is a military or a political organization should at last be put to rest: It is a political-military security organization that puts its unique capabilities at the service of international security. These are its military forces, the integrated command structure, common defence and force planning, its experience in multinational military cooperation and its expertise in training. But regarding it as the “hub” of the international system would be counter-productive, and its place in that system appears to call for better a explanation.

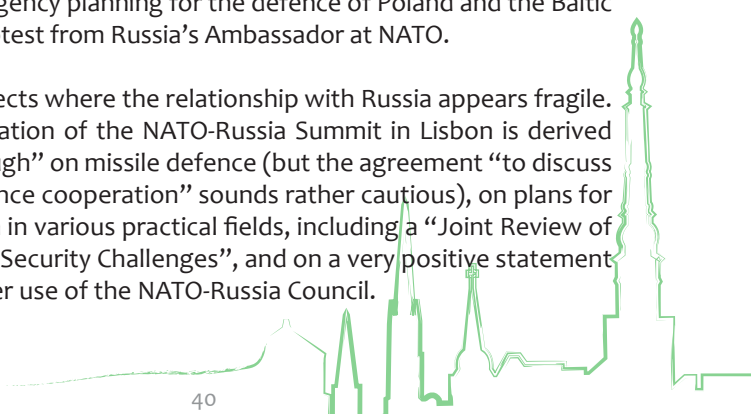
## The real task: implementation

The new Strategic Concept will be only as good as its implementation. In the Lisbon Summit Declaration this is recognized with many quite urgent taskings to Foreign and Defence Ministers as well as to the Permanent Council. Therefore, the Strategic Concept must be read alongside the Summit Declaration and, for that matter, the NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement.

Exemplarily, successful implementation of the principles and intentions is crucial in the following fields, and in some respects also requires more conceptual work:

Regarding the first core task, deterrence and defence, a definition of the added value is necessary, which can be offered by NATO in combating “new” security challenges, where it is agreed that military force is not enough: terrorism, cyber threats, energy security, piracy, organized crime, trafficking in human beings. It is no secret that there continues to be great variance among Allies concerning NATO’s role and the function of the military in these fields. With regard to the “assurance of all Allies”, it remains to be seen to what extent preparatory measures and contingency planning will be implemented, and how visible (and thereby effective) they will be. Already Wikileaks’ publication of documents on contingency planning for the defence of Poland and the Baltic countries sparked protest from Russia’s Ambassador at NATO.

This is one of the aspects where the relationship with Russia appears fragile. The upbeat interpretation of the NATO-Russia Summit in Lisbon is derived from the “breakthrough” on missile defence (but the agreement “to discuss pursuing missile defence cooperation” sounds rather cautious), on plans for concrete cooperation in various practical fields, including a “Joint Review of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Common Security Challenges”, and on a very positive statement of intent about further use of the NATO-Russia Council.



Is that sufficient and sustainable? This author has thought for a long time that “reset” of relations with Russia is a bad metaphor. Not only a new start is needed but an improved “programme”, which on the Alliance’s part would include an explicit acknowledgement of NATO’s share of responsibility for the worsening of the relationship with Russia: It poorly understood Russian political psychology and fear of marginalization, badly orchestrated the last enlargement push, paid no attention to Russian proposals for the adaptation of the CFE Treaty, failed to present the missile defence issue as a truly common cause and has not sufficiently contributed to making an optimal use of the NRC, particularly when it was most needed in the time of the Georgia crisis.

In turn, Russia should cease to see NATO as a “danger” or even “threat”, and not aim to constrain or split it, share the same values, respect the principles of the Charter of Paris, overcome old geopolitical and geostrategic categories, abandon Cold War clichés about NATO, give up the idea of a “special sphere of influence”, not instrumentalise “Russians abroad”, renounce revisionism and fully support sovereignty and independence of its neighbours, contribute itself to their “reassurance”, fully embrace cooperative (as opposed to confrontational) security, follow up the first positive steps in its “history policy” vis-à-vis Poland (and, in future, also others), and realize that Russia can only “isolate” itself. Together NATO and Russia must overcome zero-sum thinking in security policy, where one side can allegedly only gain at the expense of the other. In addition, a substantial NATO response to Medvedev’s proposals is overdue, in the awareness that Russia’s place in the European security order is still insufficiently defined.

