SEASON: NATO LISBON SUMMIT

A NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT
with Karl-Heinz Kamp, Jamie Shea and Leo Michel

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A new Strategic Concept

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On December 5, 2009, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the U.S. and Russia expired. In line with his ultimate goal of a nuclear-free world, President Barack Obama negotiated a ‘new START’ with Russian President Medvedev. ‘New START’ was signed in Prague, earlier this year, and provides reduction of the number of warheads and allows inspection of each other’s facilities. However, the U.S. Senate still needs to ratify the treaty before it comes into effect.

The current ‘lame duck’ Congress proves a difficult obstacle for Obama. Some Republicans must be persuaded, as a majority of two-thirds of the Senators is needed to ratify a treaty. But so far, Republicans refused to cooperate even to bring the treaty to a vote. In the meantime, Ronald Reagan’s legacy is used by both proponents and opponents of ‘new START’ to legitimise their stances on the treaty. Prominent (Republican) Americans like Colin Powell, Henry Kissinger and James Baker consider ‘new START’ as an essential step to improve American national security. Still, partisan politics seem to prevail on Capitol Hill.

Soon, the ‘Bush tax cuts’ will expire. These tax cuts benefited all households, including the (very) rich. Obama and most Democrats objected extending the tax cuts, at least for households with an income of more than 250,000 dollars, while Republicans sought continuation of the tax cuts for all households. Due to the current economic crisis and government deficits, limits on tax cuts seem justified. Without a new bill, the tax cuts would automatically expire. Therefore, proposals for a new bill, in any form, are subjected to political games.

With ‘new START’ as a top priority of Obama’s foreign policy, Republicans in the ‘lame duck’ Congress see opportunities to gain more influence in policy. After all, soon it will be even harder for Obama to pursue his policies, once the new Congress is installed and Republicans can capitalise their gains of the midterm elections of last month.

As a result, the tax cuts debate now links to ratification of ‘new START’. The New York Times even claimed that “National security [is] held hostage” and the decision making process comes down to “nuclear weapons cuts versus tax cuts for the rich.” First, Republican Senator Jon Kyl (Arizona) stalled the voting process for months, officially over concerns regarding missile defence and nuclear modernisation. This led to the White House pledging 85 billion dollars to modernise the nuclear arsenal, a much higher figure than during the Bush administration. Then, after this pledge, there wasn’t ‘enough time’ for the current Senate to vote on ratification. Until the tax cuts were brought to the table. Suddenly, Republicans could find a way to make time.

Some foreign events garnered Republican support for ‘new START’ as well: at the NATO summit in Lisbon, NATO agreed with Russia to explore cooperation on a missile defence system. At the same time, Eastern European leaders expressed their support for ‘new START,’ thereby defusing American concerns over Russian dominance regarding its neighbours. The debate about the treaty could continue.

The White House seems to accept the new reality: political horse-trading with Republicans is necessary. In foreign policy the President has more leverage, but treaties require Senate support. The new tax cuts are portrayed and explained by the White House as a new kind of stimulus bill and therefore a victory for the administration. Obama did take a big risk with this explanation. Should this ‘stimulus’ fail, deficits would still increase. If it works, Republicans can point to the tax cuts, ‘their’ spearhead, long opposed by Democrats, as the main factor of success. But for now, the political landscape calls for compromises. Negotiations on tactical nuclear weapons will only begin when strategic weapons are sufficiently covered. Therefore, with the long-term vision of a nuclear weapons-free world in mind, Obama needs to make deals domestically. Even when that means “nuclear weapons cuts versus tax cuts.”

Maarten Katsman
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On its summit meeting in Lisbon on November 19, 2010, NATO approved a new Alliance strategy. This in itself is not necessarily a revolution as it is the sixth strategy in NATO’s sixty years history. What makes this strategy – called like its three immediate predecessors ‘Strategic Concept’ – so different, is the way how it was formulated and the debates that led to its content.

How did NATO develop its new strategic guidance? What is the substance of the new Strategic Concept and what are the consequences for the Atlantic Alliance?

The way towards a new strategy

In the past, NATO’s core documents (like its military or political strategies) were written by a committee consisting of representatives from all NATO member states. In these groups, everyone acted on behalf of its own government fighting for every word and comma. In an Alliance with 28 members, all with a different historical, political or geographical background and faced with the complex security environment of the 21st century, such a way of consensus building is hardly possible anymore. This holds particularly true, since any new strategy would have to fulfil at least four crucial but contradicting purposes.

First and foremost, a future oriented strategic concept must clearly define NATO’s roles and missions. This has been tried time and again throughout the recent years but ended in an entire collection of functions in order to prepare the Alliance for all foreseeable contingencies. Hence, the second requirement of a strategy is to set priorities which bring demands in line with the scarce resources, even if this implies painful choices. Third, by defining a common vision for NATO, the new Strategic Concept must become a tool for re-engaging and re-committing all NATO member states to the core principles of the Alliance. This will be inevitable to counter the trend of a re-nationalisation of security policy – as currently can be observed in Afghanistan, where the ‘we’ in NATO’s operations appears to be missing. Fourth, NATO’s new strategy must contribute to winning the battle of narratives. It must be seen as a strategic communications tool vis-à-vis an increasingly critical public.

In order to square the circle of these differing requirements, NATO deviated from the committee based approach and chose instead a two step attitude, putting the Secretary General in the driver’s seat of the entire process.

In a first step, Secretary General Rasmussen appointed a small group of twelve experts (in NATO jargon: ‘the twelve Apostles’) headed the former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. This group was supposed to put together a report with ideas and suggestions which could be the foundation of the new Alliance strategy. In the process of writing such a report, the Group of Experts (GOE) discussed the core strategic questions in international seminars, including not only the NATO wonks but also external experts, think tankers and journalists. The GOE visited Russia as a group and individual experts consulted with countries inside and outside the Alliance as well as with international organisations. Most remarkable was the fact that a large number of non-NATO countries like Egypt, Australia, Israel, Japan, Austria etc. submitted their views on the future on NATO in the form of ‘non papers’ to the GOE. On May 17, 2010, after many months of
open and transparent debates, the Albright Group submitted its report entitled “NATO 2020” to the Secretary General and to the North Atlantic Council.

The reactions to the report were mixed. Outside the NATO headquarters, the resonance was very positive, applauding the paper as a forward looking assessment of NATO’s roles and missions. Internally, though, some diplomats and military officials in Brussels criticised the paper as too wordy and long-winded, lacking concrete political guidance for shaping the Alliance’s future. Still the report had a significant impact on the final strategy as it was the basis for the second step in which the Secretary General produced the initial draft of the Strategic Concept. Anders Fogh Rasmussen wrote this draft on his own, supported only by very few members of his staff. He circulated parts of the draft among some key NATO allies in advance to win their support as early as possible and on September 17, 2010, he presented the first draft of the new Strategic Concept to the nations.

It was a very short, ten and a half pages paper which – because of its brevity – seemed more a mission statement than a strategic guidance for NATO’s future planning. At the same time, its shortness made consensus building among the allies much easier. Controversial issues where described mostly in very general wordings which almost automatically became lowest common denominators. Moreover, the public diplomacy function of the strategy, i.e. its appeal to a greater public in order to raise support for security policy requirements, could be fulfilled much better by a short and concise document.

For these reasons, NATO managed to agree on the new Strategic Concept in a remarkably short time and on November 19 all 28 heads of states put their signature under the new strategic foundation of the Alliance.

The content of the Strategic Concept

Even if NATO Secretary General Rasmussen praised the Lisbon summit as the most important one in the history of the Alliance, not everybody seemed happy with the results. Particularly the new Strategic Concept drew some criticism in the media. 'Way too
general and nothing new in it’ was one of the verdicts of op-ed columnists. Others asked whether these few pages could really be the blueprint for NATO’s role in the 21st century.

However, these critics missed the point that NATO’s agreement on its own future is not only determined by a NATO document alone but also by the way leading to that document. The Alliance has evolved its new strategy in a long, open and transparent process, involving diplomats, the military, experts, journalists and the public. This was an intricate and time consuming procedure and some NATO experts quipped that this was not the right way to build consensus and would lead to nothing more than long debates.

However, these long debates had a clear purpose. In recent years, NATO was too focused on its ongoing operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere and had lost sight of its raison d’être. Since an agreement on these basics of the Alliance cannot be directed from the top, NATO needed an intense debate among all members about its future role in a changed security environment. In that sense, the process towards the strategy was at least as important as the document itself. Even if the new strategy is inevitably generic, NATO found clarity in at least ten points although some of the substance can only be found between the lines:

First, NATO is a political-military defence alliance with Article 5 of the Washington treaty – the mutual defence commitment – being the core. This is not new but sometimes it has been forgotten. NATO’s eastern members reminded their allies of these basics of solidarity and mutual assurance.

Second, NATO’s defence mission does not exclude a close and trustful partnership with Russia – however not at the expense of the security of all NATO countries. Cooperation with Russia and reassurance from Russia is not a contradiction. Only if all 28 NATO members feel reassured is a true partnership possible.

Third, NATO defends three things: its territory, the people living there and the vital interests of the members. NATO’s defence function is primarily directed to armed attacks or threats like 9/11, i.e. international terrorism.

Fourth, there are numerous risks like cyber attacks or energy crises which can become vital threats. However, since they hardly have a direct military dimension, NATO might only have a supportive role in dealing with them. In such a case, though, NATO must function as the key forum for transatlantic consultations on who is doing what – as stipulated in Article 4 of the Washington Treaty.

Fifth and also a no brainer is the insight that today’s security challenges and crisis management operations require a combination of military and non-military efforts. However, it is easy to request such a ‘comprehensive approach’ in papers and speeches but it is much more difficult to make it work on the ground, where civil and military actors sometimes just don’t want to cooperate. And even if they do want to, figuring out how to integrate their efforts can be problematic.

Sixth, to say that NATO needs partnerships states the obvious. Equally important is that NATO needs close partnerships with politically likeminded countries like Australia, New Zealand, Japan and others. They are not only contributing to NATO’s mission, they also share NATO’s values. Thus, they need to be included in NATO decision shaping processes as far as possible.

Seventh, notwithstanding its global activities, NATO is not a global institution and definitively not a world policeman or a globo-cop. Instead, it is a regional institution which needs to take a global perspective given the realities of the 21st century.

Eighth, if nuclear weapons remain a factor in international relations, nuclear deterrence remains relevant. Contrary to some popular views, the ultimate purpose of nuclear weapons is not to be scrapped. Instead, the function of nuclear weapons – like all other weapons – is to provide security. In cases where they don’t serve this purpose – and with respect to NATO’s nuclear weapons in Europe doubts are justified – they might be withdrawn and dismantled. Before scrapping, however, all NATO members have to agree upon how to provide sufficient deterrence without them.

