



## **POLICY PAPER**

### *The Future Security Environment*

Prepared for NATO Allied Command Transformation

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## The Future Security Environment

The twenty-first century security environment will be marked by *considerable uncertainty, volatility and increasingly rapid change*. New asymmetric security threats are emerging to join more traditional issues in creating a complex environment with no dominant theme such as the predictability of Cold War bipolarity. *Globalisation and modern communications technology means that events are unfolding at a speed and pace often exceeding the ability of decision-makers to effectively react*. Not surprisingly, many analysts now claim that today's world is more chaotic and unpredictable than at any other period in history.

It is against this context that NATO needs to determine its priorities for the coming decade. This will most likely encompass a re-writing of the Strategic Concept in 2009 for the sixtieth anniversary of the Alliance. This policy paper will review the findings for the RUSI Strategic Study No. 2008-001 before moving on to advance particular course of action for NATO in the near and medium term.

### Geopolitical Considerations

For nearly the past twenty years the *United States has been the predominant global power* – culturally, economically and militarily. It is the most important actor, geopolitically, and it will most likely remain so for the next quarter of a century. Talk of US decline ebbs and flows. In the 1980s Japan was on the rise, the US on its way out. During the 1990s, however, it seemed that America was unstoppable. Now, mired down militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan and economically in debt to a number of foreign countries, talk of America's 'imperial' decline is once again popular. Such talk is exaggerated. Despite current difficulties the US will remain the largest economy in the world for the near and medium term. The superiority of American products and the innovativeness of American industry will ensure a poll-position in the fields of information technology, telecommunications and biotechnology. In terms of the military, the US will remain the preponderant power. No other nation, including China, comes close in terms of military capability. The Chinese themselves muted in the 1990s that they would resort to asymmetric challenges using disease, electronic war and insurgency if they were pressed into conflict with the United States.

Although the US will remain the superpower for the next 25 years, the world will become increasingly multi-polar. *The rise of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) will alter the regional dynamics within which the US must play*. These regional players will also have global interests related to trade and access to natural resources which will also challenge the US in areas beyond their region. Examples of this can be seen in Russia's involvement with Iran's nuclear programme and Chinese exploration and exploitation in Africa. Therefore the US will find itself encroached upon by rising powers that while loathe (And incapable) of challenging the US directly with military power, will indeed *push the boundaries* of the currently accepted order.

## Security Considerations

The *changing balance of power* in international affairs means an increased probability of inter-state war on a grand scale. Although the world is currently captivated by the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is little reason to believe that these will be the templates for the future of conflict. The end of major war is far from certain and in particular rivalries between states such as India and Pakistan, North and South Korea and a number of countries in the Middle East and Africa mean that it is in fact a distinct possibility. That said, unconventional conflicts will continue to be the most common form of conflict in the international system. Such conflicts will continue to rage across parts of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia in the near and medium term as those regions continue to endure political and economic unrest. The presence of non-state actors that are able to exploit religion and promote a radical ideology will continue to make low-intensity conflicts a common occurrence. The amorphous nature of these actors will make them difficult to eliminate.

It is *non-state actors* that are most likely to affect the security of NATO allies. Given the military and economic foundations of the West, NATO allies can really only be challenged by non-state actors. While many fear a resurgent Russia, the fact of the matter is that Moscow is driven by a need to sell its products (primarily natural resources) to Europe. Therefore, any negative action towards Europe would ultimately be self-defeating. Moscow will attempt to divide and split Europe to prevent a power bloc from developing that could challenge Moscow's ambitions. Unlike Russia, however, non-state actors have no such considerations. Furthermore, their nihilistic attitudes mean that is difficult to deter them since they embrace death, rather than fear it. Terrorism within the territory of NATO is therefore likely to be increasingly prevalent and domestic security agencies will find that they will be pushed to maximum capability. Given the well known maxim that we have to be lucky every time, the terrorists have to get lucky only once, the chances are high that in the next five to ten years NATO allies will suffer from terrorist attacks, the magnitude of which may meet or exceed the standard set by 11 September 2001.

Violent acts, however, are not the only security consideration facing NATO allies today. The increasing technological dependency of modern society means that the infrastructure of daily life is subject to *cyber-attack*. Over the next five to ten years NATO allies will become increasingly vulnerable to cyber-crime and cyber-attacks. Such acts may be perpetrated by state or non-state actors and are difficult to trace. The track record for cyber attacks is disturbing. Estonia was the victim of a cyber-attack, most likely from Russia. NATO ACT suffered from a cyber-assault in 2007 perpetrated most likely from China and a number of agencies in the UK have also had similar difficulties. The damage inflicted by a large scale cyber-attack on a NATO ally could be as devastating financially as a 9/11 style attack.

