



OFICINA DO CES

ces

Centro de Estudos Sociais
Laboratório Associado
Faculdade de Economia
Universidade de Coimbra

**ANDRÉ BARRINHA, DANIEL PINÉU, LICÍNIA SIMÃO, MARIA
RAQUEL FREIRE, JOSÉ MANUEL PUREZA, OLIVER
RICHMOND, MARCO ROSA**

**NATO AT 60 PLUS
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS FUTURE
POLICY BRIEF**

**Outubro de 2010
Oficina nº 354**

**André Barrinha, Daniel Pinéu, Lúcia Simão, Maria Raquel Freire, José
Manuel Pureza, Oliver Richmond, Marco Rosa**

**NATO at 60 Plus
A Critical Assessment of its Future
Policy Brief**

**Oficina do CES n.º 354
Outubro de 2010**

OFICINA DO CES
Publicação seriada do
Centro de Estudos Sociais
Praça D. Dinis
Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Coimbra

Correspondência:
Apartado 3087
3001-401 COIMBRA, Portugal

André Barrinha, University of Coimbra (rapporteur)
Daniel Pinéu, University of Marburg (rapporteur)
Licinia Simão, University of Beira Interior (rapporteur)
Maria Raquel Freire, University of Coimbra
José Manuel Pureza, University of Coimbra
Oliver Richmond, University of St. Andrews
Marco Rosa, University of Coimbra

NATO at 60 Plus
A Critical Assessment of its Future
Policy Brief

Abstract: By the end of November 2010, NATO will have a new Strategic Concept, one in which the major guidelines of action for the Alliance will be set, supposedly in tune both with the current international security climate and its own responsibilities within it. Based on the NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement report drafted by the Group of Experts led by the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, this policy brief attempts to critically analyze NATO's current and future role in international security, pointing out several aspects and issues for which the Alliance should have a different approach. This policy brief is the result of a brainstorming session that took place in the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, on September 14h, 2010.

Summary

NATO 2020 advances a dangerous trend of securitizing non-military threats. It is of particular concern that issues such as global warming deserve NATO's attention as a security problem, thus potentially demanding the involvement of a military organization in tackling a non-military issue.

It fails to substantially revise the Alliance's nuclear policies, simultaneously advocating the maintenance of nuclear deterrence strategies and non-proliferation efforts. Such inconsistent views are also evident regarding NATO's mission in Afghanistan, where the Alliance suffers from the lack of a truly common vision, and the lack of legitimacy to implement an ambitious liberal agenda, both in the eyes of ordinary Afghans, and in the eyes of many in its domestic constituencies.

NATO is currently a global player in denial. It clearly would like to be able to intervene globally while merely focusing on the security of its members. There is a discrepancy between NATO's security referent objects (the transatlantic space) and its security subjects

(such as the Afghan and Pakistani populations). NATO is currently operating in the periphery of the international system, while mainly concerned with the security of its allies. This discrepancy will be further enhanced with NATO 2020, as it clearly reinforces the idea of a NATO that acts globally but thinks regionally.

Background

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has approved two Strategic Concepts, one in 1991 and the other in 1999. These documents define NATO's purpose, nature, and fundamental security tasks. Domestic scrutiny and international attention to the role played by NATO in a post-Cold War context has made the process of revision of its Strategic Concept an instance of global politics. As a result, and as highlighted below, NATO's concern with its own image is a crucial aspect of the ongoing revision process.

The 1991 Strategic Concept focused on the immediate challenge of redefining the goals and tasks of the Alliance, in order to justify its relevance as a security actor in the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic scenario. In that context, its members partook the view that the new environment did not change the purpose or the security functions of the Alliance, but rather underlined their enduring validity. Although the threat of a 'full-scale military attack' had been removed, the Alliance was now dealing with multi-faceted and multi-directional risks. This, it was declared, demanded a strong commitment to European security, which NATO members perceived as being best achieved through the reunification of the continent, a policy based on the common values shared by the Alliance. Democracy thus became a central feature of the 1991 Strategic Concept, and redefined NATO's identity by positioning itself at the core of post-Cold War security environment.