Ninth, the toolbox of security does not only contain diplomacy, arms control, deterrence and defence, but also protection against incoming ballistic missiles. Missile defence has always been contentious – some saw it as a blessing some as a curse. The fact is that the interception of missiles is possible and can save lives. Thus missile defence is a task for the entire Alliance.

Tenth, NATO was always quick in announcing an adaptation of its structures and decision making processes but it was slow in implementing it. Some of its procedures are still based on the situation of the Cold War. It was just too alluring for NATO members to push for prestigious positions, command posts or a strong representation in committees and agencies regardless of actual requirements. The coming dramatic cuts in all NATO defence budgets will be a catalyst for a change that is long overdue.
How to proceed?

Of course, these ten points do not answer all open questions. Instead, they raise the issue of how to implement all the intentions and objectives: how will cooperation with Russia be organised concretely? What to do with NATO’s nuclear forces in Europe? How to cope with the realities of financial scarcity?

NATO has avoided all these difficulties in the Strategic Concept but has mentioned them in the Lisbon communiqué, the so-called Summit Declaration. Some said that the NATO nations took revenge to the Secretary General who guided them so rigorously to a short and concise strategy by putting all their national preferences and traditional positions in the Summit Declaration, which made it a rather cumbersome document.

However, NATO does not dodge the controversial topics but intends to take on them in the forthcoming months. In that sense the 54 paragraph long Summit Declaration is a novelty in itself. Instead of just mentioning the open questions, NATO’s heads of states have prescribed NATO a strict working agenda with concrete assignments and strict deadlines. There is no previous summit document that contains so many orders and obligations, almost all linked to the forthcoming meetings of NATO’s Foreign and Defence Ministers in spring 2011. Among other things, NATO has

- to develop a new political guidance for military planning,
- to draft a new concept for non-proliferation,
- to work out a new partnership concept,
- to come up with a common cyber defence policy or
- to flesh out the details of a common missile defence posture.

The only assignment that is not bound to the short deadline of 2011 is the obligation to develop a new nuclear strategy that brings the requirements of deterrence and arms control into a balance.

This extremely ambitious agenda raises the question of whether or not NATO will really make progress in all the disputed areas. The fact that a summit meeting orders the debate of open questions does not mean that 28 member states find agreement by the deadline set by their political leaders. However, it at least provides NATO with a new dynamism by taking on those topics which had been papered over for a long time in order not to widen existing cracks in the fabric of the Alliance.

Still there are issues where an agreement is currently difficult to imagine, among them the nuclear question and the problem of how to deal with Russia.

In the nuclear realm, there seems to be confusion on all sides. The United States has initiated a process towards a nuclear free world, labelled ‘Global Zero’ and have won international praise for this initiative. At the same time, the Obama administration acts as if nuclear weapons would be around for a long time to come. Russia supports the idea of a nuclear free world but at the same time regards its nuclear forces as a compensation of lacking conventional capabilities and particularly as a means to balance U.S. military strength. Moreover, neither Iran nor North Korea seem terribly impressed by the global trend towards reducing the relevance of nuclear weapons and seem to pursue an exactly opposite course.

Confronted with all these inconsistencies, NATO will have to answer nothing less but the core nuclear question of how to deter whom with what.

With regard to Russia, the situation is no less difficult. Cooperation with Russia is a must but it still remains to be seen to what extend it will be possible and how it can be implemented. Whereas some allies still harbour concerns with regard to Moscow’s intentions, others seem to believe that cooperation with Russia could democratised or domesticate Russian policy. These ideas of a ‘change by cooperation’ ignore that Russia (legitimately) pursues its own national interests which only partly overlap with those of NATO. Hence, cooperation with Russia has to be guided by political realities and less by wishful thinking. The already lurking debates on missile defence or the question of what will happen if the U.S. Congress will not ratify the new nuclear arms control agreement with Russia give a flavour of how difficult the relations with Russia might become.

So, what’s the conclusion? All problems solved? Of course not! This is hardly possible in an Alliance of 28 members with different histories, geographies, and cultures. At least NATO has dared to admit that there are different interests in NATO which have to be harmonised time and again. Therefore, the new strategy is not the end of a debate but rather the beginning. Topics like arms control, missile defence or nuclear deterrence have to be further elaborated in the coming months and years. This will not always be harmonious but might lead to disputes and heavy arguments. As a result, there will be those who depict a transatlantic divorce or the end of NATO. However, the explanation for coming arguments is much simpler: NATO is more than Afghanistan and remains a pretty agile and lively institution.

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NATO is not normally an organisation that spends much time on doctrines or mission statements. Its founding Treaty of Washington has never been revised or modified. Unlike the EU, which tends to move forward from one complex, sometimes painful treaty revision to the next, NATO has tended to define itself through specific events or crises. For instance, it engaged for the first time in ‘out of area’ peacekeeping operations only in the mid-1990s in a belated response to the collapse of Yugoslavia. Had the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo been dependent upon prior agreement within the Alliance on a new operational concept, they may well never have happened. An exasperated French Ambassador is reported to have remarked at a NATO Council meeting: “I know it works in practice, but would it ever work in theory?”

Four reasons for a new doctrine

Given that the pragmatic, bottom-up approach has generally worked well for NATO in redefining its missions after the fall of the Berlin Wall, why did the Alliance spend eighteen months debating and then drafting a new Strategic Concept? Why did an organisation that has preferred not to put itself in doctrinal strait jackets but keep its options open, put so much store publicly and privately in using the Strategic Concept to define its 21st century future? To this author, who was intimately involved in the process throughout, four main reasons stand out.

Security challenges

The first concerns NATO’s spectrum of security challenges. During the past twenty years, NATO has essentially defined itself through its operations. They have become not only what the Alliance does, but what it is. They have been the driving force for NATO’s transformation. None of the Alliance’s new post–Cold War policies – from expeditionary forces, the comprehensive approach to civilian-military cooperation or the ever closer involvement of partners, would have received so much emphasis if they had not been linked to out of area military deployments.

Yet the overwhelming focus on operations has come at a price. It has diverted NATO’s political attention away from other emerging challenges, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, cyber vulnerabilities or threats to energy supplies and critical infrastructures or vital supply lines. If these issues become increasingly important for NATO’s member states, and feature prominently in their national security strategies – as has been the case of late – but NATO has no major role in addressing them, there is a danger of a disconnect between NATO-Brussels and national capitals.

If NATO and Russia can sustain their dialogue, Lisbon will have marked a turning point

Less political attention and fewer resources will then be invested in the NATO organisation and diplomats and bureaucrats rather than political leaders will take over the direction of NATO policy. For this reason, it was important that the new Strategic Concept broadens NATO’s agenda of responsibilities. Operations can by
their very nature play only a limited role in addressing these transnational security challenges. Tanks cannot stop a cyber-attack, nuclear deterrence does not work against terrorists, and an operation such as ISAF in Afghanistan can weaken but not eliminate Al-Qaeda as that terrorist network easily relocates to Pakistan, the Arab peninsula or the Horn of Africa.

**Operations**

A second issue concerns operations themselves. In the 1990s, during the interventions in the former Yugoslavia, the application of military power worked quickly and effectively. Conflicts were ended and reconstruction could begin. NATO’s problem was to get to the point of being willing to use that military power rather than the use of that power itself.

Afghanistan shows by contrast, that the age of “war without tears” (at least for the Allies) is over. Far larger numbers of NATO forces have been deployed in Afghanistan at massively greater human and financial costs, but for what the public perceives as less of a result. Why? Is it a radically different situation, or the way NATO has been using its assets? If military power is achieving less, will NATO be used less in the future? How can NATO’s traditional unique asset – its transatlantic military capabilities – be re-optimised so that they can once again be useful and useable? Drawing the right lessons from Afghanistan was a central concern of Madeleine Albright and her ‘group of experts’ as they began their preparatory work on the Strategic Concept.

**Connectivity**

A third reason hinges on connectivity. The nature of modern security challenges is that they are multifaceted, civilian as much as military, transnational and often combining a mix of destabilising factors (such as terrorism and the drugs trade or organised crime). International responses have to be equally networked and multidimensional to be effective. Consequently organisations like NATO are only as good as their ability to leverage the contributions of others. The 1990s were probably the last time when the Alliance could achieve its security objectives with its own membership or when partners were desirable rather than essential.

These days organisations that are not globally wired to import the capacities they lack themselves are of limited value. A key element of the new Strategic Concept exercise was therefore to test the quality of NATO’s connectivity. Are the Alliance’s relations with other key international organisations functioning...
smoothly? Does NATO have the right partners? Is it getting the best out of its existing partnership arrangements? Is the NATO structure properly configured to interact successfully with others and can it effectively bridge traditional disconnects between military and civilian operators, between governments and NGOs or between Western and other cultures? It was important for the Strategic Concept not only to identify NATO’s weaknesses in connecting, but also to identify ways of overcoming them.

Cooperation

A fourth and final question mark hung over NATO’s political scope as a forum for transatlantic security cooperation. A few years ago the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, shocked many NATO loyalists when he declared at the annual Munich Security Conference that NATO was no longer the forum for the transatlantic security dialogue, although he did not say whether this had gravitated to the EU or to bilateral relations between the U.S. and its European Allies. It was akin to saying that the emperor has no clothes, but for many in the Munich audience it resonated with a grain of truth. Preoccupied with its operations, the Alliance had largely reduced its political focus to those regions – essentially the Balkans and Afghanistan – where it had troops on the ground. This also meant that NATO acquired situational awareness of the local political forces and factors only after its initial military plan had been drawn up and agreed.

As a result, issues such as Iran, the Middle East, or tensions between the two Koreas – which dominate cabinet meetings and national security councils in NATO capitals – were barely discussed at NATO HQ. The usual explanation was that NATO had no immediate operational role to play or that a discussion in the NATO Council might convey the erroneous impression that NATO was about to take military action, thereby escalating the situation.

However, this lack of transatlantic political dialogue excluded the smaller Allies from the results of interaction between Washington and the big European Allies. It also made it more difficult for Europeans and North Americans to reach a common analysis. The most serious consequence, however, was that a lack of transatlantic dialogue made hard it for the Alliance to anticipate crises and act to prevent them before violence erupts.