While cyber-attacks will be an increasing concern of NATO allies, it will not overshadow the half a century old specter of nuclear weapons. *Nuclear*

*weapons proliferation* (and the proliferation of other weapons of mass destruction such as biological and chemical assets) is becoming *increasingly problematic*. Since the end of the Cold War much of the territory of the former Soviet Union has been de-nuclearized, but Pakistan and India have become declared nuclear powers. North Korea might also possess some nuclear weapons capability and Iran seems determined to obtain the ability to produce nuclear energy, the assets of which could then be converted into a weapons programme. This scattered proliferation may result in a cascade effect. The implications of an Iranian nuclear weapon and the consequent nuclear arms race that may precipitate in the Middle East are a particularly disastrous scenario for the non-proliferation regime.

One of the most worrying scenarios related to proliferation of nuclear weapons would be the collapse of the Pakistani state. Pakistan as a failed state, with nuclear weapons, and a highly volatile Islamist section of the population could resemble a Taliban Afghanistan circa 2000 on steroids. *If there is one lesson to learn from the 9/11 attacks it is that weak and failing states have great potential to cause pain and destruction on a massive scale.* Conflict in the coming five to ten years will probably emanate from weak states, rather than strong states. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are two particular regions of concern.

In addition to these more or less traditional security threats, a number of *non-traditional scenarios will most likely challenge the security of NATO allies* in the coming two decades. Climate change holds the distinct possibility of creating conflict around the world. Global warming is likely to increase the severity and frequency of extreme weather events such as *droughts, floods, hurricanes, and Tsunamis*. Between 1990 and 1999 an estimated 188 million people per year were affected by natural disasters, six times more than the 31 million per year affected by armed conflict. This conflict, humanitarian emergencies in the own right, further threaten to destabilize the governments of weak states. Furthermore, they contribute to large number of internally and internationally displaced persons. This may affect the politics of a region and could foment conflict. Rising sea levels that may submerge littoral states and coastal areas around the world will further exacerbate the situation. The 2006 UK Stern Report on Climate Change suggested that *200 million people could be displaced by 2050* by rising sea levels and droughts.

Changing weather patterns will also affect access and *quality of natural resources*. Global warming has caused an approximate 20 percent increase in global water scarcity. Water scarcity already plays a role in conflicts such as those in Darfur and in Israel/Palestine. *Climate change and environmental degradation will affect economies and livelihoods* which will affect local, regional and global economic growth. A scarcity of natural resources will be only one part of the problem, however.

*A swelling global population* will place an increased drain on stretched natural resources as well as the ability of states to deliver services for their citizens. Weak and failing states will be especially put upon. Current estimates put the global

population at 8.5 billion by 2035. But growth is not even. Near to 95% of projected global growth will occur in the poorer developing world. Sub-Saharan Africa will supposedly see an 81% increase in population by 2035. In the industrialized world, birth rates will continue to fall and remain low – often times below the replacement rate. The *domestic situation within many NATO allies will therefore become difficult* as a smaller segment of the population is asked to shoulder the care and expenses of the retired baby-boomers. This will mean a pull on state resources, complicating the ability of NATO allies to fund advanced militaries. Furthermore, the boom in the global south, coupled with the depopulation in the global north will most likely mean large scale migration. This could have a *destabilizing effect* on the populations of the global North, including many NATO allies. It will also cause changes within the populations that may affect that regions are seen as important to NATO and how NATO should act as diasporas become increasingly important in domestic politics.

There is also a danger that diaspora and minority (verging perhaps on majority) populations will become disenfranchised and/or radicalized. This process can already be seen throughout Europe. In many European NATO allies *disenfranchised* groups of Muslim youth are causing social unrest with political repercussions. In some instances they may directly affect the national security of the state. The 7/7 bombings of 2005 in London are an example of this.