Eight years later, NATO approved a new Strategic Concept during the Washington Summit. This took place in the context of NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement to Central European Countries, and following the Alliance's intervention in Kosovo. This pushed the Alliance into two competing trends: one reinforcing its role in providing for Euro-Atlantic security and consolidating an enlarged Euro-Atlantic community, which included new supporters in Central and Eastern Europe: and the other demanding a reflection on the role of the European Union as a contributor to Europe's security. The reinforcement of the transatlantic link and the maintenance of the Alliance's military capabilities were fundamental aspects in this regard. The 1999 Strategic Concept was particularly concerned with the dangers associated with failed states and ethnic conflict, following the Alliance's

experiences in the Balkans. It also underlined the importance for the Alliance of establishing partnerships with other like-minded international organizations and partners relevant for NATO members' security. Arms control and efforts of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remained another important task for the Alliance.

Since then, NATO has been actively engaged in the Balkans, in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Mediterranean. The scope of its activities has widened to go well beyond the assurance of military security in the transatlantic area. Particularly after 9/11 and the ensuing Global War on Terror, NATO has been consistently deployed in support of US goals in the Middle East and South Asia. It should now be seen how this has been materialized in the Group of Experts' Report commissioned by NATO's Secretary General after the decision of the North Atlantic Council to prepare the ground for a new NATO Strategic Concept to be approved during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010.

The 2010 revision of the Strategic Concept

According to Jamie Shea, Director of Policy Planning in the private office of NATO's Secretary General, "it will be difficult for the Alliance to distance itself too much from the Group's analysis" (2010: 48). In that sense, the document that was presented by Madeleine Albright and her peers, on May 17th, 2010, can be seen as the blueprint for NATO's new Strategic Concept. It is thus legitimate to question its major assumptions, as part of the NATO's new strategic thinking. This will be done by focusing on three main issues. First, this policy brief will assess the process that led to its drafting, focusing on issues of accountability and input. Second, NATO's redefinition of its *raison d'être* will be discussed, focusing on what it means to be part of the Alliance. Finally, NATO's role in the international system will be considered, with particular emphasis being given to the importance of partnerships.

The process's democratic deficit

Both the drafting of the Experts' Report and NATO's overall approach to the revision of its Strategic Concept have been marked by a clear concern with public visibility issues. This is a net improvement, not only from the Cold War period, in which strategic decisions and the Concept itself were classified, and thus removed from public discussion, but also from the post-Cold War revisions of NATO's Strategic Concept, much more confined to the classical intergovernmental decision-making process. The creation of a specific website dedicated to

the new Strategic Concept, as well as the extensive public consultations that preceded the drafting of NATO 2020, illustrate this newly found concern with public visibility on the part of the Alliance.

Despite these efforts, the process that led to NATO 2020 can be seen to suffer from the same flaws that generally characterize this type of documents. There are two main reasons of concern. First, the idea that a group of non-elected “experts” can draft a document of significant political impact that has at its core an understanding of policy making as an arena of a small elite. This also implies that NATO’s policy is driven by policy, rather than by knowledge, i.e., NATO invites former and current policy-makers to define policy, thus running the risk of taking its decisions based on a mindset already formatted for policy-making, shutting out alternative views of the world – which is known to students of decision-making as groupthink. Second, the idea that an extended process of consultation substitutes clear and public decision-making procedures reflects NATO’s attempt to legitimize this document more than real concern for public opinion. A document that is truly concerned with public sensitivities on trans-Atlantic security should not be afraid of engaging in processes of domestic debate and legitimization. This could include, for instance, an enhancement of NATO Assembly’s role in the drafting of the document – it is after all, the most representative institution within NATO’s structure. In a truly democratic process, NATO could go as far as holding a referendum within its member states to approve the document.