Moreover, by putting its consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, NATO gave them an exceptional character raising expectations that NATO was about to act when, in reality, these consultations will frequently be routine or the results activated in other institutions, such as the UN, the EU or the IAEA in Vienna. A central function of the new Strategic Concept was therefore to lift the taboo from security-related political consultations among Allies.

New challenges: protection of populations

If these were the drivers of the Strategic Concept reflections, the process itself has helped to provide the answers. Nominating a group of outside experts, led by Madeleine Albright and Jeroen Van der Veer, and having that group engage with NATO governments and think tankers in a series of seminars and consultations, certainly provided for a thorough analysis of NATO’s strengths and weaknesses. All who wanted to have their say were heard. The process of debate also helped Allies to express more frankly their own views and understand better those of other Allies.

All this undoubtedly helped the drafting of the actual Strategic Concept by NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and his team from August 2010 up to the time of NATO’s Lisbon summit. It is a testament to the Group of Experts that most of the ideas and proposals contained in their report made public last May were retained in the final Strategic Concept. So has NATO now answered these existential questions that the Group of Experts had first to define and then to grapple with?

The first part of the Strategic Concept, which deals with defence and deterrence, certainly marks a shift in favour of the new security challenges and from the defence of borders and territory to the protection of populations. Proliferation, cyber, terrorism and energy security are given a much more prominent role, even if it is not yet clear what the resource implications of building NATO response capabilities will be, especially in areas like missile and cyber defence.

Missile defence

There will be plenty of follow-up work for the Alliance to do. Missile defence was a key theme of the Lisbon summit and the new Strategic Concept. But it will take NATO some time to solve the technical, operational and financial challenges in constructing a missile defence to cover all of NATO territory, not to mention solving the many questions related to Russia’s participation in this project. How will the various national systems be meshed together? How will the command and control arrangements work, especially under the pressures of a crisis situation? Will the system be commonly funded or will costs “lie where they fall,” in other words with the contributing Allies? If NATO and Russia operate separate systems, how can they interoperate and who will be responsible for protecting which territory?

This said, the high level political decision in Lisbon to go ahead with missile defence, and the fact that NATO has largely made the future of its cooperation with Russia dependent on the success or otherwise of a joint missile defence system, will no doubt provide the necessary impetus to come up with a NATO missile defence action plan early in 2011.
Cyber security

Cyber security is potentially even more challenging. All the publicity now surrounding cyber-attacks, together with the rapid evolution and sophistication of cyber viruses and malware, have pushed this issue to the top of the security agenda. But cyber carries with it some difficult conceptual issues that need to be clarified before NATO can properly define which cyber capabilities it needs to acquire.

For instance, what is a cyber-attack? When do attacks begin or end – they seem to be rather a constant feature of the daily operations of vital information systems. Is a cyber-virus an actual weapon that should be treated as such? Can deterrence work in cyberspace when we do not know for sure who is attacking us? Is cyber retaliation in these circumstances a legitimate or effective strategy? But, at the same time, can we prevent cyber-attacks only by defending ourselves better while leaving the cyberspace of putative attackers relatively immune? Should NATO spend as much time and energy on trying to promote new international norms and regulations to govern cyberspace as on developing its own cyber contingency plans and operational capabilities?

Probably a bit of both, but NATO needs to ask itself a difficult question: if classical deterrence and military defence do not work against threats where terrorists and private citizens can acquire a destructive power that used to be the monopoly of states, then how can or must NATO re-think its approach? If deterrence doesn’t deter and defence doesn’t defend, then should NATO put its efforts on resilience and recovery; in other words, try to anticipate attacks, assess and limit the damage, harden vital infrastructure to make it more survivable and help Allies (or partners) to get back on their feet as quickly as possible after an attack through alternative networks and consequence management?

Global commons

Another issue resulting from the new Strategic Concept concerns the ‘Global Commons,’ or the protection of the key communications nodes of our globalised world. Beyond time-limited operations, such as Afghanistan, an enduring role for NATO in the 21st century will be to help keep the vital lines of communication open for the movement of people, goods, energy resources, money and communications on which the global economy depends.

NATO’s ‘Ocean Shield’ naval force combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden, or its ‘Active Endeavour’ mission to prevent terrorists exploiting shipping in the Mediterranean are both examples of how NATO’s forces will be increasingly called upon to police these vast expanses.
They could become even more congested and vulnerable if climate change opens up the High North to transpolar shipping or oil and gas exploration and production in the next two decades. As emerging new powers such as India and China, also rely on the ‘Global Commons’ to import their energy and technology, they too are showing interest in using their military forces in a protective role. Here may lie opportunities for NATO to engage these two countries – and others – in exercises and confidence building.

Traditional security concerns

The emphasis on the new challenges, however, will need to be balanced with more traditional security concerns relating to nuclear and conventional threats.

A nuclear Alliance

NATO has stated that as long as nuclear weapons exist, it will remain a nuclear Alliance. The Baltic states have obtained their contingency planning and the Article 5 exercises that they have long called for.

Yet, how will NATO balance these measures with its stated commitment to a nuclear-free world (as an ultimate goal), to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament and to the re-set with Russia? How to defend against a threat military, while you strive to remove it politically? How to keep important capabilities for insurance purposes, while not making those capabilities an obstacle to disarmament or seem like an iron-clad commitment to the status quo.

For NATO historians this balancing act will seem very familiar. It is after all, a reiteration of the ‘defence-detente/deterrence-dialogue’ doctrine enunciated by the Harmel Report in 1967. But getting this equation right in the 21st century, where there are many more and less predictable actors in play than during the time of the relatively stolid and predictable Soviet Union, will test NATO’s political skills and internal unity to their very core.

NATO has promised a defence and deterrence posture review. Hopefully it can provide constructive answers and not be only the theatre of the well-known debate between the advocates and detractors of NATO’s tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, or between those wedded to the permanence of nuclear deterrence and those who would like to further reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in NATO’s strategy through arms control or changes to the Alliance’s declaratory policy. NATO needs to be able to defend itself while also adjusting its posture from time to time so as to engage Russia in more arms control and confidence-building.

Crisis management

Another area where the new Strategic Concept looks for answers to NATO’s current dilemmas is crisis management.

The new Strategic Concept is premised on the expectation that Afghanistan will not be the last NATO operation, and that therefore the Alliance needs to learn and integrate the lessons of Afghanistan. One lesson is to have a coherent military-civilian plan before engaging. Another is to have better intelligence and situational awareness early on, particularly of likely adversaries and the needs and expectations of the local population. Yet another is to have the right political and diplomatic structure to work with the military in-theatre, and to engage with important neighbours, such as Pakistan.

The result of the new Strategic Concept has been to call for more of the Comprehensive Approach, but this depends critically on NATO’s ability to work more harmoniously with the UN, EU and regional organisations, such as the African Union. To facilitate this, the Lisbon summit agreed that henceforth NATO should have a small civilian-planning capacity to interact with the major civilian actors. This could help to integrate advance planning or at least better coordinate between military stabilisation and civilian reconstruction and governance aspects.

The civilian capacity in NATO can also help to generate civilian staff from NATO capitals to fill a vacuum before the other international organisations are able to deploy. Ideally, it should serve as an interface to make civilian culture move comprehensible to the military HQs and vice-versa. Given the view of many Allies that civilian assets should be provided by other bodies and not by NATO, it was not easy to achieve consensus on this initiative before Lisbon. But it represents an important breakthrough and a victory for the pragmatic approach.

Another aspect of crisis management involves training. Building up local security forces is the key to a transition or exit strategy from Afghanistan and it will be an essential feature of future NATO operations as well. NATO has to undertake serious training, capacity building or security sector reform much earlier and be better equipped, organised and funded to carry it out. The idea of a separate NATO training command was not adopted in Lisbon, but how to increase training activities, perhaps using Allied Command Transformation, will certainly be part of the follow-up work.
Cooperative security

The third area in which the Strategic Concept moves NATO forward is in cooperative security or global connectivity. Partnerships will be reviewed so as to make them even more relevant both for NATO and for the partners, as this is a two-way street. One way to do this is to involve the Partners more closely in the planning and conduct of operations to which they contribute forces, as well as in decision shaping.

Another proposal is to streamline NATO’s partnership bureaucracy to focus more on timely political consultations or to give partners greater access to the full tool box of the Alliance’s cooperation activities. One challenge will be to preserve NATO’s ISAF coalition, built up in Afghanistan and the largest since the Second World War, beyond the ISAF mission. After all, this is a network that could be as useful in fighting cyber-crime, terrorism or proliferation as it is in helping to stabilise Afghanistan. Many ISAF troop contributors do not have permanent partnership arrangements with NATO, as ISAF has been their one and only reason to approach the Alliance. Can NATO turn them into permanent partners? What can NATO do to make partnerships more attractive and substantive for those partners who do not contribute to NATO operations – where most of the more substantive and political partnership activities now reside?

On the other hand, NATO-Russia relations are improving with President Medvedev adopting a constructive approach in Lisbon. If NATO and Russia are able to work successfully through all the many complicated legal, technical and political issues involved in establishing a joint missile defence, they should be able to solve most of the other security challenges facing them. Moreover, the arrangements worked out over missile defence should facilitate cooperation between Russia and NATO on cyber, terrorism, piracy and other issues as well.

NATO and Russia will have their differences and the NATO-Russia Council will be the place to air them; but if NATO and Russia can sustain their dialogue, even in the face of difficulties, while focussing on the positive and their common interests (increasingly larger than the differences), Lisbon will have marked a turning point.

Conclusion

The new Strategic Concept has made NATO enter the 21st century. It gives NATO a clear mission statement. But it will only be as good as the willingness of NATO to implement it, and provide the resources to develop the needed new capabilities: missile defence, cyber, intelligence and expeditionary forces both for Article 5 and out of area contingencies.

NATO has made many efficiency cuts to its command structure, committees and agencies; but cutting the fat is the easy part. Investing in new muscle with the resources saved or redeployed will be crucial to the new Strategic Concept’s credibility in the long run.

The financial environment will remain a difficult one, with declining defence expenditure, the bow wave of unfunded legacy systems often too expensive to cancel and the costs of ending conscription and moving to an all-volunteer force, as most recently in Germany. This will put a premium on NATO’s ability to find innovative, cost-effective solutions, such as role specialisation, pooling of resources, sharing of key assets, merging of testing facilities and headquarters, not to speak of rigorous prioritisation and a responsive defence planning system incorporating lessons learned from operations.

