



From Lisbon to Lisbon: Squaring the Circle of EU and NATO Future Roles

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NATO emerged from its 19-20 November 2010 Lisbon Summit with a new Strategic Concept (SC) that is concise and readable. That is an achievement in its own right, as those who in preparing for the Summit struggled through the previous long-winding 1999 version will appreciate. The new text does not break a daring new path for NATO nor does it bridge any age-old divide, which perhaps explains why attention from the media and the general public outlasted the Summit itself by just a day or two. Even so the Summit can be deemed successful, for NATO needed a new and clear mission statement, as the public, and many governments, were growing restive about Afghanistan, and were beginning to doubt whether that seemingly never-ending war did not put a mortgage on the Alliance's reason for living: the collective defence of its territory.

The new Strategic Concept provides the answers that were to be expected. Of course, NATO must be capable of both Article 5, i.e. territorial defence, and non-Article 5, i.e. worldwide crisis management operations. Evidently, the Alliance must remain committed to nuclear disarmament while maintaining nuclear deterrence as a

core element of Article 5: "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance" (SC §17). Naturally, it is better to have a "strong and constructive partnership with Russia" (SC §34) than to steer an antagonistic course — Russia's own interpretation of that will become clear soon enough. The Strategic Concept offers a neat expression of NATO's mission and how it seeks to go about it in the years to come.

And yet, a forceful Strategic Concept has not generated a self-confident Alliance, and not just because at the same time as strategizing NATO had to down-size as well. The NATO structure will be cut from some 13,000 to some 8,000 personnel. The much more fundamental reason for the existential unease that marks NATO today is its loss of centrality. The Strategic Concept contains a number of ambiguities as a consequence of trying to reconcile two ways of dealing with this loss of centrality: staying relevant by strengthening the core business, or staying relevant by adding new business lines.

THE POLITICAL CENTRE OF GRAVITY HAS SHIFTED

As long as the Cold War lasted, it was logical for defence against the vital military threat to the territorial integrity of the Allies to be high on the political agenda, hence the centrality of NATO in the multilateral relations of Europe and North America. Now that there no longer is a vital threat, it is equally logical for territorial defence and the Alliance that organizes it to lose that central position, as other issues rise to the top of the agenda: climate change, energy scarcity, global economic and financial governance, the role of the emerging powers. These are not threats, entailing an immediate risk of violence, but challenges. They cannot be tackled by military means, but require a mix of diplomatic, economic, technological and other instruments. In short, this is foreign policy — not defence.

The gradual shift of the political centre of gravity away from NATO should not be resisted. While unpleasant perhaps for NATO, it is in fact a luxury problem: there are no more vital threats to our territory, hence we can afford to prioritize other issues. NATO is not equipped to deal with those — NATO cannot do foreign policy. Trying to keep NATO relevant by artificially forcing all of these issues onto its agenda is counter-productive, for as the Alliance will not be able to solve them it only risks being discredited without hope of achieving success. At the same time, means and efforts will be distracted from its core business of territorial defence and crisis management, which does in fact ensure NATO's relevance — only in a less central position than before.

That does not mean that NATO cannot discuss climate change or energy scarcity, but only in so far as they have implications for security and defence. Nor does it imply

that NATO should not have a dialogue with third States. Obviously, all those that deploy forces on operations are entitled to “a structural role in shaping strategy and decisions on NATO-led missions to which they contribute”. Perhaps NATO might even “develop political dialogue and practical cooperation with any nations and relevant organizations across the globe that share our interest in peaceful international relations” (SC §30). As long, that is, as NATO realizes that it cannot be the main forum through which Europeans and Americans channel their relations with States such as China, India, or Brazil, or even Russia.

The simple reason is best expressed by one of NATO's own buzzwords: the comprehensive approach. NATO is a politico-military organization, which deals with one dimension of foreign policy only, i.e. security and defence. Responses to global challenges and relations with third States require a much broader, comprehensive approach that encompasses all of foreign policy, from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military. While NATO can contribute, it is not equipped to take the lead. That is up to the governments of its members, including notably the United States and those members and non-members that happen to have organized themselves into the European Union. The US and the EU: those are the true, comprehensive foreign policy actors in Europe and North America. The EU's foreign policy institutions were greatly strengthened by the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, and in Lisbon, back-to-back with the NATO Summit, the EU's new President of the European Council met with the President of the US for bilateral talks. In an age where, fortunately, foreign policy challenges outweigh direct security threats, the EU and the US, and direct consultation between them, logically take centre stage.

