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**NATO'S STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE  
MEDITERRANEAN AND THE INITIATIVE**

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NATO's strategic transformation will have an important impact on the Alliance's approach to the Mediterranean and on the future of its Mediterranean Initiative. During the Cold War, NATO's strategy, doctrine, and military capabilities were oriented toward deterring a military threat from the Soviet Union. Today, the threats and challenges are more diverse—and more indirect. They range from ethnic conflicts on NATO's borders to threats from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly around the Mediterranean.

At the same time, the locus of risks and challenges has shifted. During the Cold War, the main security challenge was located in central Europe along the German-German border. Today, the key challenges and risks are increasingly on Europe's periphery and beyond its borders, particularly in the south. Moreover, in most instances these risks and challenges do not involve a direct threat of military attack against NATO territory; they are much more indirect and ambiguous. But as the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo have shown, they still can threaten important Alliance interests.

In response to these changes, NATO has embarked upon a far-reaching process of adaptation and transformation. The debate about "out of area or out of business" that raged in the early 1990s is over. With NATO's involvement in Bosnia—and more recently Kosovo—NATO is out of area and very much in business. It is now recognized that non-Article V challenges—that is, those that do not

involve a direct attack on NATO territory—may present a serious threat to Alliance security and require a military response by the Alliance.

In addition, the Alliance has undertaken a process of enlargement designed to project stability to central Europe, and has launched a number of important new cooperative initiatives aimed at strengthening ties with former adversaries. These initiatives include Partnership for Peace (PFP), the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and the Permanent-Joint Council with Russia (PJC). The Alliance has also significantly streamlined its command structure, reducing the number of regional and subregional headquarters.

NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Washington Summit in April 1999, reflects many of these changes. The previous Strategic Concept, approved at the Rome Summit in November 1991, was written before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war in Bosnia, and the enlargement of NATO. The new Strategic Concept amends and updates the 1991 document to take into consideration the new security challenges the Alliance will face in the coming decades. A number of these changes have important implications for NATO's approach to the Mediterranean and for NATO's Mediterranean Initiative.

### **NATO'S EXPANDED SCOPE**

Whereas the 1991 Strategic Concept continued to emphasize the threat posed by the Soviet Union, the new Strategic Concept emphasizes risks that are "multidimensional" and often difficult to predict. Moreover, the geographic scope of the risks is expanded in the new Strategic Concept. They now include "uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area" and the possibility of regional crises on the Alliance's periphery.

In short, both the definition of the risks and their geographic scope have been considerably expanded. Rather than facing a unidimensional threat from a single enemy (i.e., the Soviet Union), NATO today faces a multiplicity of risks, many of which emanate from beyond NATO's borders. Indeed, the new Strategic Concept specifically speaks of risks "in and around the Euro-Atlantic area" and

regional crises “at the periphery of the Alliance” that could affect Euro-Atlantic stability (Paragraph 20).

Thus, in a broad sense the new Strategic Concept reflects a geographic shift away from a preoccupation with a threat in central Europe to a more diverse set of risks, many of which are located in or emanate from the south. This southern prominence reinforces the need for NATO to develop a substantive security dialogue with countries of the Mediterranean basin.

### **WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**

The new Strategic Concept puts greater emphasis on the threat posed by WMD. It stresses that nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons have become a matter of “serious concern” and that threats from these weapons can pose a direct military threat to Allies’ populations, territory, and forces (Paragraph 22). It also notes that Alliance forces must have the capability to address the risks associated with the population of NBC weapons and their means of delivery (Paragraph 53h). Reflecting this new emphasis, the Alliance launched at the Washington Summit a new five-part WMD initiative designed to ensure that NATO will be able to counter the risks posed by WMD in the coming years.

While the new Strategic Concept does not single out any country or group of countries for special attention, many active and potential proliferators are located around or near the Mediterranean littoral. Hence, the emphasis on WMD will tend to give NATO a greater southern focus. At the same time, it will reinforce the need for NATO to develop a deeper security dialogue with countries in the southern Mediterranean, many of whom themselves are threatened by the proliferation of WMD.