Identity and Purpose

It is particularly telling that the document considers relevant to “tell NATO’s story” under a different light, in an attempt to enhance its legitimacy among its domestic constituencies. Part of this re-telling of the story is based on a reinterpretation of its history. NATO is thus portrayed as a driver of world history, rather than driven by it. According to the document “NATO’s role in maintaining the unity, security and freedom of the Euro-Atlantic region is ongoing. Its status as the globe’s most successful political-military Alliance is unchallenged” (2010: 5). Its legacy is declared one of “success”, going from 1949 until NATO’s contemporary operations in Afghanistan, the Gulf of Aden, and the Balkans. In the case of the latter, the document particularly highlights the Alliance’s role in halting ethnic cleansing in the region, as well as its pivotal role in the construction of “more stable societies” (2010: 7). This interpretation is particularly striking given NATO’s problematic and delayed

intervention in Bosnia, and its troubling intervention in Kosovo – the latter’s current status as a stable society being a particularly debatable issue.

Part of this attempt to improve NATO’s image is also based on the idea that NATO’s primary task is to defend its allies’ national security interests, reinforcing the centrality of state sovereignty in international relations. Taken to the extreme, this view reifies a realist understanding of the world, in which international organizations are but the sum of its members’ pre-defined national interests. Paradoxically, it also appeals to the common responsibility of its members by highlighting the importance of an equitable contribution to the Alliance: “To succeed, NATO must have the sustained commitment and united effort of its members” (2010: 12). In a recent speech on NATO’s future, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated as much, saying that, “[...] NATO is not now, nor should it ever be, a talk-shop or a Renaissance weekend on steroids. It is a military alliance with real-world obligations that have life-or-death consequences. Those realities must inform everything we do” (Gates, 2010). Whilst couched in a language of partnership, Secretary Gates’ words are meant as a reminder of the inevitable tension between the American self-image of leadership within NATO, particularly in terms of strategic direction, and the recent rifts between America and other Allies regarding troop contributions, force caveats, and the primacy of the military objectives in Afghanistan vis-à-vis stabilization and reconstruction.

This is further reinforced by the notion that NATO needs to develop faster and more efficient means of decision, eventually falling short of consensus-based decisions, a worrying trend that could ultimately lead to the establishment of a formal hierarchy of power, in which the strongest members impose a disciplining power that defines what it is to be a member and how to operate within the Alliance, or at best a “two-speed” NATO. It holds true to the myth that the rational application of knowledge and power, mobilized through centralized burden sharing, can make no mistakes.

International dimension

According to the Group of Experts’ report, NATO’s story should also be re-told to its international audience: “people outside NATO should know that the organization and its partners are working each day to build a safer world” (2010: 12). Within this context, the idea of partnerships seems to be a central tenet of NATO 2020, at least according to Jamie Shea. In his opinion, “the strongest message in the Group of Experts report is the need to strengthen

NATO's partnerships" (2010: 57). While it is not clear how exactly will such partnership mechanisms function, they do tend to highlight NATO's re-positioning strategy in the international arena, thus materializing the notion that NATO will always have global interests, but will not always be able to attend to every issue, and therefore needs partners whose operations will in large measure be aligned with the broad objectives of the Alliance. Such allusions to participation have long been a problematic mechanism of western power and institutions by which they claim local legitimacy beyond their immediate members. Moreover, there is no allusion to concepts such as 'local ownership' despite the fact that other international or regional organizations have been forced to acknowledge its centrality to their legitimacy.

The report recognizes that, while "NATO is strong and versatile [...] it is by no means well-suited to every task". Therefore, the Alliance will have to rely on "other organizations, national governments and nongovernmental entities", but "depending on the needs in any particular case, NATO may serve as the principal organizer of a collaborative effort, or as a source of specialized assistance, or in some other complementary role" (2010, 10). As this passage denotes, NATO intends to develop a network of partnerships that will allow for the pursuit of its own particular agenda, without having to centrally implement it. It is a sort of outsourcing logic in which the partners will have some operational autonomy but that will, in the end, allow for the fulfillment of the Alliance's liberal agenda.

