

“NATO Strategic Concept: Response to Our Concerns?”- International Conference

On January 12, 2010, the [Prague Security Studies Institute](#) opened the season with an international conference on the future NATO Strategic Concept. The event, co-hosted by the [Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) and supported by [NATO Public Diplomacy Division](#), welcomed over a hundred of policy practitioners, officials from NATO countries, think tanks, and NGO community, journalists and experts. Present were several members of the [Group of Experts](#) on the Strategic Concept appointed by the Secretary General, led by the former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Madeleine Albright.

Discussions focused on the views of Allied states, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, regarding NATO's future role in Europe and beyond. A number of speakers addressed the issue of finding the right balance between territorial defense and out of area missions as well as between NATO's commitment to Article 5 and new security challenges. Other topics included NATO's crisis management capabilities and the relations between the Alliance and the EU.

In her intervention, Secretary Albright emphasized the importance of security reassurance to member states as well as the need to work on better relations with the Russian Federation. “There is no question that an important concept is reassurance, that Article 5 is central to the NATO Alliance, and at the same time it is very important to also reset our relations with Russia,” Albright said.

Event Summary

The following part highlights some of the opinions voiced during the meeting (Note: The sessions were held under the Chatham House Rule). Selected [media coverage](#) appends this summary, along with a selection of [readings](#) on the new Strategic Concept.

Worries from Central and Eastern Europe Regarding Russia

The morning sessions of the conference focused on NATO's future relations with Russia. Most speakers and contributors confirmed that NATO needs to reset its relations with Russia.

Many experts viewed the process of “resetting” as problematic: Russia does not respect the rules of the game and still claims a right to the sphere of influence. Furthermore, Russia is willing to use force to impose its foreign policy doctrine in NATO's neighborhood (Georgia). Russia's increasing defense spending suggests this trend will not change in the future.

Some were even more skeptical: *Despite NATO's efforts to engage Russia, the Alliance may not be able to stop it from using energy as a legitimate weapon. In this regard, NATO's tools for reassurance might be limited*, even if NATO included some members' concerns into talks with Russia.

According to most participants, NATO faces a difficult task in changing Russia's perceptions regarding the CEE region. Even a routine NATO activity (e.g. training exercise) is automatically regarded as anti-Russian measures. By further engaging Russia, NATO should attempt to alter

Russia's self-induced psychology of "being surrounded." In this regard, NATO needs to come up with various frameworks for common thinking to break the barriers.

One participant clearly defined the differences in views on Russia between the CEE members of NATO and the rest of the Alliance stating that: "Central European members worry about artificially induced conflicts, cyberattacks and disruptions of energy flows. The rest of NATO is primarily concerned with sending the right signal to Russia."

This divergence remains the main factor driving the new members' call for Article 5 reassurance in the New Strategic Concept.

Article 5: No Reset Without Reassurance

Admittedly Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) no longer faces a direct military threat. Yet there is a good deal of uncertainty, instability and unpredictability. As the Georgian crisis illustrated, there still exists a chance of limited military action in NATO's immediate neighborhood. Under such circumstances, *many participants expressed the view that it would be hard to reset the Alliance's relations with Russia without new reassurances on the Article 5.* Furthermore, such a step would have a positive spillover effect on populations in PfP countries, namely Ukraine or Georgia.

In reexamining the Strategic Concept, NATO should realize what Article 5 means in terms of protection, rather than defense in the traditional meaning. Individual members need to understand that there exist different groups within NATO with varying security perceptions. "What concerns you concerns me. This should now be the approach among the members, instead of appeals that particular member states should change their perceptions regarding Russia," noted one of the speakers.

One participant emphasized that *NATO should not forget its core mission, which is protecting the homeland of its members.* "Territorial defense should remain the core task of NATO," he reminded. NATO can play a vital role in supporting national authorities in times of natural disasters and crises. "Protection is not the same as consultations," stated another contributor pointing out that NATO should clearly distinguish its commitments between Article 4 and Article 5, which is about "getting things done." Another expert thought that NATO's position will significantly improve if NATO stops undermining the credibility of Article 5: "How many times have we heard that the article is dead?"

In response to the question how can CEE states ensure that the U.S. remains involved in European security, one U.S. participant strongly advised that new members of NATO do their "homework" properly: "You will have a lot more leverage in Washington. The Americans want to hear what it is that you actually want. "The more [reforms] you do at home," he continued, "the more seriously you will be taken."

Sufficient Crisis Management Capabilities Needed

Many of the policy experts present at the conference pointed out that the process of NATO's reform involves a new thinking about deterrence and NATO's crisis management capabilities.

NATO should shift its attention to consequence management and adequate capabilities for such tasks. In general, the conference participants agreed that NATO's specialized capabilities are in short supply. NATO might currently have limited capabilities for out-of-area operations, yet it lacks parallel resources to ensure sufficient home defense. The same concerns exist for early warning systems.

Additionally, the panelists felt that NATO currently lacks enthusiasm (and resources) for contingency planning. The recent Russian-Belarusian exercise - entitled "Zapad 2009" (West 2009) - taught us a lesson. It would have been appropriate to respond, albeit not in a Cold War spirit, by a routine training exercise. Instead, NATO stood by watching.¹

The participants agreed that frequent training will improve the new member states' ability to respond to threats and should therefore become a central theme in the reassurance discussion. Unfortunately, *NATO has found it impossible for several years to agree on a single contingency planning exercise in the Central European region. As a result, it is no surprise that partner countries such as Georgia are not confident that NATO can play a crisis management role.*

As a next step, NATO should encourage its members to bring their national security strategies into the line with the changing security environment. While deterrence should involve the revision of NATO's nuclear capabilities, it should embrace various modes of deterrence (e.g. deterrence by punishment, by denial, etc.). From this perspective, one speaker suggested, missile defense remains a critical component.