FOCUSING ON THE “HARD” CORE BUSINESS

NATO must continue to play a leading role, by contrast, in what constitutes its core business: “hard security”, both defence against threats to our territory and global military crisis management. Here lies the strength and the continued relevance of the Alliance.

If today there are no more vital threats to Alliance territory, it cannot be excluded that in the long term NATO will again see a major threat arise, or may have to ward off the consequences of inter-State war between other powers. To that end, Article 5 functions as the ultimate insurance. The call, particularly from East European Allies, to reconfirm Article 5 is understandable and legitimate, hence the firm statement: “NATO members will always assist each other against attack” (SC §4). The credibility of this commitment is not helped by those who seek to expand the scope of Article 5, however. What does the reference to “emerging security challenges” (SC §4) mean? The North Atlantic Treaty is clear: “an armed attack against one or more [...] shall be considered an attack against them all”. Once one starts to add other types of contingencies than armed attack, such as energy or cyber security, a grey zone quickly emerges, making it more difficult to decide what constitutes sufficient ground to invoke Article 5. For how long must the gas be cut e.g. — a day, a week, a month? How to react to cyber attacks perpetrated by fluid collectives of individuals, some of them under-age? Once more, the Alliance will not be kept relevant by trying to imagine military responses to non-military challenges: energy security, cyber security, even terrorism are best tackled by a holistic foreign and security policy, including notably the police and justice dimension, in

the framework of which the military instrument is but a last resort.

In the absence of a vital threat, it can be doubted too whether missile defence of all Alliance territory constitutes an indispensable and effective contribution to collective defence. The actual threat of missile attack seems limited and certainly not markedly higher than other types of threat that cannot be stopped by missile defence, notably terrorism, currently the only direct threat of violence against our citizens on Alliance territory. Would not the combination of deterrence and a proactive foreign policy in cooperation with other powers suffice to contain, and ideally come to a mutual agreement with those States that acquire a significant missile capacity? As it is, the effectiveness of missile defence technology to protect our entire territory remains very much in doubt, while the financial burden will certainly be very heavy. At the moment though, that will mostly be carried by the US, which will contribute the actual missile defence capability, while the other Allies will fund the required command & control system for an amount in excess of €700 million over 10 years (including €200 million added in Lisbon to expand protection from troops deployed in theatre to Allied territory itself). Their contribution will hopefully remain at this level, for in the wake of the financial crisis European Allies would better focus their reduced defence budgets on generating deployable capabilities for crisis management.

If after Afghanistan the appetite to undertake new large-scale operations has surely diminished, Europe and North America will continue to have to engage in crisis management. For there will be crises in which vital interests are at stake, such as “the vital communication, transport and transit routes on which international trade, energy security and prosperity depend” (SC

§13). Furthermore, there will sadly be instances of crimes against which Europe and North America have a “Responsibility to Protect” populations in the context of the collective security system of the United Nations. Crisis management beyond the North Atlantic area thus also forms part of NATO’s core business.

However, through which organization Europeans and Americans will act in which case cannot be decided beforehand: NATO, the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the UN — the most suitable framework for military deployment will have to be selected on a case-by-case basis. On occasions when Europeans and Americans both want to engage, it will be NATO. But on other occasions, Americans might have other priorities than Europeans, or might already be engaged elsewhere, or for political reasons NATO might be less welcome in a region. Alternatives are thus required, if we want to be able to act in every contingency and deploy forces in the quickest and safest manner. The CSDP framework too therefore must be completely operational, including a permanent command & control structure that allows for permanently ongoing contingency planning, a smooth planning process in crisis situations, and the conduct of all types of crisis management operations, including combat missions if necessary. As the NATO command & control structure is being downsized by no less than 5,000 staff, nations would certainly be able to find the 300 or so officers that would have to be seconded to the EU to that end. At the same time, a permanent EU capacity would be a lot cheaper for those three EU Member States that now always have to multinationalize their national headquarters to run CSDP operations: France, Germany and the UK.

In crisis management too, the primacy of foreign policy is uncontested. The military end-state aimed at by an operation is never an end in itself, but a step towards a comprehensive political end-state. That is decided upon by the foreign policy actors: the governments and, when the European governments concert (which ought always to be the case), the EU. Regardless of the framework in which European troops are deployed — NATO, CSDP or the UN — Europeans discuss the wider foreign policy objectives in the EU framework. That is the case for Lebanon e.g., in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, even though the 8,000 European soldiers are there as Blue Helmets, under UN command. It is the case for Kosovo, where European military are deployed under the NATO-flag. And it ought to be the case much more for Afghanistan, if Europeans want to have an impact on strategy towards the country and the region.