Finally a word on public opinion. Some of the key messages in the new Strategic Concept may not encounter a friendly echo. Doing more operations post-Afghanistan, investing in defence, preserving nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future and keeping NATO’s door open to new members are not part of the Zeitgeist. Our publics are focused on economic concerns, declining living standards and job prospects. So a new Strategic Concept that speaks of NATO’s greater need to engage with the wider world and take on a larger burden will not sell itself. It will require firm political leadership in the Alliance to explain the need for engagement over the desire for retrenchment. As President Obama put it in Lisbon: “Austerity will not relieve us of our responsibilities.”

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Now comes the hard part

Leo Michel

When NATO heads of state and government agreed at their April 2009 Strasbourg-Kehl summit to launch preparation of a new Strategic Concept, few commentators appreciated the risky nature of the exercise.

On the one hand, NATO was busier than ever, implementing decisions agreed by consensus among all 28 members. These included, for example: conducting operations ranging from counterinsurgency in Afghanistan to peacekeeping in Kosovo to anti-piracy off the coast of Somalia; managing strained relations with Russia following its August 2008 intervention in Georgia; and rebalancing its capabilities to deal with non-conventional threats as well as territorial defence. On the other hand, by commissioning a new look at long-term strategy, leaders of the Alliance implicitly conceded that its many activities apparently lacked a coherent and convincing rationale. Moreover, some security affairs cognoscenti feared that re-examining the Alliance’s core missions, structures, and tools could open multiple Pandora’s boxes – such as differences over the need for UN authorisation for NATO military operations, the role of nuclear weapons in the Alliance, and NATO’s relationship to the European Union’s emerging security and defence policy – that had been difficult to close during contentious negotiations over the 1999 Strategic Concept.

Fortunately, the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit also set in motion an unprecedented approach to writing a Strategic Concept. In their past iterations, such documents were mostly products of “in house” deliberations among a relatively small group of senior government officials. For this effort, however, a twelve-person Group of Experts, selected by the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, found multiple ways – from large conferences to small seminars in several countries to the use of social networks – to engage a wide spectrum of civilian and military officials, parliamentarians, independent researchers, opinion leaders, and publics across the Euro-Atlantic community. This helped build support for the new concept among those whose voices, votes, and resources would be critical to maintain Alliance solidarity in deeds as well as declarations. Other factors helped as well, including Secretary General Rasmussen’s somewhat controversial insistence on “holding the pen” and expediting the drafting and approval process.

But now comes the hard part: moving from the Strategic Concept’s affirmations of NATO’s core tasks and principles (defence and deterrence, security through crisis management, and promoting international security through cooperation) to implementing concrete actions to meet current challenges and prepare for future, hard to predict contingencies. Several areas deserve special attention.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the caldron where, for many Americans, NATO’s solidarity and effectiveness will be severely tested in the com-
How to cite this article: 2010. No. 8: 2010. Hamid Karzai visits the Afghan National Police Training Center Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghan security forces should gradually get more responsibilities over the coming years (photo: ISAF).

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European and American leaders broadly agree that if Afghanistan were to become a failed state, terrorist networks would re-establish themselves there, posing an increased threat to the European and American homelands. At Lisbon, Allied leaders joined with those of twenty other countries contributing to ISAF to “reaffirm our enduring commitment to Afghanistan’s security and stability.”

However, with few exceptions, public support for the Afghanistan mission is generally lower and eroding faster in Europe than in the United States. Allies and partner countries in ISAF expressed support for President Karzai’s objective for Afghan forces to lead and conduct security operations in all provinces by the end of 2014, but this does not constitute a pledge by those countries to stay in Afghanistan until then – much less beyond. Indeed, as ISAF gradually passes the lead for security operations in selected provinces and districts to Afghan forces beginning in early 2011, pressure likely will build within several troop contributing nations now deployed in those areas (mostly in the north and west) to reduce their footprint rather than shift troops to training and mentoring functions, which clearly are not risk-free.

The danger, of course, is that during the 2011–2014 transition period, the operational burdens and risks might fall even more disproportionately on those forces now deployed in the volatile southern and eastern regions. Presumably, this is not what American defence officials have in mind when they advocate an “in together, out together” approach to the NATO effort. Meanwhile, the precarious situation in Pakistan could heighten friction among the Allies, especially if some conclude that U.S. pressure against extremist sanctuaries is hindering more than helping chances for a regional settlement.

Russia

Regarding Russia, the new Strategic Concept, Lisbon Summit Declaration, and NATO-Russia Council Joint Statement correctly stress the importance of improved dialogue and practical cooperation to meet common security interests, ranging from counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and counter-piracy to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. New arrangements to facilitate transit of non-lethal ISAF goods through Russian territory are a tangible sign of the improved relations between NATO and Russia, as is the agreement to “discuss pursuing missile defense cooperation.”

Nevertheless, realising NATO’s declared goal of a “true strategic partnership” with Russia will not be easy. The Russian actions in Georgia continue to sow suspicion of Moscow’s attitude toward its closest neighbours and willingness to abide by its international
commitments. Similarly, Russia’s continued suspension of its CFE Treaty obligations and refusal to address the overall disparity in non-strategic nuclear weapons stoke Allied concerns. And notwithstanding the more positive tone of Russian statements at Lisbon regarding possible collaboration on missile defence, it remains to be seen if Russia’s long-term intention is to develop a cooperative architecture that does not interfere with NATO’s legitimate and necessary autonomy, including in command and control functions, to defend its territory and population from the growing ballistic missile threat.

Capabilities

Delivering the capabilities needed to meet NATO’s agreed roles and missions, as set out in the new Strategic Concept, will be another difficult task. The “critical capabilities package” endorsed by heads of state and government is a credible attempt to ensure that priority needs for current operations (such as countering improvised explosive devices) and emerging threats (such as defence against cyber threats) are actually delivered to the Alliance within its agreed budget ceilings. The planned “end-to-end rationalization review of all structures engaged in NATO capability development,” if combined with promised reforms in the management of NATO’s common funding, should help to produce a better match between resources and requirements.

Still, the results of previous summit-approved efforts – for example, the Defense Capabilities Initiative of 1999 and Prague Capabilities Commitment of 2002 – were disappointing, at best, and the economic environment faced by most Allies is measurably worse today than it was a decade ago. All Allies will face tough choices between supporting current operations and investment in new capabilities; in some cases, demographic trends also will make it increasingly hard to maintain the desired volunteer force levels. Moreover, even if the Pentagon fails to obtain its target of one per cent real growth in overall defence spending – and some in the new Congress will push for actual reductions – the relative disparity between U.S. defence expenditures (approximately 4.5 per cent of GDP) and the average expenditure of the 27 other Allied nations (around 1.5 per cent of GDP) is likely to grow, given projected cutbacks in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and many smaller countries.

Over time, fiscal constraints might intersect in significant ways with sensitive policy issues discussed at Lisbon. In post-Lisbon briefings, for example, American officials have emphasised that the U.S. “Phased Adaptive Approach” (PAA) – comprised of deployments of increasingly capable sea- and land-based missile interceptors and a range of sensors – will be the U.S. “contribution” to a NATO-wide system to defend against the growing ballistic missile threat. To integrate that “contribution” into a NATO-wide command, control and communications (C3) system is estimated to cost about 200 million Euros over ten years. But that figure pales in comparison with the U.S. costs of providing the Aegis missile cruisers, sea- and land-based missiles, and other C3 and sensor components of the PAA. One might wonder whether a U.S. Congress that is increasingly focused on cutting the deficit will agree to what some members likely will argue is another example of lopsided burden sharing. In fact, some Democratic as well as Republican members are already clamouring to significantly reduce the U.S. military presence in Europe (approximately 78,000 military personnel) based in part on their perception that Europeans can and should pay more for their own defence.

Similarly, the new Strategic Concept affirms that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance” and, as such, “will ensure the broadest possible participation of Allies in collective defence planning on nuclear roles, in peacetime basing of nuclear forces, and in command, control and consultation arrangements.”

NATO leaders agreed separately to conduct a comprehensive review of deterrence and defence that will include NATO’s nuclear posture. Yet, according tocredible press reports, some of the Allies that currently maintain dual-capable aircraft (i.e. aircraft capable of performing nuclear as well as conventional roles) and/or have small numbers of U.S. nuclear weapons stationed on their territory are more inclined than others to reduce or eliminate their direct participation in “nuclear burden sharing.” Faced with budget cutbacks, some of those Allies might argue that investing in new capabilities to maintain dual-capable aircraft for the foreseeable future would represent an unwise allocation of resources, given NATO leaders’ statement in Lisbon that they “will seek to create the conditions for further reductions [of nuclear weapons stationed in Europe] in the future.” Others might see this as a convenient excuse to shed nuclear-sharing roles, which are not politically popular.

NATO-EU relations

Finally, on NATO-EU relations, the new Strategic Concept contains cogent and compelling reasons for improving their “strategic partnership” in language that goes beyond its 1999 predecessor. It
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acknowledges, for example, that the EU is “a unique and essential partner for NATO” – due, in part, to the fact that they share common values and a majority of members – and that a “stronger and more capable European defense” benefits the Alliance as well. It also calls for enhanced practical cooperation in planning and conducting operations, broadened political consultations, and better cooperation in capability development.

Truth be told, however, these have been well-worn themes in transatlantic discussions over the recent years, and there is little evidence to date that the Lisbon summit did much to advance their practical implementation. The Lisbon summit declaration did give a nod to unspecified “recent initiatives” from several Allies and Secretary General Rasmussen; the latter was “encouraged” to continue work with the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, and report to the North Atlantic Council in advance of the NATO foreign ministers’ meeting next April.1

Still, while several avenues for low-profile but beneficial practical cooperation exist and could be enhanced, the fact is that absent a much improved and high-level agreement to give direction, substance and structure to the NATO-EU relationship at all layers, the organisations and their member states will continue to underperform in their attempts to anticipate, prevent and, where necessary, effectively respond to a wide spectrum of crises.

To be sure, Afghanistan, Russia, capabilities development, and relations with the EU are not – and will not be – the only challenges faced by NATO in the coming years. Iran’s reported efforts to acquire a nuclear weapons capability and continuing ballistic missile programmes, increasingly sophisticated attempts by terrorists to mount mass casualty attacks, and cyber threats posed by state and non-state actors alike pose real and serious threats to Alliance members, even if NATO might not be the appropriate body, in every specific instance, to mobilise or lead an international response. Hence, the new Strategic Concept correctly underscores that

In the end, this reminder of NATO’s “unique and essential” nature may be among the most important legacies of the Lisbon summit. After all, close security bonds among the United States, Canada and the European Allies, anchored in NATO since 1949, have survived many difficult tests. Ultimately, the Alliance remained strong because its members did not allow their differences ever to rival their overriding shared interests and values. With operations such as Afghanistan clearly putting new and intense strain on NATO, it was not surprising that in the run-up to Lisbon, many were asking: Will the past be prologue? The answer, unfortunately, is conditional: yes – if Allies muster the political will to fulfil their pledges to themselves and to each other.