### **ENLARGEMENT**

While no new invitations were issued at the Washington Summit, NATO reiterated its intention to keep the door open to new members (Paragraph 39) and launched a new initiative, the Membership Action Plan (MAP), designed to enhance the capability of candidates to improve their qualifications for membership. Five of the nine

aspirants eligible for the MAP, it is worth noting, are in southeastern Europe (Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and Macedonia). Moreover, many of the most serious security problems NATO faces are in southeastern Europe. Indeed, with NATO's active involvement in Bosnia and Kosovo, NATO's focus will increasingly shift toward the south, further diluting the traditional emphasis on central Europe.

### **COLLECTIVE DEFENSE VERSUS CRISIS RESPONSE**

Collective defense (Article V) remains a core Alliance mission. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that most challenges the Alliance will face in the future are not likely to involve a direct military threat to NATO territory. Rather, they will involve non-Article V—or “crisis response”—operations. While such contingencies do not involve the threat of direct attack on NATO territory, as noted earlier, they can affect the security interests of the Alliance and thus could require a military response by NATO. Indeed, many of NATO's operations and activities in the future are likely to be non-Article V operations beyond NATO's traditional borders.

The new Strategic Concept reflects this changed balance between collective defense and crisis response. It notes that Alliance forces must be able to carry out a full range of missions. At the same time, these forces must also be able to contribute to conflict prevention and non-Article V crisis response operations (Paragraph 41). Moreover, as noted, many of the risks today emanate from “in and around the Euro-Atlantic area.” As a result, NATO forces need greater mobility and sustainability so that they can operate effectively beyond NATO's borders.

The expanded definition of NATO's interests and scope for action raises questions about how far NATO's geographic mandate extends. Is NATO's new expanded scope for action essentially confined to the Balkans or does it extend to the Mediterranean as well? Is a crisis in Algeria, for instance, within NATO's geographic mandate? What about a crisis in Libya or Sudan?

At the moment, no clear consensus exists within the Alliance on exactly how far NATO's geographic scope extends. Most Alliance members would probably rule out NATO involvement in Middle

Eastern crises. Some, however, consider the Mediterranean to be within NATO's new expanded focus. The expanded definition of NATO's geographic scope and the emphasis on non-Article V operations could spark new concerns in the Middle East and North Africa about NATO's ultimate purposes and goals. Hence, as NATO expands its geographic scope for action, it needs to be particularly sensitive to how this expansion may be perceived in these regions.

### THE MANDATE ISSUE

One of the most divisive issues within the Alliance has been whether NATO can act without a UN mandate. In Kosovo, the Alliance acted without a clear UN mandate, but many Alliance members regard Kosovo as the exception, not the rule, and deny that it has set a precedent for future NATO actions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the mandate issue was one of the most contentious issues in the debate over the new Strategic Concept. In the end, the Alliance skirted the question and adopted instead rather general language about the need for Alliance actions to be "consistent with international law" (Paragraph 31). The lack of any specific reference in the Strategic Concept to the need for a UN mandate for NATO operations as well as NATO's action during the Kosovo air campaign—where NATO acted without a clear UN mandate—is likely to make many countries in the Middle East and North Africa uneasy and could stimulate new fears among Dialogue countries that NATO may be more prone to intervene across the Mediterranean.

### ENHANCED POWER PROJECTION CAPABILITIES

Countering many of the new risks and challenges that NATO will face in the coming decades will require a reorientation and restructuring of NATO's military forces, especially those of the European allies, to develop better capabilities to project power. The forces of most European allies are still oriented primarily toward deterring a large ground attack against their national territory (Britain and France

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<sup>1</sup>See in particular the speech by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer at the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on December 8, 1998. See also Fischer's interview with Udo Bergdoll and Josef Joffé in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 27, 1998.

excepted). However, as noted, today there is no direct threat to the territory of NATO members except in the southeast.<sup>2</sup> Most NATO operations—as in Bosnia and Kosovo—will be beyond NATO's borders. The forces of NATO members therefore need to be restructured to develop greater power-projection capabilities.