In our view, the centrality of such partnerships reveals NATO's search for global legitimacy and a way to control structural changes at the global level. This, in turn, evinces one of the key tensions inherent in the build-up to NATO's new Strategic Concept: on the one hand, the insistence on its regional defensive nature and, on the other hand, its envisioned future as the promoter and manager of a global order through strategies of liberal security governance and through the implementation of a liberal peace. The present discourse on the future of the Alliance shows a global player in denial: even if it refuses to explicitly acknowledge it, NATO is moving from a role as the guarantor of the collective defense of a regional liberal space, to that of an engaged architect of a global liberal order – a move which is sure to cause a measure of resistance worldwide. The latter is as likely to come from the countries whose societies NATO aims to reconstruct and stabilize, as from ambivalent partners such as Russia, both of which will likely contest NATO's legitimacy.

Even though Moscow is considered a relevant partner in the Groups of Expert's Report, and even if there is much general talk about the need for enhancing the role of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), no specific solutions are ever proposed regarding a structural change of mutual perceptions, nor concrete measures for building trust between Russia and NATO. The former is still presented as the unreliable partner that can easily turn into an enemy of the Alliance. In the somewhat ominous words on the Experts' Report, while "the Alliance does not consider any country to be its enemy [...], no one should doubt NATO's resolve if the security of any of its member states were to be threatened" (2010: 26-27). Statements such as this – and mirror attitudes on the part of Russian officials – mean that greater trust will be a hard objective to achieve. With such perceptions running through the public statements of various members of the Alliance, in particular those with a contentious history during the Cold War, it seems unlikely that largely cosmetic efforts in public diplomacy, including President Medvedev's decision to attend the Lisbon Summit, will produce significant results, at least in the short and medium term.

With regards to NATO's international relations, a particularly striking feature of this document is the limited attention that has been conceded to the United Nations. Appearing in third place, after the Partnership for Peace (PfP)/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) is treated as little more than a horizontal partner with which NATO must have close ties. Little, if anything, in this document indicates the hierarchical superiority of the UN over NATO within the framework of International Law. In fact, the document seems to suggest that through such a partnership, NATO should become a primary enforcer of the UN's security pronouncements, and thus the de facto fundamental security provider worldwide. This would almost certainly grant NATO a higher degree of global legitimacy for its out of area operations, as well as de-territorialized security missions, thus belying the purely regional scope of NATO's (stated) intentions and strategies.

A final aspect that we believe deserves to be underlined and questioned in NATO 2020 is the way it understands the world as defined through the categories of member states, partner states and problematic states (this expression is obviously left out of the document), with the latter being both the source of the 'known and unknown unknowns', and the sites in need of interventions. States considered fragile, or at least unable to fully control their territories and populations according to the precepts of liberal order, are represented as the

origin of dangerous flows (such as terrorism, migration waves, environmental disasters, cyber-attacks, etc.), and therefore in need of NATO intervention – what we could term the darker side of the liberal peace doctrine espoused by the Alliance.

Conceptualizing and operationalizing security

Two aspects merit particular attention regarding the conceptualization of NATO's views on security, and their operationalization: first, the inclusion of a broad range of new threats and challenges, adding to NATO's traditionally hard military stance and doctrines a concern for 'soft' security issues; second, the centrality and attempt to define in more detail NATO's role in counter-insurgency operations, with a particular focus on the lessons learned from its engagement in Afghanistan.

Broadening the security agenda

NATO 2020 identifies a number of 'perils' that the Atlantic Alliance should tackle, such as piracy, risks associated with energy supply, environmental neglect, and cyber-security. In a sense, with this document, NATO is a latecomer to the debate on the broadening of the security agenda, be it in terms of a larger number of threats to be considered beyond the traditional, military ones; be it in terms of a concern with the security of individuals vs. the security of states (human security). Regarding the latter, NATO 2020 has avoided utilizing the term human security itself, rather focusing on the "well-being of people throughout the continent [Europe]" (2010: 20). The debate on non-statist security referent objects is thus very limited, with the bulk of the document referring to the security of its Allies.