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1. In a September 15, 2010 news conference, Rasmussen stated: “In concrete terms I have suggested that the European Union conclude an arrangement between Turkey and the European Union Defence Agency. I’ve also suggested that the European Union concludes the annual security agreement with Turkey. And finally I have suggested that the European Union involves non-EU contributors in decision-making when it comes to EU operations like the one in Bosnia. It would be equivalent to how we do it in NATO. We have 19 ISAF partners outside NATO and we include them in decision making. I think the European Union should do the same when it comes to EU operations, like the one in Bosnia. By the way, Turkey is the second largest contributor to the EU operation in Bosnia. And then of course, in exchange, all NATO allies should recognize that all EU members participate in such EU-NATO cooperation.”
Insurgency and counterinsurgency

In counterinsurgency, short engagements and battles are not decisive except at the lowest tactical level; it is the campaign that is decisive rather than the battle. However, campaigns take time to unfold and modern societies, unlike their insurgent opponents, are impatient. The spirit of the age is one of instant gratification, and the idea that the defeat of an enemy may take years simply encourages a hostile or shallow media to equate deliberate progress with disaster. Connected to this, the broadening of the information realm has made control by governments, in a way that was still possible even during the Falklands War, impossible. In the absence of the means to garner public support, even small numbers of casualties on intervention operations owing nothing to vital national interests can humble governments.

War among the people

Counterinsurgency is, indeed, ‘war among the people,’ a phrase coined by Rupert Smith in his seminal book The Utility of Force. Smith sets out the view that in wars today, forces developed for industrial-age warfare against states are increasingly, although not exclusively, used for non-industrial wars against non-state actors. War has changed from being a matter of comparative forces doing battle within the context of strategic confrontation, to battle between a range of combatants using different weapons and asymmetrical methods for reasons that have little to do with the interests of nation states.

Smith is of course drawing on his own experience of service in the British Army. After 1945, that army maintained a standing conventional force of 55,000 troops in Germany, with others committed to reinforcing it or deploying to the Baltic. This was its main effort. It also maintained forces for conventional interventions elsewhere, like the Falklands. But from the last phase of colonialism through to the campaign in Northern Ireland, there was always another army: the army fighting counterinsurgency operations in places like Palestine, and Malaya. Soldiers, especially in the infantry, regularly put their armoured vehicles into mothballs, retrained and went off on tours of duty in these operations. So too, the doctrine and staff training of the army had to prepare commanders and staffs at all levels for these unconventional campaigns. Thus right up until the 1990s, the notion of doing a range of tasks across the spectrum of conflict came quite naturally. We may of course have ended up doing neither really well.

This was not the experience of the U.S. Army, which concentrated after Vietnam on rebuilding itself solely for the conventional fight. Faced with a changing situation in Iraq after 9/11, however, it has shown a remarkable ability to adapt structures, forces and weapon systems planned for confrontation with the Soviets to the demands of warfare against a host of modern enemies. Indeed it has undergone three transformations since Vietnam and it has moved from a doctrinal position of ‘we do not do counterinsurgency or nation building’ to ‘no-one does it better.’ It has moved from a marked aversion to casualties in the 1980s and 1990s to an absolute conviction that casualties must be accepted when vital national interests are at stake; and, in so doing, it has reverted to ‘normal’ U.S. thinking, amply demonstrated during both World Wars and in Korea and Vietnam. It has taken on new equipments, formulated a new doctrine, taught this throughout the organisation and put it into effect, gripped the integration of civil and military effects, and mobilised large elements of its reserves – and all while fighting two major campaigns.
At the same time, the British army has struggled to maintain the wide collective experience it gained in Northern Ireland and apply it to new theatres. In Northern Ireland, for example, we lived with the IED threat, developed intelligence at every level, and operated comprehensively and successfully against the networks. However, the fact was that seven years of cease-fire in Northern Ireland and our flirtation with UN peacekeeping in the 1990s had bred a whole new generation that had not lived and breathed that experience. The Army had developed corporate amnesia and had to start all over again with the business of learning lessons the hard way.

What may be happening at present is that rather than a new type of war supplanting state-on-state conflict as Smith and others seem to be suggesting, the two are coexisting as they always have done – the Cold War obscured this – and it is the balance that is shifting. If you doubt that state-on-state war is over, consider Russia versus Georgia. In both the Iraq and Afghanistan case, a successful invasion rapidly destroyed the enemy’s conventional forces and the country was occupied – occupied not for exploitation, but to bring the supposed benefits of Western liberal democracy and development to a failed or failing state. However, significant sections of the occupied country’s population did not quite see the benefits of what were to them alien, Godless, notions. These sections were initially those who had lost out through the invasion: the Sunni Ba’thists in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A period of regrouping followed the initial defeat, and then a counter-offensive was launched to eject the occupiers. The losers were soon reinforced by those Islamic extremists whose objections to the occupation were not so much material as spiritual. With them came foreign jihadi reinforcements, arms, money and expertise – expertise gained through a long war against Israel. This rapidly turned a counter-offensive into an insurgency, and the insurgency quickly learned that confronting the occupiers head-on would lead to destruction. They therefore did what the weak have always done when faced by the strong: avoided trials of strength unless on very favourable terms; exploited the vulnerabilities of the occupier, especially in the minds of the home population; used propaganda; and adopted the indirect method of attack – in other words, what is now termed asymmetry.

The virtual realm

Asymmetry is apparent in both the physical and virtual realms and it is the latter I want to address first, because the broadening of the virtual realm of information has certainly changed the face of insurgency and counterinsurgency beyond recognition in the last ten years. It has of course benefited insurgencies, enabling them to transmit their messages and to develop technology exchange. The Taliban’s self-styled Emir of Afghanistan, Abu Al-Yazid, was an excellent example until his death earlier this year. His web-
site (still kept running by his acolytes long after his demise) is updated every four hours in five languages and is, of course, unconstrained by the requirement faced by government sources, to tell the truth.

Ironically, Al-Yazid was, for several years, known for his penchant for hanging anyone engaging in activities connected with globalisation. An illustration of the acceleration of transfer technology is the fact that during the 1980s, it would routinely take six months for techniques developed in Palestine to reach the IRA or vice versa. Today, the exchange of expertise can take just a few days to show results on the ground. Anyone can search the internet and find details of how to construct an improvised explosive device, how to reach Afghanistan and join the jihad, how to become a suicide bomber – and much else besides.

From this we must understand that information is power; and how we apply it will help determine our success or failure. It is a weapon of mass effect and can, if used incorrectly, result in friendly fire. It has to be targeted at very different audiences, who may interpret the same message, or various actions, in different ways, and often we are far from clear about the nature of those audiences and their likely reactions, with the subtlety required and with the explicit linkage between messages and actions. Above all, a modern military commander must be able to explain what he is doing, because his principal business in complex modern emergencies is not activity-led operations like framework security, but rather a relatively small number of intelligence-led operations. Some of these will be aimed simply at producing further or better intelligence; others at destroying or capturing particular objectives or people. They may be aimed at setting conditions for non-military activities, like democratic elections or reconstruction.

All will be in some way associated with particular decisive points in the campaign. But we in the military continue to make things difficult for ourselves: the firewall we erect between information operations and media operations seems to me to make little sense in this multi-media world of ours. In a counterinsurgency I question whether we should be using such terms as ‘psychological operations’ (Psyops) and ‘information operations’ (IO) at all; it is far too easy for trouble-makers among the insurgency and in the international media to present what we do as manipulation.

If you accept the notion of connection between words and deeds, it seems to me fundamental that whatever message is being put out by IO and Psyops – or by the engagement of key leaders – has to be matched by what is seen in the media. If you accept the notion of connection between words and deeds, it seems to me fundamental that whatever message is being put out by IO and Psyops – or by the engagement of key leaders – has to be matched by what is seen in the media. We know that the media gets things wrong – through misinformation or disinformation – nevertheless most people believe what they see in the media and it is therefore vital that any commander does his best to ensure that whatever story is put out to the media and then by the media is true, and therefore credible. The internet too seems to have credibility beyond what it deserves, all the more dangerous because of the speed and quantity of information which it carries. It is essential to get our messages out and dictate the agenda; if we do not it will be dominated by the enemy’s version, or the media’s version.

We also have to be fast with our messages. Winston Churchill said that “a lie gets halfway round the world before the truth has got its pants on.” Governments are bureaucracies, and therefore centralised and slow. In democracies at least, the days are gone when governments or leadership elites could control information and thereby control populations: advances in IT and telecommunications have shattered any monopoly of control over information and at the same time, the merging of these once separate areas has brought the ability to reach larger audiences.

The mobile phone is part of the equipment of any self-respecting insurgent or terrorist, and any insurgent attack can be recorded and broadcast. In Afghanistan, as in many parts of the world, cell phones are commonplace. In the most remote areas, people may still grind their corn by water-power but they communicate by solar-powered cell phone. Our strategic communications need to be able to exploit this, not to have to react to it and its effects.

Intelligence

In the glare of modern media and with an enemy whose large network of scouts, equipped with cell phones, can watch our every move, large-scale sweeps end up achieving little except disruption. At worst, they lead to the arrest and internment of large numbers of the wrong people who are then a captive audience for the agents of jihad. In trying to do better, the military forces of the U.S. and its allies have found new uses for old toys, especially in the field of intelligence, which remains one of the key aspects of successful counterinsurgency. The Nimrod aircraft, for example, was procured as a Cold War maritime patrol aircraft; for the past six years it has been used as a valuable surveillance platform able to loiter for extended periods and identify pinpoint targets.

In our training for the conventional war we expected in Europe, we often stressed the need for high tempo in relation to our opponents: whoever makes, implements, reviews and sustains decisions fastest will surely win. On that basis, the best is the enemy of the good. Questing for certainty in the uncertain fog of war will merely hand the advantage of tempo to the enemy – so better to make a decision based on partial information and thus gain the initiative.

But counterinsurgency is the exact opposite of this. For one thing, the enemy has a very different view of tempo: he will rely on time,
The mobile phone is part of the equipment of any self-respecting insurgent or terrorist.
Security sector reform

Explicit in any successful counterinsurgency is the need for indigenous security force generation, to produce the sort of densities of security forces needed, along with the continuity and familiarity with the geography, social anthropology and political economy of an area. The aim must be to allow the host nation to take charge of its territory and solve its own problems, in its own way. This does depend on the host nation government being effective, accountable and acceptable to the majority of its own people. Beyond that short-term aim, it has to be recognised that a national army has a considerable part to play in nation building. In most states, and particularly in new ones, an army is regarded as part of the essential attributes of statehood. Military power is a symbol of national prestige, and no proper state can do without it. Moreover, armed services can be a powerful instrument of national unity.