The new Strategic Concept lays the conceptual ground work for this process and provides concrete guidelines for the restructuring of NATO forces in order to enhance their power-projection capabilities. Particular emphasis is put on deployability, mobility, and survivability of forces and their ability to operate beyond NATO's borders (Paragraphs 53b and 53d). Improvements in these areas are the main focus of the U.S.-sponsored Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI), approved at the Washington Summit, which aims at increasing interoperability and enhancing the Alliance's capability for power projection. While such a reorientation is necessary to allow NATO to handle the new risks it may face in the coming decades, this adjustment could create the impression in some Middle East and North African countries that NATO is trying to become a global policeman.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

All told, the changes reflected in the new Strategic Concept should put NATO in a better position to address the key strategic challenges it is likely to face in the future. At the same time, the Alliance needs to be sensitive to how changes in its strategy may be perceived by countries in the south, especially those participating in NATO's Mediterranean Initiative. NATO's expanded scope for action, its willingness to act in some cases without a UN mandate, and its emphasis on the need to enhance its power-projection capabilities could intensify concerns in the Middle East and North Africa about NATO's purposes and objectives, stimulating fears that NATO is now more likely to intervene in these regions. The strong reaction in some Middle Eastern and North African countries to the creation of the

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<sup>2</sup>Turkey is an exception, and continues to face plausible threats to its national territory. Therefore, Ankara will be especially reluctant to see any diminution of the Alliance's emphasis on collective defense (Article V). Greece is similarly sensitive to territorial risks.

WEU's EUFOR and EUROMARFOR underscores their sensitivity on this issue.

NATO's greater emphasis on the WMD threat could spark similar fears. Despite their own proliferation concerns, many Dialogue members, especially those in the Maghreb, are perplexed by this new emphasis and fear it represents an attempt to portray the Mediterranean region as a new locus of threat and area for NATO intervention. Thus, as NATO moves to develop new means of addressing WMD risks, it needs to ensure that its public diplomacy and military strategy are closely harmonized. Otherwise, misconceptions and misunderstandings may arise that could undermine NATO's effort to develop a more cooperative dialogue and common approach with countries of the southern Mediterranean.

In addition, the Alliance needs to be sensitive to the impact of changes in its strategy on its own southern members. As a Mediterranean country with Middle Eastern borders, Turkey could play an important role in developing NATO's Mediterranean strategy. At the same time, Turkey is unique in the sense that it is the only Alliance member that faces a serious military threat to its territory emanating from the Middle East and which could invoke an Article V commitment. Thus, as the Alliance shifts its emphasis to focus increasingly on non-Article V threats, it should bear in mind Turkey's exposed position, and ensure that this new emphasis does not give the impression that the Alliance is abandoning or downgrading Article V. Similarly, in the western and central Mediterranean, members need an approach to WMD risks that balances military and diplomatic instruments. Counter-terrorism is an issue that some members (and Dialogue countries) will wish to see addressed more actively within the Alliance, but others may prefer to see this as a national or EU area of responsibility.

Taken together, the process of NATO adaptation underscores the need for a clearer and more focused Mediterranean strategy. This strategy needs to reflect—and be shaped by—certain realities. First, the Mediterranean is not a homogeneous region, and NATO needs to take this diversity into account. This recognition suggests a differentiated approach in relations with security partners. Second, the playing field is crowded, with many institutions involved in Mediterranean initiatives. NATO should avoid duplicating what other organizations

are doing. Third, NATO should play to its strength—which is military cooperation—especially in areas such as peacekeeping and humanitarian rescue operations. However, NATO should adopt a flexible approach in developing this cooperation, recognizing that some countries will be more interested in such cooperation than others. Cooperation should be developed on a *case-by-case* basis at a pace at which each country feels comfortable. Finally, as this study has noted, the main security problems in the region are internal, not external. They have deep economic, political, and social roots. NATO is not well suited to deal with these challenges. In most instances, therefore, the EU should take the lead in longer-term strategy toward the internal sources of regional instability.