

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

THE PROMISE OF NATO DEFENCE PLANNING

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The NATO defence planning process (NDPP) is the cornerstone of Allied collective defence, and one of the few politically-guided military instruments translating common interests and agreed objectives into a concrete defence posture. The development of forces and capabilities to NATO's requirements has been the imperative for all Allies since 1949. But, despite the obvious and vital link between articles 3 (self defence) and 5 (collective defence) of the Washington Treaty, NATO members have always had problems with meeting budgetary thresholds and military planning goals. Thus, structurally, military planning has been constantly burdened with unfulfilled promises. To the defence of this recurring fact, one may add that, beyond the described pattern of the allies' behaviour, it is also a natural problem of national and collective defence planning. Long-term goals, mid, and short-term expected deliverables, confronted with a dynamic external and domestic strategic context, always produce a need to correct inputs (action) and outputs (results) and, thus, narrows the gap between expectations formulated in different situations and defence postures reflecting the current situation. In NATO, all of this has manifested itself since the first Lisbon 1952 force goals were adopted (by consensus), and later on, the famous benchmark of 3% GDP to be spent on defence was announced – to mention just two striking examples of this situation. Therefore, such patterns of behaviour by some NATO members (described in academic studies as free-riding)

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are of a structural nature, and perhaps any other resource-intensive and politically sensitive process in an international organisation. They may result from the very nature of planning for the future and, more pointedly, do so in a (increasingly) multinational context composed of sovereign actors deciding on what and how they spend on defence. Against this background, however, NATO should be rightfully praised for constant flexibility, adaptability and effectiveness in providing quality solutions in such an ungenerous environment. Any effort today to improve the interplay between the NATO defence planning process and national planning should start from a thorough analysis of the obstacles in translating commonly identified Alliance requirements into specific targets.

Many things have happened in and around NATO since 1989 that have further complicated these issues, which were built-in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation from the very first days. To name just a few of them:

- more complex threats emerged, calling for new military – political instruments. This challenged the practicalities of collective defence needs and invited disputes on priority missions and access to corresponding resources. Thus, the sharp focus of NATO defence planning has been blunted,
- pursuit of new missions: low-intensity, out-of-area, prompted NATO to develop different military capabilities than required for large scale operations, sometimes at the expense of the latter, and sometimes simply by cutting-off “heavy” capabilities,
- natural competition for resources, both on the operational and infrastructural level, complicated the understanding of mission unity and a single set of forces – where NATO collective defence serves as the “referential mission” for development of military capabilities,
- the post-cold war NATO military adaptation brought some unwanted results: a growing gap between objectives and deliverables in defence planning, an extra burden imposed on the capacity of the reduced NATO command structure; and renationalisation of some military processes,
- an abrupt return of a military threat in the neighbourhood of NATO called for a political – military response, burdened with diverging perceptions of the gravity of threat, political considerations, and resource shortages,
- *a peace dividend syndrome* (exacerbated by the recent global financial crisis) – brought about additional budget cuts, less forces, and more (*imperfectly functional*) multinationality in the capability build-up process. NATO leaders, at

their September 2014 summit in Wales, pledged to keep their defence spending at a level of 2% of their respective Gross Domestic Products. The pledge was needed to stop the steady decline of defence resources, which had been going on since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the figures published by the NATO Secretary General in his *2014 Annual Report* are *alarming*. According to the source: in 1990, the 14 European Allies spent USD 314 billion on defence in real terms. By 2010, defence spending in NATO Europe had dropped to USD 275 billion, despite 12 additional European countries having joined the Alliance. In 2014, it is estimated that European members of NATO spent USD 250 billion on defence². In summary, over the last quarter of a century, some 64 billion dollars evaporated from Allied defence budgets, increasing the challenge for their contribution to NATO planning.