If we consider that NATO's *raison d'être* is still the military defense of its territory, then the inter-relation between a) the identified perils, b) the security referent objects and c) NATO's logic of existence paints a particularly grim picture regarding the Alliance's future security role. NATO 2020 proposes the widening of NATO's security understanding by broadening its agenda. This unfolds in the context of an Alliance that has an organizational culture centered on a militaristic understanding of its role in the world; a world in which the main actors are still states, and not individuals or civil society actors. The result is likely to be the securitization of a number of issues (such as climate change) that should find their solutions outside a military security logic. Given that the securitization of issues tends to lead to the tackling of issues outside a 'normal' democratic framework (cf. Buzan *et al.*, 1998)

adding to a growing tendency for a democratic deficit, it is of great concern that NATO might come to encompass these issues in its Strategic Concept.

The broadening of the security agenda raises two further issues of concern, one related to the operationalisation of the Strategic Concept, the other to its out of area missions. Such a broad range of security issues provides firm grounds for NATO to extend the scope of its military operations, thus allowing it to use its military power in a whole range of different operations, from piracy (as it already does) to cyber-space. With the broadening of the security agenda, the nexus will be potentially enlarged to new policy areas. This will work in the enhancement of what Mark Duffield defines as the ‘security-development nexus’, in which a certain international order is imposed on the out of area spaces in which NATO unfolds its missions through the securitization of civilian policies, such as development and humanitarian assistance (Duffield, 2001).

NATO’s nuclear policy

As in previous revisions of NATO’s Strategic Concept, the Alliance’s nuclear policy is also an important part of NATO 2020’s reflections. The recommendations of the Group of Experts place NATO’s deterrence policies at the heart of peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic space, while urging its members to commit to the overall goal of global non-proliferation and securing nuclear materials. “As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO should continue to maintain secure and reliable nuclear forces” (2010: 12). This is the major rationale behind NATO 2020’s suggestion to keep NATO’s nuclear deterrence capabilities, disregarding the negative impact that both the maintenance of the nuclear arsenals, and an active nuclear policy might have on the broader non-proliferation agenda. NATO’s Secretary General hinted at this dilemma when he referred that the Alliance needs to “balanc[e] the importance of having a strong deterrence posture with the desire to strengthen arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts” (Rasmussen, 2010).

This is perhaps another perfect illustration of the difficulties the Alliance faces in transiting from the mental and operational frameworks of the Cold War, towards the interdependent nature of security in the 21st century. The risk of nuclear terrorism is a major concern underlined in NATO 2020, as are the current instances of global nuclear proliferation. What is striking is that the report fails to acknowledge the inter-related nature of NATO’s nuclear posture and the policies of proliferation, both by states and non-state agents.

By keeping its nuclear strategies valid for its own security, NATO members fail to reinforce a fundamental pillar of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the universal regime it establishes: the need for vertical non-proliferation measures, i.e. solid and transparent steps towards disarmament. In fact, the very word ‘disarmament’ is completely absent from the report, and although US-Russia cooperation is acknowledged as a fundamental step in fighting proliferation and in security nuclear materials, only perfunctory references are made to the importance of reducing both states’ nuclear capabilities.

NATO has also retained its policy of nuclear solidarity, which implies the deployment and maintenance of US nuclear weapons in Europe, in a potential violation of the NPT. Although the number of nuclear weapons in Europe has sharply decreased, NATO’s extended deterrence capacity has been maintained. Moreover, as the modernization of nuclear arsenals in Europe might be poorly perceived by European constituents, NATO 2020 clearly indicates that NATO’s defense should increasingly rely on Missile Defense, initially as a complement to its nuclear capabilities (2010: 10), but according to some authors, potentially seeking to replace it (Thränert, 2009). This has been particularly problematic in NATO’s relations with Russia. The latest efforts by NATO’s Secretary General to entice Moscow to join the Alliance’s announced commitment to the US-proposed Missile Shield in Europe are likely to be seen in Moscow as another hollow attempt to provide legitimacy to the project, whereas disregarding President Medvedev’s proposals for a new comprehensive security treaty in Europe.