Demographic issues will be further complicated by *disease*. In an increasingly networked and interconnected global village the catastrophic devastation that disease could cause is very real. NATO countries would be very much affected by a global pandemic, given first of all their open borders (particularly in Europe) and second of all because they tend to serve as major airport hubs (London, Frankfurt, Paris, New York) which would be the point of entry for a pandemic. Already well established diseases such as AIDS will have a pile-on effect in weak states. In Malawi for example 25-50% of healthcare workers will die from the disease. Across Africa, AIDS poses the greatest danger to the economy according to the World Bank. The Bank expects it to reduce GDP in many states by as much as 20%. Thus the disease will reduce the ability of states to care for themselves and it will worsen the already poor economic situation making conflict and state failure more possible. *Africa's ability to police the situation itself will be greatly reduced* because of AIDS as well. HIV rates in the armies of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are suspected to be at least at 50%. A Zimbabwean army spokesman sparked a major stir in 2000 when he speculated that 90% of the Zimbabwean army was infected by HIV. In South Africa, the best trained and best cared for forces in Africa, estimated range from 23-40% of the military is infected. Infections amongst the military have two devastating effects. First, it reduces the ability of the African's to provide for their own security. Secondly, the sexual abuse of the population by African militaries promotes the spread of the disease. This creates a vicious cycle in Africa which will come to affect the security of NATO allies.

### **Implications for NATO**

The changing security environment will have a number of implications for the Alliance as it heads into its seventh decade. Most importantly perhaps is that the trend towards 'global security' will continue and strengthen. The direst security risks will continue to emanate from the far abroad, while a relatively small security threat from Russia will continue to be a concern. Instability in the near abroad will emanate from the Balkans region and perhaps North Africa. The Middle East will remain a troublesome region for the near, medium and long-term and instability in South Asia will be problematic for the ISAF mission. The non-traditional security risks that will categorize the international security environment will mean that NATO's traditional role as a military alliance will need to be once again revisited. The key will be to maintain credibility in terms of regional territorial defence (which is especially critical for new Eastern European allies) while at the same time further re-conceptualizing and re-tooling the Alliance for missions far from its North Atlantic boundaries. These missions may not be overtly military in nature and will most likely have a larger humanitarian component, than military component. However, the two are certainly related and many (but not all) of the problems the alliance has encountered in Afghanistan with relation to the civil-military nexus will be recurrent. NATO will have to become increasingly comfortable operating globally, although this does not mean a global NATO. It is unavoidable though that the Alliance will need to be utilized beyond the North Atlantic.

## **Recommendations**

Going into 2009 the Alliance must re-visit the Strategic Concept so that the document better fits the international security environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As it currently stands the Alliance is still largely stuck in a Cold War conceptual framework. Reaching a new Concept will not be easy, but it will be necessary if the Alliance is to properly respond to the security challenges and risks outlined in this paper. The Alliance must have some sort of protocol in place for dealing with cyber-attacks. It must also consider the role it should play in the protection of energy infrastructure. This will require a real re-thinking about the reasons for NATO's existence, how the Alliance will accomplish future missions and what role NATO will play in the change international environment.

NATO must examine its global relations. In the first instance this means relations with nation-states. Improved relations with Australia, South Korea, and Japan are a good start. The Alliance should continue to expand the network of friendly states that are interested in working with NATO. This is important because NATO will need more resources (military, logistical and financial) to carry out global mission. Furthermore, given the likely area of operations it is only logical that regional states are involved with NATO. Such relations will most likely not involved new members as this would strike to closely at the heart of NATO as a transatlantic actor. Attempts to sell NATO as a new global alliance would most likely fail at home and abroad.

NATO must also improve relations with other international organization. NATO's ability to resolve many of the security situations described above will be quite

limited. The Alliance must become more comfortable working with other entities such as the United Nations and the European Union. NATO should establish an official memorandum of understanding between the Alliance and the UN.

NATO must address forthcoming equipment requirements in a flexible manner. The Alliance will need to balance territorial defence around the North Atlantic (which will remain a core mission) with the requirements of increasingly global operations. This will be difficult because of the demographic pressures in Europe which will further inhibit Europe's desire to spend tax dollars on military equipment. As such, planning now will alleviate future problems as the demographic swing comes into full effect.

NATO must also sell itself to a new generation in Europe, North America and indeed, around the world. Many within the North Atlantic do not understand what NATO does, why it does it and why NATO is necessary. The Alliance needs not only to adapt to the changing international security environment, it also needs to re-package itself to the public. Adapting to address the new security challenges will help, as NATO will need to engage with issue that concern this generation such as global poverty, disease and eco-politics. Stronger relations with other organizations such as the UN, and with non-governmental organizations, will make it easier for NATO to sell itself to a new generation as a necessary and responsible global actor.

The Alliance must also re-dress its efforts in Afghanistan. Currently, this is the most pressing challenge the Alliance faces. NATO must ensure that the burden of Afghanistan is distributed more equally across the international community. NATO should not be blamed for 'failure' in Afghanistan and should proactively begin to define success in a way so that over the next five years the Alliance will be well positioned to transfer away from being centrally involved in Afghanistan. If this effort fails, the repercussions for NATO will be immense.