In the era of NATO-wide shrinking of defence budgets and cuts in forces the sufficient synergy of Allied and national defence planning is highly necessary. In the foreseeable future it seems likely that there are not going to be more troops or money for them. However, threats and challenges of a military nature will remain severe and diverse. Therefore, more solidarity in burden sharing, increased financial efforts, and smarter multi-national programmes are in high demand today, not as a luxury or saving-generator, but as a must. To remain militarily credible, NATO simply needs efficient forces, command structures, and capabilities to conduct a full spectrum of operations, from low-intensity up to large-scale and combat ones. All of these, however, must grow from collective defence as part of the NATO mission. A quick analysis of conflicts in NATO's neighborhood strengthens the case for adequate military capabilities. Missions in Afghanistan and Libya have exposed some shortfalls in NATO's capabilities, including those critical for collective defence. Precision guided munitions, drones, and C2 for air operations were some of the most prominent examples. Russian aggression in Ukraine has suggested that hybrid warfare might be a doctrinal, political (decision-making) and legal challenge for the Alliance. However, it is never effective without its "hard military component" – another thing that proves that NATO should not turn a blind eye to traditional threats. Likewise, Russian aggression against Ukraine should be an illuminating case study for all proponents

² See: The Secretary General's Annual report 2014, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_116854.htm/Accessed 2/2/2015.

of “new warfare” concepts as reportedly replacing the traditional one. It offers a lot of material for confirming the longevity persistence of its largely traditional (attrition) model, based on strategic Clausewitzian prescriptions and their rather non-sophisticated military execution. Outside of NATO, the US led coalition against the so called Islamic State, also requires proper military hardware. With the Wales summit decisions, NATO is on track in addressing its collective defence requirements, including capabilities and forces. This process should be built on the following five assumptions:

First, collective defence should remain the key reference. Each time NATO undertakes actions outside its borders, it should preserve capabilities and forces for collective defence. Russia’s aggression in Ukraine demonstrates that the classical conventional threat has not gone away from Europe.

Second, NATO’s main tool at hand - Readiness Action Plan - should lead to NATO’s permanent adaptation to the new strategic context. Some defence shortfalls had been identified well before the Russian annexation of Crimea, and they mostly concerned heavy equipment and mobile capabilities. This hard stuff cannot be treated anymore as a legacy of the past, as it is an inseparable component of NATO’s deterrence and defence. ISAF has proven that it remains useful and not only for collective defence. For this reason it should remain in national inventories. The Allies should declare these forces to the NATO Defence Planning Process. This is the only way to ensure their effectiveness and usability.

Third, sufficient resources should be dedicated to defence. The defence budgets cannot be viewed by the governments any longer as a burden or the source of quick and easy savings. “Peace dividend syndrome” belongs to the past. However, in addition to what the Allies spend, it is equally important how spend it. Spending more and in a smarter manner also sounds like a way of addressing the drastic imbalance in defence efforts between NATO, Europe and the US.

Fourth, multinational opportunities for the development of capabilities should be used effectively and wisely. Such projects offer an opportunity to build capabilities, by groups of nations, in a cost-effective manner. However, multinational approaches make more sense, if they bring usable capabilities and the savings are re-invested in defence. If not, multinational projects would be a means for further cuts and lowering NATO’s operational level of ambition.

Fifth, “hybrid warfare” has to be treated as a specific political and military instrument, however inseparably linked with other segments of defence and contingency planning, both as a stand-alone problem or part of a more complex incremental war scenario. Anyway, it is not a cheaper defence, or defence relegated to interior ministries, state services or guided media, thus justifying more military cuts.

A case for better NATO Defence Planning Process

Collective defense planning has been one of the three key mechanisms making NATO unique and distinct from other forms of military-political cooperation. The other two are obviously permanent politico-military consultations and an integrated command structure. Today, this trio is still the key to NATO success. Within this framework, defence planning remains the most challenging process as a combination of political decision-making and purely technical elements. This is a distinct process with its own complex procedures. It is not easy for the planners. After all, if they knew everything about their job, the system they create would be perfect. There would not be any governance problem and all planning disciplines would smoothly interlock, thus creating an always-coherent and up-to-date product. To make things even more complicated, the defence planning process is hardly comprehensible for the decision-makers. At the same time, it is a tool for reaching the political objectives defined by the political leaders. For this reason, it has to be better understood by them, and they should be more involved in the process. What needs to be highlighted here, in the first instance, is the fundamental role of defence planning in forging NATO’s political coherence and military effectiveness, as well as its heavy dependence on national planning. Allied planning has gone a long way from threat based force planning focused on collective defence to a capability-driven process, involving all planning disciplines. Its goal is to cover all current NATO missions and tasks, including new mechanisms, such as the comprehensive approach. I find it particularly striking that some specific problems that the Allies have discussed over the last few decades remain to a large extent the same today.