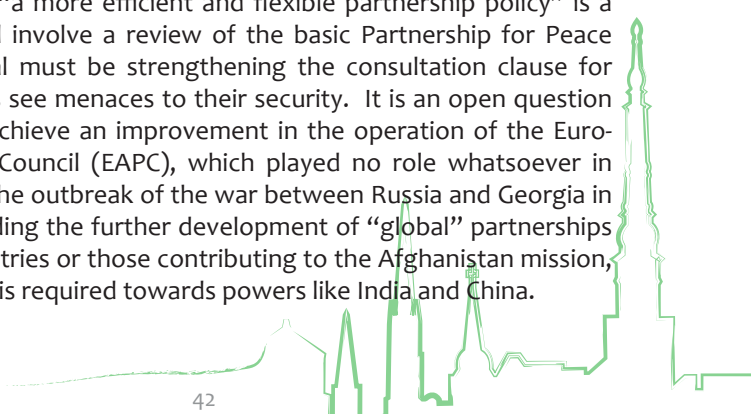
Concerning nuclear weapons policy, it is clear that the remit contained in the Summit Declaration to “review NATO’s overall posture” points to the need for a fundamental debate about the role of nuclear weapons, extended deterrence and forward stationing, the shift from “deterrence by punishment” to “deterrence by denial” (of options), and the future of “nuclear sharing”. The task for NATO and its member governments remains to reconcile public expectations for “global zero” with the explanation of deterrence requirements in the (presumably very long) transition period. Conspicuously, the debate about a nuclear-free world has until now been a Western soliloquy.

Conventional arms control is given importance in the Strategic Concept, and the Summit Declaration envisages a revival of the High Level Task Force (HLTF),

which had accompanied the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) negotiations in the 1990s. But there are no new ideas, and to “work to strengthen the conventional arms control regime in Europe” is not enough. The CFE Treaty, suspended by Russia, is all but dead, and its confidence-building instruments of verification and transparency are corroding. Therefore, a new departure in conventional arms control is required, which means broad talks among all European states, most prominently including Russia, on conventional military forces, their potential linkage to tactical nuclear weapons, threat perceptions, doctrines, force levels, weapon holdings - leading to negotiations about numerical limitations, regional constraints and transparency measures. Such a new approach would enhance confidence in the strictly defensive orientation of military postures, advance cooperative security among the nations of Europe, and might even support nuclear disarmament and missile defence cooperation.

As the new security challenges are not amenable to mainly military responses, NATO is not the sole actor, and Alliance solidarity in this field does not automatically invoke article 5, “broadened and intensified” consultation as pledged by the Strategic Concept is of the essence. But has it been realised that this will mean a genuine cultural shift in NATO? Until now, many obvious security issues have never reached the Council table, not least for fear that disagreements would be interpreted as an internal crisis. Also, in order to bring about a qualitative improvement in the consultation, a much improved analysis and assessment capacity is needed at NATO HQ. This appears to have been recognized through the establishment, in the International Staff, of a new “Emerging Security Challenges” Division. However, it remains to be seen to what extent it will produce valid political-military analysis or deal with all relevant issues (including the long-term implications of climate change), and whether it will contribute to substantially broadening the Council agenda.

The task to develop “a more efficient and flexible partnership policy” is a vast one, and should involve a review of the basic Partnership for Peace document. One goal must be strengthening the consultation clause for cases where Partners see menaces to their security. It is an open question whether NATO will achieve an improvement in the operation of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which played no role whatsoever in the months prior to the outbreak of the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. Regarding the further development of “global” partnerships with likeminded countries or those contributing to the Afghanistan mission, utmost transparency is required towards powers like India and China.



As noted above, it is striking that at a time when crisis prevention gains ever more significance, the Strategic Concept makes no mention of the OSCE. True, its Astana Summit was no success, but the need remains to strengthen the potential and the instruments of that organization and join forces with the OSCE's emphasis on "soft security" such as human rights, confidence-building and early warning, all Allies being also OSCE members, and to jointly strive for better crisis management and prevention of violent conflict. Also, the African Union, embodiment of the approach by Africa's nations to take ownership of African problems, deserves all possible support by NATO, not only in concrete operations, but also with NATO's rich experience in such fields as consultation, civil-military cooperation, education and training, security sector reform, force planning, arms control and confidence-building.

Much space is, however, devoted to the European Union with its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as an important complement to NATO, better enabling European countries to take responsibility for security and stability on their continent and at its periphery. Nevertheless, the statements about a strengthened strategic partnership, enhanced practical cooperation, broadened political consultation and fuller cooperation in capability development remain hollow, as long as the cooperation is still blocked by individual Allies. Success of the new effort by the Secretary General and the High Representative, to be reported to Ministers in April, is indeed pivotal for any progress.

Finally, cooperation with the UN, close to satisfactory on the ground in foreign missions, requires enhancing consultation at the political-strategic level. The UN-NATO Declaration, concluded in 2008, needs to be filled with life. Liaison procedures and effective consulting practices are necessary. The UN's Peace-Building Commission should be a venue for institutional cooperation. It remains to be seen how quickly these good intentions will overcome prevailing mistrust at the East River towards NATO.

