Chapter 2
Changing Missions

Any list of security problems concerning the members of NATO will be dominated by challenges emanating from areas on the periphery of the Alliance’s treaty area or, in many cases, well beyond it. There is little disagreement about this. What has yet to emerge is a clear picture of the roles NATO can and will play in dealing with this long list of challenges.

Not that the Alliance has stood still over the past decade. Two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO adopted for itself a new strategic concept to reflect these new realities. With this step, NATO, in the words of one commentator, “anointed itself as the guardian of European stability . . . reorienting its military forces away from border defense toward rapid reaction and power projection.”1 Arguably, the strategic concept adopted by NATO in 1991 should be regarded more as a reflection of the allies’ aspirations than as a road map for force planning. Nevertheless, in the years since its adoption, NATO has taken steps to adjust its posture and activities toward the demands of new challenges—formally adopting peacekeeping as one of the missions of NATO’s forces, for example, and opening a dialogue with selected countries bordering on the Mediterranean.

NATO’s members, in short, are beginning to shift their conception of the Alliance away from one devoted primarily to the defense of territory to one increasingly focused on the defense of common interests. This shift in conception is occurring in fits and starts, and it is not shared evenly among the allies. But it seems an inescapable reality that the most serious threats facing NATO’s members lie beyond the treaty area. Hence, NATO’s “area of regard” is growing. The recent accession of three new members (and their almost immediate involvement in a

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NATO's military operation in the Balkans is only one manifestation of this broader reality. Increasingly, the members of NATO will seek to influence events beyond the NATO treaty area. It is surely in the interests of the United States to encourage its allies to see NATO as a vehicle for extending this influence.2

What might be called this “Drang nach Aussen” underlies the new strategic concept that the Alliance formally adopted in 1999. That concept recognizes the need for the Alliance to take account of risks and threats beyond those related to the defense of territory. These beget demands for capabilities to carry out “new missions:”

- Power projection—the ability to deploy and employ military forces and assets rapidly, over long distances, and for sustained periods
- Crisis management—the ability to intervene diplomatically and militarily in disputes that could result in conflicts ranging from small scale to fairly large
- Countering weapons of mass destruction—reducing incentives by others to acquire or employ weapons of mass destruction and preparing to prevent the effective use of such weapons
- Countering terrorism.

These changes in thinking about the purposes of the Alliance and the primary focus of its efforts are welcome. However, as important as a general commitment to adopt new missions is, such commitments are, in the end, meaningful only if they lead to actions over a sustained period to implement them. Key questions remain:

- What concrete responsibilities and operations will NATO and its members undertake to make these general missions a reality? Where will they draw the line between matters that are the business of the Alliance and those that are to be left for unilateral action or responses by ad hoc coalitions of the willing?
- What sorts of military capabilities—hardware, trained people, operational concepts, and supporting assets—and activities are most appropriate for carrying out important new missions?

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2 For a range of views regarding NATO’s future roles and of the alliance’s place in U.S. global strategy, see Gompert and Larrabee, 1999.
• To what extent are the members of the Alliance fielding the military capabilities needed to undertake these missions? How interoperable are their forces?
• And, for the United States, how should its military forces in Europe be shaped in light of future challenges and strategies?

The remainder of this report addresses these questions, offering first an overall strategy that could govern NATO’s activities in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. It then suggests some broad implications of this strategy for force planners in NATO member countries, focusing finally on some more-specific implications for U.S. planners.