In the chaos of a civil war or violent insurgency, or in the aftermath of regime change, a new Army may be one of the only nationally organised, functioning institutions that does not reflect faction interest. It has to be a-political, capable of deployment anywhere, and truly accountable through civilian control – not something that has featured before in places like Iraq or Afghanistan much of Africa. Care must be taken in setting up these control mechanisms, not to create a force that is so cohesive that we are merely setting the conditions for a future military coup d’état.

SSR in Iraq and in Afghanistan has been closely integrated with security and stabilisation operations. Essentially it has three strands: first, force generation, by a security transition command composed of specialists from a multi-national coalition but under the authority of one lead nation. Next, fielding of the force through partnership between indigenous forces and Coalition units, supplemented by embedded specialist teams leading to joint operations; third, organisational, systemic or institutional reform aimed at the creation of major headquarters, the higher management of defence, staff training, and systems for managing people and equipment. This last is highly important and often the poor relation, but SSR is not simply about training and arming people. It is about creating an indigenous system which will do that for itself.

As with elections, the results of SSR have not always been entirely what was envisaged, but that said, the principle must be the right one. In Iraq, the penny dropped quite rapidly as far as the re-formation of the Iraqi Army was concerned; it has taken much longer in Afghanistan. The Afghan Army is being asked to double in size over a five-year period, take on novel technologies, produce an educated body of officers capable of running its own institutions and fight a determined enemy simultaneously. I doubt that the British Army could do as much.

Law and order

Another area vital to success in counterinsurgency that was badly neglected early on in both Iraq and Afghanistan, is police reform. In a COIN operation the police must hold the ground that military forces clear. In any case, the police should be the agents of everyday security on the streets, not the military. While it will be necessary for policemen to deal with the development of law enforcement and institution building, the military will almost certainly have to deal with building the paramilitary skills required. Paul Bremer, the U.S. Administrator of Iraq from May 2003 to June 2004, received considerable criticism for disbanding the Iraqi Army; in fact, he had no choice, for the Army had already disbanded itself. The failure had been that of Coalition messaging during the invasion. However, the force that gave problems in Iraq was not the one that was broken down and rebuilt, but the one that was not: the police. Police reform was removed from the one body that could have achieved it rapidly, the U.S. Army, and given to various civil agencies, who did little or nothing until David Petraeus took back ownership of the problem.

What must also be taken into account in developing police forces and the accompanying legal and penal systems, is that in modern insurgencies, we face a nexus of insurgency, criminality and violent ideological extremism. Our COIN doctrine sets out the requirement to separate insurgents and terrorists from their sources of support, physical and moral. One of those sources of support is their finance and the nexus is a major source of finance. The nexus matters, because the evils feed off each other: violence creates insecurity, the absence of the rule of law and plenty of willing participants, while criminality provides money to buy fighters and to corrupt legitimate governance; and it provides access to the cheap weapons so readily available on the world markets. The nexus is one of the factors that gives longevity to wars, produces corruption and collusion between opposing parties for criminal purposes, blurs the distinctions between combatants and non-combatants, and makes the humanitarian desire to protect civilians and minorities terminally difficult.

It seems to me that in almost every modern and post-modern campaign, we have encountered the nexus and yet each time we do so, it takes us by surprise. We respond to it on a case-by-case basis, instead of treating it as an integral part of the threat. Our responses tend therefore to be localised, limited, and legalistic. In the past, when faced with this sort of problem, we have changed the law to make our responses effective: look at Malaya, Northern Ireland, Columbia. The interdiction of narcotics illustrates rather bleakly the current struggle to adapt to a changed world; and the way that human rights law, which protects individuals, can be used to protect criminals and insurgents and so undermine the needs of collective security for states and peoples.
International law prohibits military attacks on civilians and civilian objects even where both might properly be described as criminal, therefore in Afghanistan and elsewhere, military forces cannot attack narco traffickers and producers unless they are demonstrably insurgents. If we are serious about attacking the nexus, therefore, there may need to be a fundamental legal shift that describes narcotics or other commodities – like diamonds in Sierra Leone – within a defined area as insurgent war materiel, liable to attack as if it were a stock of weapons or explosives.

**Governance, government and civil effect**

Faced with all these problems, fierce opposition and insufficient resources, coalition governments and forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have had to find other ways to reach a decision. In part, they have done this by modifying their aims. The goal of the coalition in Iraq, having ejected Saddam Hussein, was originally described as being to bring stability and democracy to the country. It rapidly became apparent that it would be very difficult to deliver both.

Political pressure led to the introduction of democracy being the first requirement, and this arguably had the result of delaying the achievement of stability. Much energy was diverted into the business of elections – in a country without any tradition of democracy or any recognizable system of political parties. In Afghanistan, the same priorities were applied, leading to rapid elections which, as in Bosnia and Kosovo, merely entrenched the undesirable individuals who happened to hold power at the time, because they had the means and the will to oblige citizens to vote in a particular direction or face violent reprisals.

However, after six years of effort – a remarkably short period when compared with historical insurgencies – it is arguable that a decision has been reached in Iraq. It has taken time, much effort and a huge expenditure of blood and treasure. But it seems unwise to write off the notion that a counterinsurgency campaign cannot achieve decisive results, and to conclude that the notion of a decisive campaign and, within it, a tipping point after which the end result is inevitable, is no longer viable. The jury is still out in Afghanistan. It is entirely possible that, over the past two years, we have seen a surge by the Taliban, and that, without a sustained counter-move by NATO, we will find the tipping point was reached during last year’s rigged election, but in favour of the wrong side.

And what of the eighty per cent non-military effort required to run a successful counterinsurgency? Much emphasis is placed on the development of the physical infrastructure of statehood; I want to urge caution about military involvement in development.
Where stability is poor, the military can and must play a leading role in providing essential infrastructure or services, and in such circumstances, lead organisations like PRTs. But we should not fool ourselves this does much to win the war – it often only results in frustrated expectation among the population – or that in itself it will bring stability.

Stability is the product of security and good governance. The military can and must bring security, but must not usurp the role of aid agencies or government in providing good governance. Pursuing well meaning but often misguided construction activities outside the construct of stability merely provides targets for the other side. Properly targeted and tied in with programmes to generate the trained people and systems to occupy construction projects, construction activities can certainly be used to further the development of governance and security. Beyond that however we enter the realm of development, which is for governments, business and professional agencies. The military are amateurs at this and we must learn our place: when we plan a complex strike operation we do not call in a bunch of development geeks to do it for us; the converse is also true.

I also believe that, while international efforts may do much to develop the institutions of central government and governance, the development of civil society and infrastructure programmes that change people’s lives for the better is usually most successful at a local level. Give a local community ownership of its own development and the chances are it will be sustainable. If you need to be convinced, compare what has been achieved in Afghanistan by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in partnership with locally based NGOs and local communities, with big ticket programmes imposed from outside which, like the Kajaki Dam, may often simply provide opportunities for criminals to control and tax power supplies, or divert irrigation to drug cultivation. Let us, however, never confuse civil effect with civil participation and especially not civil service participation. There remain roles for the military – especially professionally qualified reservists – and for the private sector in this business.

In Iraq, with its well-established infrastructure, strong tradition of central authority, well-educated population and enormous oil wealth, ownership of the non-military lines of operation has been largely achieved by the host nation, despite the continued inability to form a central government. In Afghanistan, the situation is quite otherwise. With none of those advantages, the host nation has looked to foreign donors to provide civil support. The contribution of the U.S. aside, that support has been patchy. If counterinsurgency really is eighty per cent non-military, this failure to help will contribute to a decision – but the wrong one.

Lt Gen Dr. Jonathan Riley was Deputy Commander of NATO ISAF 2007-2008 in Afghanistan. He is currently a visiting professor at King’s College London. This text is a concise transcription of his keynote address at the CIHM Congress (organised by the Netherlands Institute for Military History) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, August 2010.

Would you like to react? Mail the editor at redactie@atlcom.nl.
The dangerous myths and dubious promise of COIN

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is a topic of both contemporary and historical interest in the age of what has been called a global counterinsurgency. It is totally appropriate that historians should devote attention to COIN doctrine that is being rediscovered by military organisations and that has spawned its own ‘latter-day priesthood.’ This priesthood argues that population-centric, ‘hearts and minds’ doctrines offers a formula for success in winning over people and places in the grip of terrorist organisations.1

This latest espousal of COIN as a war-winning formula by a group of military intellectuals and commanders ironically comes at a time when historians are increasingly questioning whether ‘hearts and minds’ strategies – anchored in minimum force, aid to the civil, and tactically flexible formations – ever actually formed the core of COIN strategies, let alone whether they were as effective as their proponents claimed.2 Doubts over whether COIN will be able to deliver victory in Afghanistan,3 as well as the very tenuous stability produced by the so-called ‘surge’ in Iraq, have generated a number of COIN critics who argue that historical claims for COIN success, based on courting popular gratitude by improving economic conditions, are at best anchored in selective historical memory, when not fantasy fabrications.4

A second complaint is that COIN is a Western construct. Not only do COIN theorists, in the words of Brian Lynn, “project U.S. values onto foreign populations.”5 In addition, they operate within the context of liberal peace theory and its “single sustainable model of national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise,”6 in the words of the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy. Rather than a vehicle for modern state-building, COIN is denounced as a revival of nineteenth century divide-and-rule imperialism masquerading as state-building.

Given the rich history of COIN going back over at least two centuries, the activities at the CIHM conference are not merely an exercise in historical curiosity. They can provide a perspective, a reality check, a foundational investigation into the assumptions and strategic context in which COIN has developed and in which it is applies. This examination should help to remind strategists, planners, intelligence operatives, politicians and others, that while insurgencies share certain common characteristics, every insurgency plays out in a particular historical context, is the product of a particular set of grievances and is shaped by unique ethnic, geographic, resource, ideological and strategic factors that defy a formulaic approach.