Restoring NATO's Credibility

NATO, as one participant noted, is the only international organization with so sharp contrast between what it truly represents and its perception throughout the international community. The recognition of NATO's various achievements remains low among the general public.

The participants suggested there exists a correlation between the lack of public trust, some members' calls for reassurance and NATO's ability to conduct missions abroad. NATO's lack of attention regarding home missions, including defense and deterrence, eventually lead to questions pertaining to the missions in remote places such as Afghanistan. The citizens of NATO members would be more willing to support their armies' expeditions abroad if they, in turn, felt stable and secure.

One of the overarching themes throughout the meetings was the issue of mutual trust. The Allies could enjoy more harmonious relations among themselves, if they restored their own credibility. *Senior members should do more about convincing their citizens of solidarity towards the junior allies, whereas the latter need to do the reforms properly.* The allies, therefore, need to come up with a societal resilience strategies to strengthen the transatlantic bond.

¹ NATO and Russia: War games. 2009. *The Economist*. Available at: http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14776852.

“Start worrying about each other’s concerns and think beyond the threats on your doorstep,” several speakers urged. “It is not about the Baltics fearing Russia and the United States disturbed about Afghanistan. It should be the other way round,” the representatives advocated.

Strengthening the Partnership with EU

The conference participants stressed the need for an effective division of labor between NATO and the European Union. *Most of them agreed that NATO could not fix all security problems in the European area.* As one speaker illustrated the situation, NATO sometimes resembles a robust Swiss Army Knife. It has all the tools needed, but it’s difficult to use them at once.

While recognizing the obstacles to relations between NATO and the EU, the audience called for the strongest cooperation possible. One speaker suggested that there be an official consultation body.

Several participants were critical towards the EU’s stance on the cooperation with NATO. One expert pointed out that the European Security Strategy released in 2003 views the partnership with NATO only in general terms. “Do the EU institutions want to cooperate with NATO?” was a frequent rhetorical question. On NATO’s side, reforms should be made that could allow the international staff work without political censorship and engage in informal consultations with their EU counterparts.

Others saw NATO’s role as instrumental for further enhancement of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). NATO should encourage the EU to adopt a truly common European defense policy as specified in the recently ratified Lisbon Treaty. In this regard, one speaker welcomed French efforts to make the development of ESDP capabilities the prime issue after the country’s return to the military structures of NATO.

Global Challenges: Article 4 or Locking the Door?

With the globalization of security challenges (threats to energy security, cyberspace, environment, and others), questions arose on NATO’s role in addressing the non-traditional threats. Should NATO’s efforts in these areas complement or duplicate institutions such as the UN, IEA, and others? There was a strong disagreement among the participants on this subject.

One group advised that the security community avoided loose talks such as the debate on energy security several years ago, which led to no particular conclusion. “After all,” one representative noted, “there are security implications to many contemporary problems, including food scarcity, environment degradation, and others, which lead to internal conflicts.” Does NATO need to respond to every such challenge or are there better platforms to address issues such as energy security. Does a horizon-scanning of these issues causes NATO to loose its focus?

Other experts vigorously opposed these suggestions, choosing cyber-security as an example. There are differences in the nature of the cyber-attacks. Some do not necessarily imply losses of life or long-term threats to security, whereas some can achieve damage comparable to a massive-scale conflict. While NATO should not try to second-guess the international organizations dealing with such issues, *it is necessary to discuss the asymmetric threats under the provisions of Article 4, as*

long as it includes a military aspect to it. “Talk about the Arctic, when there is a possibility of conflict,” persisted several experts. “That is the original purpose of NATO.”

Thinking Ahead: NATO at 80

The participants proposed several ideas regarding the substance of the debates and the subsequent drafting process. As it has become the tradition, some suggested that there is an opportunity to define a wide array of trends (new threats, missing strategies for particular regions, namely the Greater Middle East). Others recommended a cautious approach to contents of the final document. As one speaker put it, being too concrete too early might hamper any future discussions, which are already so highly politically charged.

The audience agreed that NATO should take seriously the numerous calls for a short yet actionable document. *The new strategic concept should refrain from empty phrases and avoid a vague communiqué style.*

Another speaker suggested that policy leaders shaping the concept should be ambitious and imagine NATO in 20 years, when it turns 80. In this context, it will be necessary to start discussing China and other key players in the future. Only then can we ensure that NATO remains relevant. ♦

Questions and comments regarding this summary can be addressed to PSSI's Program Consultant Jan Havranek at: [jan \[at\] pssi.cz](mailto:jan[at]pssi.cz).

Media Coverage

1. [As NATO Redrafts Priorities, Albright Says Alliance Must Adapt To New Realities](#) - RFE/RL
2. [NATO should more focus on new members' defence, Czech senator](#) - ČeskéNoviny.cz
3. [Prague conference seeks to help NATO chart new course](#) - Czech Radio
4. [NATO's new Strategic Concept discussed in Prague](#) - NATO

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