Challenges and lessons learned from Afghanistan

NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, in the form of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), has become a cornerstone issue for NATO and its members, a fact openly acknowledged by the Expert’s Report, which notes that the Afghanistan mission is “the largest ever attempted by the Alliance” (2010: 9) In a way, therefore, Afghanistan has become the focus for the redefinition of NATO or, at least, a crucial litmus test, prompting in some quadrants a series of questions about whether the Alliance’s focus on that particular mission was a way of staving off its announced decline in the post-9/11 world, and whether a failure in Afghanistan would spell the end of the Alliance. Moreover, between 2001 and 2007, NATO has come to gradually abandon its initial strategy of a ‘light’ military footprint in the country. Accordingly, the challenges faced by NATO in Afghanistan have triggered a ‘lessons

learned' mentality on the part of the Alliance, something which is bound to decisively shape the new Strategic Concept. Regarding this issue, it is perhaps worth citing the Expert's Report at length:

Looking to the future, the Allied experience in Afghanistan is a rich source of lessons to be learned. Many of the principles that should be featured in the new Strategic Concept are in evidence. These include the requirement for Alliance cohesion, the desirability of unified command, the value of effective planning and public diplomacy, the aptness of a comprehensive civilian/military approach, and the need to deploy forces at a strategic distance for an extended period of time. (*idem*)

What is perhaps most remarkable in this attitude towards the Alliance's future strategy is the extent to which it worries about more classical aspects of military doctrine – emphasizing the importance of joint planning and interoperability, as well as the challenges of strategic force projection, and the logistic chain needed to sustain this effort for an extended period. While all of the above are undoubtedly a challenge for NATO's forces operating in Afghanistan – in part revealing the novelty of such an operation for NATO –, they do not reflect the contemporary priorities of strategic thought in that scenario, at least from the dominant American perspective, namely the central importance of counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine. This ambivalence towards the nature, importance, and future role of COIN capabilities for NATO's 'out of area' missions reflects, to a certain degree, the ongoing debate in the post-Rumsfeldian Pentagon about the future of the 'American way of war', with the proponents of the classical mechanized warfare and 'the big Army' hashing it out against the vocal proponents of reorienting America's doctrine towards 'small wars' and insurgencies in the developing world.

However, unlike the US, most European members of NATO seem to have adopted a more conservative posture, insofar as the new strategic concept reflects the doctrinal consensus of the Alliance. In other words, there has been no similar effort by NATO, as an organization, to make a sustained revision of its strategic doctrine to accommodate counterinsurgency needs, in Afghanistan or in future intervention scenarios. In fact, the issue of insurgency/counter-insurgency only makes its appearance three times in the entire Experts Report, and then only to emphasize the need for developing joint doctrine and planning in COIN, working with 'partner organizations' to win local hearts and minds, and reforming local security forces. This is probably a reflection of two factors: on the one hand, the very

nature of NATO – an Alliance of multiple partners, comprising several strategic cultures – makes it a doubtful partner in effective COIN operations with the US. On the other hand, this evinces a certain strategic divide between NATO members regarding their national strategic position towards COIN. For one, there seems to be no actual political consensus among member states about the nature of future operations in Afghanistan, and the inescapable role of COIN therein. Perhaps as a consequence of this, many NATO contributing members have not reviewed their military doctrine in order to adapt to the requirements of COIN (cf. Noetzel e Schreer, 200).

The issue of counterinsurgency aside, NATO is clearly trying to refine and solidify its military dimension in Afghanistan, while at the same time enlarging its security concept to include challenges that are not best addressed by those means, such as the environment, or gender issues. This paradox is most evident in the insistence by the Group of Experts, whenever mentioning NATO's mission and objectives in Afghanistan, on the need to develop and deploy civilian capabilities, given the relative lack of civilian and political capabilities within ISAF today. Despite this, however, one must keep in mind the lack of detailed proposals on how to effectively create them in the short-term, and the constant emphasis of the Expert's Report on cooperating with 'partner organizations'. Another potentially problematic area, which is apparently left unaddressed, is the potential for inter-institutional conflict with other organizations (EU, OSCE, UNAMA) due to overlap in stated mission/strategic goals.