COIN: past and present

That COIN gradually emerged as a separate category of warfare can be linked to two historic factors: the professionalization of European warfare in the nineteenth century, and the emergence of a coherent doctrine of subversion in the twentieth. Wellesley may have been derided as a “Sepoy general” by Napoleon, but his India experience was not seen as a disqualifier for command in Europe. However, the professionalization of European warfare in the nineteenth century left French imperial soldiers with the feeling that the conquest and policing of empire was professionally undervalued – a category of sub-war considered a poor preparation for ‘real’ war on the European continent. Critics complained that proficiency in imperial warfare was bought at the expense of...
preparation for continental conflict. This was especially true in France, where blame for the 1870 defeat against Prussia was laid at the feet of ‘African’ generals, whose decades of experience in raids and skirmishes in Algeria and Mexico was judged poor preparation for ‘real’ war.

The foundation of the post-1871 French military renaissance rested on the assumption that metropolitan and colonial warfare constituted separate categories of conflict. Liberated from Clausewitzian constraints, colonial soldiers were free to characterise their brand of warfare in Jominian terms. In the 1890s, Callwell and Lyautey defined a ‘small wars school,’ which emphasised not only the nobility of imperial soldiering, but also its unique requirements. Callwell argued that small war constituted “an art by itself” that required considerable tactical flexibility, unlike what he categorised as the “stereotyped system” prevalent in Europe.7

Lyautey publicised the “oil spot” and “combining politics with force” methods of Generals Pennequin and Gallieni. Efforts to separate colonial warfare from its conventional counterpart were calculated to bolster the image of colonial soldiering as a unique calling and a specialised category of conflict. It also sought to neutralise the intrusion of the national government into the management of imperial conquest. So, what was presented as imperial military methods became both a public relations exercise and a ‘tactic in a box’ to market foreign expansion as both effortless and low risk. COIN offered a win-win formula that would both expand the influence of the homeland and benefit the local populations, who would see invasion as a ‘liberation.’

Mao’s People’s War and the birth of COIN

A second factor that contributed to the elevation of COIN into a stand-alone category of warfare was the globalisation of insurgency following the Great War, first as an anti-imperial, nationalist phenomenon, and subsequently as a theory of subversion anchored in a communist-inspired ‘people’s war.’ Mao’s assertion – that if properly organised and sequenced, insurgency can produce strategic results – turned post-1918 nationalist rebellions into an orchestrated communist threat to the West’s ‘civilising mission.’

Surprisingly, given the French lack of success against what they categorised as la guerre révolutionnaire in the post-1945 wars, the latest U.S. Army/Marine Corps field manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency claims to take inspiration in part from a French veteran of the Algerian war, David Galula. But Galula is simply the preamble for the true unfinished business that inspires what is being referred to as the COINista school: the U.S. defeat in Vietnam. Fundamental to the COINista ideology is the U.S. Army’s alleged institutional aversion to counterinsurgency, which brought defeat in Vietnam.

U.S. Army personnel perform house searches during a clearing operation in eastern Afghanistan’s Kunar province. Critics argue counterinsurgency tactics like house searches only increase support for insurgents (photo: U.S. Army/Mark Burrell)
Indeed, the COINista gospel asserts that there is a right and wrong way to fight insurgencies. If the French proved to be too brutal and the U.S. military was too structurally conventional and firepower focused, the British developed the correct balance between persuasion and force. Thus, while COINistas’ shared memory starts with Vietnam, their historiography begins with Tom Mockaitis’s 1990 British counterinsurgency, which basically argues that building on the lessons of the 1919 Amritsar massacre and the 1921 loss of Eire, London institutionalised the idea of ‘minimum force,’ civil-military cooperation ‘aid to the civil,’ and tactical flexibility based on decentralised decision-making as the central principles of its counterinsurgency operations.

The rise of neo-imperialism in the 1990s provided the intellectual climate that, following the 9/11 attack on the United States, has jumpstarted the COIN renaissance. Such neo-imperialists as Max Boot, Robert Kaplan, Niall Ferguson, and the liberal internationalist Joseph Nye have argued that the requirement for international order compels the West led by the United States once again to take up the ‘White Man’s Burden,’ predicting that the universal appeal of Western values and institutions will cause right-thinking non-Western peoples to welcome occupation as a liberation.

The ‘end of history’ opened the door to a group of young U.S. officers who see counterinsurgency as a mission set and who offer COIN as a doctrine around which the U.S. military can organise, much as British officers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced the preservation of empire their raison d’être. John Nagl’s Learning to eat soup with a knife resurrects the 1970s debate about the nature of the Vietnam War. Nagl’s arguments are echoed by Australian COIN expert David Kilcullen, who, in his 2010 The accidental guerrilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one, repeats the mantra that counterinsurgency constitutes a special category of warfare carried out in a globalised environment.

Flawed History

There are several problems with the COINista arguments, but let’s begin by challenging the Mockaitis-Nagl assertion that the British military broke the code on counterinsurgency in the inter-war years and managed to become an exemplary ‘learning organisation’ that transmitted its ‘minimum force/aid to the civil’ wisdom through the generations. The British Army did not have a particularly exemplary record at COIN or at any warfare, for that matter, at the time of Malaya. In The politics of the British Army, Hew Strachan argues that ‘aid to the civil’ was not imperial practice and that victories in British colonial campaigns were bought with timely political concessions, not earned through the efficiency of British COIN tactics.

As for national styles of counterinsurgency, Chris Bayly and Tim Harper writing of decolonisation in Southeast Asia and David Anderson’s masterful book on the Mau Mau have revealed them as wars every bit as repressive – even ‘dirty’ – as those fought by the French. ‘Minimum force’ and unity of civil-military control were treated as foreign concepts in North Ireland between 1969 and 1976, which contributed to the notorious Bloody Sunday incident of 1972 and to the ballooning of popular support for the IRA in the Catholic community.

Conclusion

What are the important takeaways about COIN? First, the claim that COIN constitutes a separate category of warfare, one made at least since the 1890s, is contentious at best. In the final analysis, Callwell’s definition of COIN as “an art by itself” basically boils down to a mastery of small unit tactics, the acquisition of tactical intelligence, and a capacity to drink endless glasses of tea with tribal sheiks as they exact their price for cooperation. Historically, COIN-centric armies – the French in 1870 and the British in two World Wars – have had trouble adapting to conventional operations, not vice versa. Krepinevich argues that the U.S. Army in Vietnam failed to make the transition from conventional to COIN, and so lost. But the basic problem for the Americans in Vietnam was the strategic context in which the war was fought, not the tactics used. Meanwhile, ‘conventional’ U.S. forces have proven quick learners in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A second point is that, in many settings, COIN methods are mustered to support an agenda based on a set of assumptions that are quintessentially Western, and hence alien and unrealisable. Strategic goals like exporting ‘freedom,’ ‘democracy’ and the free enterprise system abroad as laid out in the U.S. National Security Strategy are at a best vague, when not totally destabilising, policy framework in which to implement COIN doctrine. Third, the role of historians is to establish the factual record so that mythologized versions of the past are not offered as a formula for the future. Theories based in shoddy research and flawed and selective analysis of cases are not only a-historical. They can lead to people getting killed because they fail to convey that...
each insurgency is a contingent event in which doctrine, operations, and tactics must support a viable policy and strategy, not the other way around.

Last, my guess is that we are on the downside of COIN for a variety of reasons, beginning with the fact that the ‘liberal peace’ justification for intervention is becoming less attractive to Western populations, if for no other reason that it has become horribly expensive. But the certainty is that predictions for success of COIN doctrines anchored in mythologized history and selective memory are perilous propositions.

Douglas Porch is a Professor at the Naval Postgraduate School (USA). This text is a concise transcription of his keynote address at the CIHM Congress (organised by the Netherlands Institute for Military History) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, August 2010.

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During the Lisbon summit on 19 and 20 November, NATO agreed on a new Strategic Concept. The Strategic Concept is the most important document for the functioning of the Alliance, after the Atlantic Charter. It outlines the main goals and challenges that NATO foresees for the coming years.

As expected, the new Strategic Concept confirmed the importance of Article 5: the pledge to mutual defence. It also stated that nuclear weapons still remain necessary for the security of Europe. These points are of great importance, especially to the Eastern European member states.

Roughly every ten years, a new Strategic Concept comes into effect. The new Strategic Concept replaces the previous one from 1999.

Cyber defence is a new topic in this Strategic Concept. Following the example of Britain, NATO considers cyber-attacks as an important threat to international stability. Therefore, it will develop a cyber-defence policy in 2011 and a NATO Computer Incident Response Capability (NCIRC) in 2012. Also, it will assist in building national cyber-defence capabilities and improving interoperability between member states.

The military command structure will be streamlined to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The number of headquarters will be reduced from eleven to seven. This will bring about a personnel reduction of thirty per cent. The number of NATO agencies will also be reduced.

Canadian Prime Minister Harper announced Canada will deploy a substantial number of trainers to the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan. All member states, except the Netherlands, confirmed their commitment to stabilise Afghanistan.

Afghan president Hamid Karzai and other operational partners, such as the UN, the EU and the World Bank were also present in Lisbon. Together they agreed that giving the Afghans a bigger role in their own security should start in 2011. According to the current planning, this process will lead to a withdrawal of most NATO led combat troops by 2014. After the end of combat operations however, NATO will remain committed to the development of Afghanistan.

Rasmussen also proposed closer cooperation in ISAF and in the fields of counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and counter-narcotics. NATO and Russia agreed on common security challenges and the way to address them through practical cooperation.

On November 25, Foreign Affairs Minister Lavrov elaborated on these agreements. Russia will allow more NATO transports through its territory. Transport through Russia is important for NATO, because currently eighty per cent of supplies are transported through Pakistan. There, convoys are vulnerable to attacks.

Weapons and combat-ready vehicles remain exempt from the new agreement. Only "non-lethal" commodities (for example, food and oil) and vehicles for civilian transports can pass through Russia. NATO does however have agreements with many Russian private contractors to fly heavy combat equipment to and from Afghanistan.

Russian President Medvedev attended the summit. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen invited Russia to join in a theatre missile defence system (TMD). Privately, NATO officials doubt that the initiative will ever materialise.

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WikiLeaks: ‘Cablegate’

Cables

On November 28, WikiLeaks began publishing confidential diplomatic documents that it possesses. They were allegedly sent to the company by a former U.S. Army soldier. The so-called 'embassy cables' all cover U.S. government foreign activity. The
CABLEGATE

• NORTH KOREAN

releases immediately created a diplomatic crisis.

- Hardly flattering remarks of American diplomats concerning many world leaders were rapidly picked up by the press. Other, more diplomatically substantial material, soon found its way into the public sphere.

- Several Arabian countries have been secretly requesting military intervention in Iran, in fear of its nuclear program. The king of Saudi-Arabia was quoted in one of the cables, saying that he had asked the United States to “cut off the head of the snake (the Iranian government, ed.).”