Crisis management requires capabilities. At the Summit NATO adopted the Lisbon Capability Package, fixing the funding for a number of multinational projects. The boots on the ground however have to be provided by the nations. European Allies are still struggling to improve the efficiency of their defence effort: their combined defence budgets ought to generate much more deployable capabilities. But they do not, because in reality they are not combined — the problem of European defence is fragmentation. The answer is integration: a combination of specialization, pooling of efforts, and doing away with redundant assets. The answer, furthermore, is Europe: such integration has to, and can only, take place among Europeans — the US has no need to pool its military. Hence CSDP is the platform from which to launch a stepped up European defence effort. On 9 December 2010, the Ministers of Defence of the EU

agreed on the so-called Ghent Framework, referring to their earlier informal meeting in that city in September. Each EU Member State will analyze its capabilities in order to identify: (1) those it will maintain on a national level; (2) those to which it will contribute through pooling with other Member States; and (3) those to which it will no longer contribute, relying on specialization and role-sharing between Member States. If done in a permanent and structured manner, such a process will lead to true cooperation — as envisaged by Permanent Structured Cooperation, the new defence mechanism in the Lisbon Treaty. The end-result will benefit everybody: more effective forces, no matter how integrated, will be available for national as well as CSDP, NATO and UN operations.

AVOID “SOFT” BRANCHING-OUT

Crisis management is not exclusively military. In Lisbon, NATO decided to create “an appropriate but modest civilian crisis management capability” in order “to interface more effectively with civilian partners”, but it “may also be used to plan, employ and coordinate civilian activities until conditions allow for the transfer of those responsibilities and tasks to other actors” (SC §25). Undoubtedly, the “interface” is highly necessary. An arrangement is needed that, whenever NATO is chosen as the framework for a military operation, allows from the very start for the involvement in NATO planning of whichever actor will take charge of the political, social and economic tasks, be it the EU or the UN. These can then implement those tasks in full coordination with the military — but under their own command. Once more, the primacy of foreign policy must be recognized. The highest political authority, which will set the comprehensive foreign policy strategy towards the country

concerned, will always lie outside NATO, with the US and the EU, and finally with the UN. It is not up to NATO to command the various civilian dimensions of this comprehensive strategy.

The added value of creating a NATO capacity to “plan, employ and coordinate” civilian tasks is doubtful therefore. Certain civilian tasks will in any case have to be implemented from the start, simultaneously with military operations. That civilian capacity will in any case have to be provided by nations (e.g. police, gendarmerie, civil protection), by other international organizations (notably various UN agencies), and by NGOs, and will in any case require military protection. Building a NATO “civilian HQ” would duplicate existing civilian command & control structures, notably the EU’s Civilian Planning and Conduct Capacity (CPCC), without adding more capability. More importantly, this would be a useless duplication, for even if initially NATO itself would conduct some civilian tasks, eventually the other actors will always need to come in — certainly the Alliance will not create a development policy, a trade policy etc. Better then to leave the short term (i.e. civilian crisis management *stricto sensu*) and the long-term civilian dimension in the same hands. Nor would it be very useful then to “identify and train civilian specialists from member states” (SC §25). There already exists a plethora of national, EU and UN courses for civilian crisis management. The problem is not how to train policemen, judges etc. for deployment abroad — the issue is where to find them.

CONCLUSION

NATO remains the forum where Europe and North America organize their collective defence, and it remains one of the key actors through which they do crisis management and cooperative security.

Those are the three “essential core tasks” defined by the new Strategic Concept (§4). The more capable NATO will be of implementing those security and defence tasks, the more relevant it will be. Attempts to broaden NATO’s agenda beyond those core tasks and move into civilian crisis management and even into foreign policy cannot achieve success, for the Alliance is an alliance, not a foreign policy actor. Instead, such distractions will only serve to undermine the core tasks and thus to question NATO’s relevance. What this artificial broadening of the agenda will not do is bring back the centrality that NATO enjoyed during the Cold War. Fortunately, for to put it simply, that today the agenda of Europe and North America is no longer dominated by a vital threat to their territory is a good thing.

NATO’s loss of centrality does not affect the transatlantic relationship, however, for we should not make the mistake of equating transatlantic relations with NATO only. Logically, if defence is no longer the main concern, the main debate moves elsewhere, particularly to the direct EU-US relationship. That transatlantic link, between the two fully-fledged foreign policy actors, needs to be deepened and operationalized. Within such a fundamental political partnership, NATO remains a key asset, the executive organization that Europeans and Americans use when they need to act together in the military field. Let us hope that an effective foreign policy can limit those occasions as much as possible.

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