Finally, the Alliance in general, and the US in particular, have evinced a marked concern with defining the responsibilities that each of the members has towards the Alliance – the oft-cited 'burden-sharing' – especially with regards to Afghanistan. The issue of troop contributions from the European partners, in the American optic clearly insufficient (with the exception of the United Kingdom), as well as the issue of national caveats – that is, restrictions imposed by some Allies on their troops being used in combat missions, or in certain geographical areas – have regularly created minor political 'crises' within NATO. The key issue here is that while American pressure is always applied in the name of 'burden-sharing', a thorough discussion of who can authoritatively define – or challenge – the nature of that burden, and the measure of that sharing, is off the table.

Clearly then, NATO's ill-prepared foray into state-building in Afghanistan forms the backdrop against which the new Strategic Concept emerges. In this context, rather than

senselessly worrying about whether Afghanistan's intervention may spell the demise of NATO, one should focus on the apparent tensions brought forward by that mission, and which the new Strategic Concept is unlikely to address in any comprehensive manner. Chief among these is perhaps the legitimacy of NATO (both domestic and international) to intervene in far-flung places, not in strict defense of the territorial integrity of its member states, but rather to promote a particular form of liberal security underpinning a Pax Transatlantica.

NATO and its future

Is NATO still relevant? This is, in our view, a legitimate question, one that is far from being reduced to authors of a critical stance – and also one which the report engages with. Neo-realists such as Stephen Walt (2010) question the long-term viability of this organization. More than its relevance, though, it is legitimate to ask for whom and for what purpose does NATO still endure as an international organization.

NATO is always for someone and for some purpose

In what has since become a key expression in International Relations Theory, Robert Cox wrote in 1981 that “theories are always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox, 1981: 128). This was used to illustrate Cox's Frankfurt School–influenced typology of theories as either problem-solving or critical. According to Robert Cox, a ‘problem-solving theory’, “takes the world as it finds it” (*ibidem*). The problem with this approach is that, it neither questions those conditions of existence of what it is looking at, nor does it consider the possibility of change beyond existing structures.

Critical theories, on the other hand, question the prevailing order, how that order came into existence, and what are its underlying processes of historical change. They are constantly adjusting to the changing concepts and the objects they seek to explain (*ibidem*: 129). Also, they are open to normative approaches that favor the change of the prevailing order. However, such openness is limited by the feasibility of that alternative order, constrained “by the comprehension of historical processes” (*ibidem*: 130).

This typology could be used as an analogy to explain both, what NATO is, and what it could be. The Atlantic Alliance could in fact be described as a problem solving institution, as it is incapable of going beyond the security environment it is given. In that sense, NATO's

Strategic Concepts have been, since (at least) the end of the Cold War, trying to ‘catch up’ with the surrounding security environment (and by security environment we mean the network of issues that are defined as security, not necessarily the existence of clear and objective set of threats), rather than attempting to contribute to its change.

It would never be easy for an institution that was built on the bricks of the Berlin Wall to transform itself into an agent of change. This does not mean NATO’s problem solving approach has not had some positive results. For instance, it could be argued that NATO’s post-Cold War policies helped Central and Eastern European countries in their transition to democracy. The Alliance has also played a positive role in keeping the US close to Europe. Even though this a) was also on the US’s interest and b) led in some cases to Europe’s involvement in conflict scenarios in which it did not have direct interests at stake (such as in Afghanistan), it could be argued that the Atlantic Alliance provided the Europeans with a discussion forum in which they could attempt to influence US foreign policy decisions. It could thus be argued that Washington’s tendency to either isolate itself from the world, or engage in expansionist policies was tempered by Europe’s alternative interests. With the increasing tendency for a shift in the axis of the international system towards Asia, it is now doubtful that Europe can still be useful for the US. In addition, it could be claimed that the US’s economic and military might is increasingly restrained by rising powers such as China and India.