- This revelation immediately heightened tensions in the region, although Iranian president Ahmadinejad maintained that he considered the revelations to be part of American propaganda. He said that “regional countries are all friends.”

- It also appears that Iran possesses North Korean missiles, that might be able to reach Europe. Thus, they could seriously threaten European security.

- The cables also show that the U.S., South Korea and China are preparing for a collapse of the North Korean regime. Particularly striking is the fact that China seems to allow for a united regime. Particularly striking is the fact that China seems to allow for a united regime. Particularly striking is the fact that China seems to allow for a united regime. Particularly striking is the fact that China seems to allow for a united regime. Particularly striking is the fact that China seems to allow for a united regime.

- Other cables tell the story of China repeatedly launching cyber-attacks at Google and United States systems. The cables portrayed Chinese officials as obsessed with internet, especially with Google.

- Revelations about Pakistani support to insurgents in Afghanistan might well have the biggest diplomatic impact. Pakistan has always presented itself as a loyal ally to the U.S. and has received great amounts of financial support in its war against terror. In one cable, a U.S. diplomat seriously doubts the intentions of the Pakistani fight against the Taliban.

- Also, cables point out a failed U.S. attempt to have nuclear material removed from a facility in Pakistan in order to prevent them from falling in militant’s hands.

- Nuclear weapons are stationed in the Netherlands, according to a cable. Although it was generally assumed to be the case, the Dutch government never confirmed the presence of any nuclear devices. Cables also tell the story of how the Dutch, Italian and German governments tried to have the weapons removed.

- The Netherlands also appeared in another cable, listing several locations the U.S. considers to be vital for the country’s national security. Among others, the Dutch coastal cities Rotterdam, Katwijk and Beverwijk are on the list.

Reactions

- The revelations made by WikiLeaks infuriated many, not in the least U.S. government officials. Secretary of State Clinton called the publication an “attack on the international community.”


- WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was arrested in England on December 7, after he had turned himself in. An international arrest warrant had been issued several days before, following dubious allegations of sex crimes in Sweden.

- Assange dreaded going to the police because he expected the United States to put severe pressure on both Britain and Sweden to have him extradited. He has left a “poison pill” (also called the “Doomsday File” or the “Insurance”): an extremely well encrypted digital file, containing large amounts of classified information.

- Assange has threatened that the key to the information will be released if anything were to happen to him.

United States

- At the Lisbon summit, the United States presented a draft plan transferring security duties to the Afghan government. It reflects “the most concrete vision for transition, since President Obama took office,” says the New York Times.

- Another important issue for Obama is the New START treaty, which aims to reduce the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals. It is important for Obama because it fits both in his broader strategy of a nuclear weapons-free world and a ‘reset’ regarding Russia.

- The Democratic loss at the midterm elections is already becoming apparent. It appears New START will only be ratified when Obama agrees on extension of the ‘Bush tax cuts.’

North Korea

Barking dogs…

- The North Korean regime boasts about having thousands of centrifuges working to produce enriched uranium. This message seems to confirm the story of U.S. scientist Hecker that he visited a factory in North Korea where 2,000 centrifuges operated to produce low-enriched uranium. The country says it only wants to create nuclear energy for peaceful energy programs.

- However, U.S. intelligence agencies say North Korea is preparing nuclear tests. Satellite imagery shows tunnelling activity and power lines being constructed near previous nuclear testing grounds. A possible test may
be a show of force to secure a smooth transition of power from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un.

...sometimes bite

• On November 23, the North Korean army launched an attack on a South Korean village, killing two soldiers and injuring several civilians. The North Korean government said it responded to provocative actions by the South Koreans, referring to a large scale military exercise near the North Korean border.

• The South Korean government responded furiously to the attack, but exercised restraint by not retaliating. Two days later, South Korea’s Minister of Defence resigned from office after critics said the country’s response to the attack was too slow.

The Netherlands

• In November, the Dutch government decided to send a reconnaissance team, consisting of military and diplomatic personnel, to Afghanistan. The mission objective is to assess the possibility and desirability of a new military mission of the Dutch forces in Afghanistan.

• The decision comes at the moment that the Dutch are conducting a complete retreat from Afghanistan. The international community, the U.S. in particular, are putting pressure on the Dutch government, asking for prolonged military support.

Germany

Conscription

• Conscription in Germany will come to an end, as of summer 2011. This was announced on 22 November by the German Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg. The debate has been on-going since last summer.

• The decision is controversial, as conscription is seen as a binding factor between the military and society. Eventually, arguments pointing to the huge costs and the relative ineffectiveness of the draft won the discussion.

• The abolition of conscription will be accompanied by far-reaching reforms of the armed forces, particularly of the Army. Guttenberg was not yet able to say which bases are in danger of being closed.

Piracy

• The first piracy trial in Germany in 400 years will be held in Hamburg. The accused Somalis were arrested in a spectacular operation by Dutch Royal Marines. The pirates had boarded the German container ship Taipan, taking over the bridge. After being caught by the Royal Dutch Navy, the men were transferred to the Netherlands and extradited to Germany in June.

• The German prosecutors face a difficult case, as many circumstances are unclear and some suspects deny the charges against them. A similar case is unfolding in the Netherlands, where five pirates have been flown to Rotterdam from the Royal Dutch Navy ship Hr. Ms. Amsterdam, after being arrested off the coast of Somalia.

• Pirates were originally to stand trial in Kenya, but this country was overwhelmed with the large amounts of pirates being brought in. Kenya does not have the justice system to facilitate these amounts of difficult legal procedures. Pirates are now being brought to the country whose flag the attacked ship is sailing under.

Terrorism

• Germany has raised its terrorist threat level in November, after intelligence services warned the government about the possibility of ‘Mumbai-style’ attacks on public facilities in Germany. Two of the terrorists allegedly already were in the country, with four others coming.

• Public places were heavily patrolled by police and the public section of the Bundestag building was closed. In the meantime, the threat has seemingly disappeared, since the heavy public presence of security officials has been scaled down. Some media discard the whole terrorist threat story as a hoax.

Iran

• Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has admitted that cyber-attacks have affected parts of the uranium enrichment centrifuges. He blamed Israel and the United States for it. Experts, however, still think that Iran will be able to build a nuclear weapon within considerable time. This is despite four rounds of sanctions by the United Nations.

• Recently, three nuclear scientists have been killed in bomb explosions. Again, Iran blamed Western secret services for it. The attacks were executed very professionally and sophisticated bombs were used.

• British Defence Secretary Liam Fox has said that Iran needs to negotiate in order to avoid a military showdown. Iranian officials have made clear that negotiations are a possibility, but uranium enrichment will not be a subject of this.

• Iran has also announced that it is self-sufficient in its uranium production. It has made uranium mines operational.

An Arrow-2 anti-ballistic missile launches to intercept an incoming target missile as part of a joint test program between the United States and Israel. NATO seeks support and cooperation of Russia for an integrated European missile defence system (photo: U.S. Department of Defense)
within its own borders. Relations between Iran and the Western world have deteriorated since the head of IAEA Mohammed Al-Baradei was succeeded by the Japanese Yukiya Amano.

More importantly, Iran claims that it is now capable of producing so-called yellowcake, the uranium ore concentrate that is essential in order to sustain any nuclear program. If true, Iran has a stronger position at the negotiation table, for it will be able to bypass UN sanctions.

Israel and Palestine

United States negotiators have dropped their bid that Israel should again put a freeze on building new settlements in order for the peace talks to move into a new phase. This was announced on December 7. According to U.S. officials, the specific aim regarding the construction of new settlements was “not advancing the goal of creating a constructive environment.”

Ever since the last freeze expired in September, Palestinian president Abbas has made clear that the resumed construction projects had to be stopped entirely, before Palestinian delegates would continue any negotiations. When president Netanyahu resisted this demand, Abbas decided not to kill the peace talks right away, and said he would keep on pushing for the Palestinian cause.

Abbas said that he hoped the European Union would step in and play a role. “We hope the time will soon come when the EU will play a role alongside the US”, he said.

U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said that the U.S. would initiate new proximity talks. Mustafa Barghouti, a member of the Palestinian legislative council, told Al Jazeera that he considered that to be “funny,” since there have already been direct talks. "It’s like having an engagement party after the wedding. It doesn’t make sense.”

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NATO’s Lisbon summit: strategic reorientation?

Report of the Atlantic Education Seminar in Breda, The Netherlands

Like in previous years, Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Avans University of Applied Sciences, the Dutch Defence Academy (NLDA) and the Atlantic Education Committee (AOC) organised the Atlantic Education Seminar in Breda, The Netherlands. Around 200 students attended the event. The Royal Military Academy acted as an inspiring backdrop for the day that had the NATO Lisbon summit as the main theme.

The day started with a role playing game, in which four groups of students represented four interest groups (politics, businesses, military and NGOs). The student delegates had to convincingly put forward their views and proposals about NATO’s international role. A jury would decide which group had most eloquently made a strong case.

After four very decent performances of all the groups, and after several strikingly critical questions from the audience as well as from reporters (also both formed by students) the jury considered the things that had been said. In the end, the students arguing the case of the oil-industry (business) had delivered the most compelling plea, the jury stated.

After lunch, three authoritative lecturers were ready to enlighten the students about their points of view regarding the current international circumstances, and the future of NATO. Professor Marianne van Leeuwen of the University of Amsterdam spoke about the transatlantic relations and wondered aloud whether or not the relations are cooling down.

Mr. Max Valstar, Senior Policy Advisor at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and assistant of the vice-chair of the Group of Experts of the NATO 2020 project, was the second lecturer. He spoke about the role of NATO in the changing global environments, and the altering threats the alliance faces. In other words, he argued why a new Strategic Concept should be developed, to enable NATO to meet those challenges.

Last, but certainly not least, Mrs. Sabine Mengelberg, who is attached to the International Security Studies department of the NLDA, discussed the means and conditions of NATO interventions, and the difficulties it usually comprehends. She also concluded that a constant reconsideration of NATO’s own goals and means is essential.

After the three lectures, all students were invited to ask questions and join the discussion. An invitation that many students took to heart, much to the satisfaction of the organisation. Finally, a general discussion, in which the winning student delegates were invited to join the panel, marked the end of a very interesting and informative day. The drinks offered to everyone afterwards may therefore be considered well-deserved.

Taking into account the high standards of both the lecturers and the participating students, the seminar was entertaining as well as valuable. The efforts of Naval Captain Van Straten and of AOC chairman Hans Luijendijk contributed greatly to this conclusion.

Arno Hamar de la Brethonière