More than any further conceptualization, the Comprehensive Approach requires convincing persuasion and better implementation. The acknowledgement that missions like the one in Afghanistan cannot reach their goals by a military effort alone, and in addition to their joint, inter-agency and multinational character, require close and synergetic cooperation with International Organizations (IOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). This is not about hierarchy; NATO should not aspire to a dominant position or want to coordinate others, but coordinate *with* them. Self-

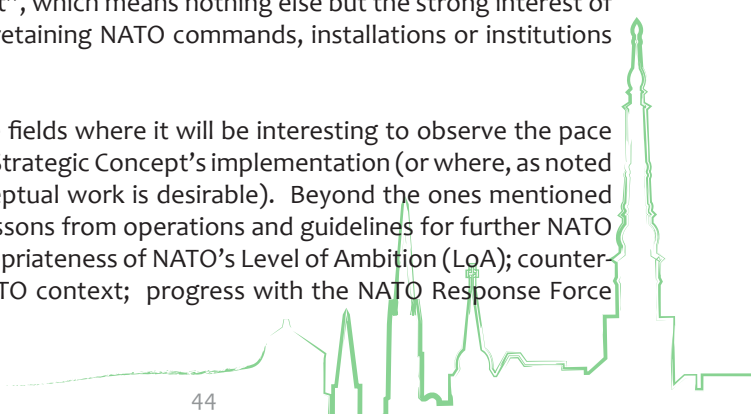
evident as the concept is, greater efforts are needed to make it work as a truly integrated civilian-military effort, over-coming national and institutional interests and bias. It is crucial to improve NATO's interaction with NGOs, but it brings about the meeting of different, often opposing, institutional "cultures", where the military wishes to take control, whilst the NGOs seek to preserve their independence and impartiality as critical for their success. Further efforts are needed towards better mutual understanding through dialogue as well as joint planning and training.

With regard to the development of NATO's military capabilities, the Strategic Concept, the Summit Declaration and the "Lisbon Capability Goals" do not contain more than the obvious goals (usability, deployability, sustainability etc.), well-known from the 1999 Defence Capability Initiative (DCI), the 2002 Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) or the Comprehensive Political Guidance (CPG) of 2006. They all yielded very limited results, and with the financial and economic crisis and the resulting drastic cuts in many national defence budgets, it is difficult to see how the gulf between ambitions and means will be bridged better than hitherto. Increased joint development of military capabilities and multinational, cost-effective approaches are needed.

Also in the field of missile defence, apart from the foreseeable resurgence of disagreements among Allies and of Russia's mistrust, the cost may be a factor hampering swift implementation of an important improvement of NATO's defence capability.

For NATO's internal reform, the Strategic Concept and the Summit Declaration give the Secretary General a broad mandate and great authority "to streamline structures, improve working methods and maximise efficiency". Also here, implementation will be the crucial test of NATO's "continual reform", and it is revealing that the Declaration (in the context of Command Structure and Agencies Reform) twice refers to outstanding decisions about the "geographic footprint", which means nothing else but the strong interest of individual nations in retaining NATO commands, installations or institutions on their soil.

There are many more fields where it will be interesting to observe the pace and scale of the new Strategic Concept's implementation (or where, as noted before, further conceptual work is desirable). Beyond the ones mentioned here, they include: lessons from operations and guidelines for further NATO operations; the appropriateness of NATO's Level of Ambition (LoA); counter-insurgency in the NATO context; progress with the NATO Response Force



(NRF); assessment and further development of multinationality; training assistance and NATO's contribution to DDR and SSR; NATO's role in non-proliferation; and public diplomacy.

There are also fields for particular study and formulation of common Alliance positions, such as: developments in international law regarding defence in the light of potentially apocalyptic attacks with no pre-warning; "Responsibility to Protect" in cases of genocide and massive human rights violations; problems of "humanitarian intervention"; implications of "failed states"; and further development of a credible deterrence doctrine in a multi-polar world with a multitude of state and non-state actors.

## Conclusion

Notwithstanding this critical look at "What does it mean and imply?", the Alliance's new Strategic Concept makes a good case for NATO's relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and after the amazing adaptation this Cold-War alliance underwent after the end of East-West confrontation, it marks another significant transformational step - programmatically. Now Allies must afford demonstrate political will and provide the resources for implementing what they have courageously proclaimed.

### After the Summit is before the Summit...

<sup>1</sup> Klaus Wittmann, Ein neues Strategisches Konzept. In: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 07.07. 2007, p. 9. Klaus Wittmann, Towards a new Strategic Concept for NATO. NATO Defense College, Rom, September 2009 (Forum Paper 10). Klaus Wittmann, NATO's new Strategic Concept should be more than a "Shopping List". In: The European Security and Defence Union, vol. 4/2009; p. 35-37. See also: Klaus Wittmann, NATO's new Strategic Concept. An Illustrative Draft. Berlin 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Ronald Asmus, Stefan Czumur, Chris Donnelly, Avis Ronis, Tomas Valasek, Klaus Wittmann, NATO, new allies and reassurance. Policy Brief. London: Centre for European Reform, May 2010.