According to Michael C. Williams, NATO’s strength after the Cold War was in its capacity to transform itself into an alliance of shared values (Williams, 2007). More than military, its power after the Cold War was mostly symbolic, ideational, and cultural. It was what NATO represented that made Central and Eastern European countries confident enough to free themselves from Soviet dominance, go through painful internal reforms towards liberal democracy, and eagerly join the Atlantic Alliance.

It could be argued that with 9/11 that symbolic value was overtaken by existential security needs that eventually led to its mission in Afghanistan. The liberal peace that NATO strongly promoted in the 1990s, was replaced by a liberal security agenda in which NATO missions were now undertaken with the explicit goal of promoting its members security at a global scale, rather than doing so by promoting the expansion of its liberal values in its near abroad. This revised *raison d’être* – which will be reflected in NATO’s new Strategic Concept – reinstates NATO as an organization more concerned with its military condition, rather than

with its symbolic power. Even though the blind belief in the benefits of expanding a liberal peace could be criticized for its teleological character and its potentially negative consequences (cf. Richmond, 2007), setting NATO's existence at the ideational and symbolic levels provided a more positive setting for its eventual transformation into an organization that assessed the world under a more critical prism. An organization that defines itself according to threats and risks is an organization less willing to contribute to a structural change in the international system; it is an organization largely concerned with its survival in a world that, according to what it was told, is structurally anarchical.

Conclusion

While NATO was clearly the product of a Cold War territorial world, and its symbolic capital was inextricably tied to the idea of shared values and the defense of the sovereign boundaries that contained those values against external aggression, today's Alliance treads a different ground. In fact, both NATO 2020 and (presumably) the new Strategic Concept make much of the de-territorialized nature of contemporary threats – such as cyber-attacks, environmental decay, or terrorism. Accordingly, the referents of NATO's security agenda are no longer just its member states, but rather the whole of humanity. Yet its focus on specific threats writes that humanity out of existence. NATO creates securitized political subjects without any responsibility towards their understandings of insecurity. Strangely enough, even as the Alliance extends its security agenda in this manner, it falls back on essentially military solutions. As a result, NATO has not yet let go of its classic identity, but it is struggling to project it into a new agenda, prompting at least one author to speak of 'narrative transformation' (Ciuta, 2002). To what extent that transformation will successfully leave the pages of the narrative and effect real-world changes, and to what extent this transformation will be seen as legitimate or, to the contrary, engender resistance, remains to be seen.

Bibliographical references

- Buzan, Barry; Wæver, Ole; de Wilde, Jaap (1998), *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Ciuta, Felix (2002), "The End(s) of NATO: Security, Strategic Action and Narrative Transformation", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 23(1), 35-62.
- Cox, Robert (1981), "Social Forces, States and World Orders", *Millennium*, 10 (2), 126-155.
- Duffield, Mark (2001), *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. Londres: Zed Books.
- Gates, Robert (2010), "NATO Strategic Concept Seminar (Future of NATO)", Speech at the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1423>.
- Noetzel, Timo; Schreer, Benjamin (2009), "Missing Links: The Evolution of German Counter-Insurgency Thinking", *The RUSI Journal*, 154(1), 16-22.
- Rasmussen, Anders Fogh (2010), "NATO Ministers start the sprint to the Lisbon Summit" available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-BF5BE339-58201D20/natolive/news_66872.htm.
- Richmond, Oliver (2007), *The Transformation of Peace*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shea, Jamie (2010), "What Will be in NATO's New Strategic Concept?", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 9 (1), 47-59.
- Thränert, Oliver (2009), "NATO, Missile Defence and Extended Deterrence", *Survival*, 51(6), December, 63-76.
- VVAA (2010), *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement*, Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO.
- Williams, Michael (2007), *Culture and Security. Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security*. New York: Routledge.
- Walt, Stephen (2010), "Is NATO Still Relevant?", available at http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/24/is_nato_irrelevant.