In June 2004, shortly before my departure from NATO HQ, where I served as deputy ambassador of Poland, the North Atlantic Council had adjusted its planning procedures to reflect “the need for greater political visibility and ownership of

key elements of the process, and the need to streamline the process”. It sounds like a recurring motive in this process, and resonates as a piece taken from the present ministerial communiqués. Other examples include 1980 when the Allies agreed to develop a “flexible framework for longer term defence planning”, and, already in 1955, the NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay was tasked by the North Atlantic Council to prepare “a procedure for multilateral consideration of changes in defence planning of members that would affect their contributions to NATO”. This strikingly resembles the same dilemmas taken up by NAC today. These three somewhat randomly selected examples from the past (and present) demonstrate a permanent motive in NATO defence planning, namely how to encourage nations to spend more on defence and how to better connect national decisions with NATO goals.

On a daily basis, NATO has to cope with challenges inherent in its defence planning: 1) developing credible and realistic plans covering all possible Allied missions, 2) coordinating those plans with national efforts, 3) implementing collectively agreed plans in an effective and cost efficient manner. In my understanding, a successful NDPP should be able to deliver in three major areas:

- first, prevent re-nationalisation of defence policies of member states, namely by avoiding a situation where Allied planning has no or a very limited regulatory impact on national planning;
- second, influence and, where possible, guide national decisions to build the capabilities needed to meet collectively agreed goals. After all, the real strength of NATO comes from national forces providing muscle to the Allied force structure. If this is absent, then the NATO command structure alone does not mean a lot,
- last, but not least, the defence planning process should ensure or facilitate development and availability of capabilities needed for the full range of Alliance missions.

A few words on renationalisation

It has been the main internal challenge to NATO’s cohesion from the very outset, and remains the case now with a leaner Alliance facing uncoordinated reductions in national capabilities, triggered - among other factors - by the financial crisis. The termination of the ISAF mission in 2014, and the naturally expected subsequent

slow-down of the “operational” tempo of NATO, may look like an opportunity for further unilateral defence cuts. Burden-sharing between the US and other Allies has already got a very complex record, and any further reductions in European defence spending may, no doubt, complicate it even further. Then, the challenge for the NATO defence planning process will be to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic link, the way that would encourage Europe to develop more capabilities, and the US to keep Europe on their geopolitical radar-screen and continue to provide its share. In the European context, there are two distinct but closely related types of renationalisation risks. One is that some Allies, with the end of ISAF, might be tempted to abandon certain capabilities, considering them “an unnecessary legacy of the past”. The other is that other nations - especially in the light of what is going on in Ukraine - may become even more sensitive about those cuts and decide to develop capabilities they believe are necessary for territorial defence. This might create divisions among the Allies, leading to consequences far beyond the area of defence planning. This is not an abstract situation, or a theoretical academic concern. To avoid the renationalisation risks, for the sake of NATO credibility, nations must be fully confident that planning goals genuinely reflect the whole spectrum of possible Alliance missions, corresponding with the threat perception. In this context, a cocky and militarily maverick Russia offers another reason for allied nations to treat their NATO collective defence pledges in a serious way.

A few words about influencing national decisions

The NATO defence planning process must remain a top-down one where a common vision of defence posture impacts national commitments. Expectations that it will simply “certify” whatever nations bring to the table, and confirmation that Allies only make the only right choices individually, are understandable for the simplicity of such assumptions. However, in reality, the primary role of NATO defence planning, through its collective wisdom, is not to satisfy individual nations. In practical terms it should make them equally unhappy, and pushed to develop commonly required capabilities. Against this background, the increased political visibility of the process is a must. In order for Allied governments to be willing to meet NATO requirements in their national planning, the national decision-makers have to understand why should they act in a particular way. To

this end, the agendas of NATO leaders (ministers of defence and foreign affairs) need to include regular exchanges on all the key elements of defence planning. After all, the multi-stage planning cycle starts from adopting “Political Guidance” that drives the military content of defence planning (followed by four other stages: naming capability requirements, apportioning requirements, and setting targets, implementation, and results review). Probably, there are ways of going even beyond this by introducing this issue in a smart way to the Heads of State and Government. In the context of political visibility and instruction to the process, the active role of the NATO Secretary General, and his own assessment of the present and future state of Alliance defence planning, would also be helpful. A competent political debate on NDPP should help decision-makers in understanding the need to develop capabilities for the full spectrum of NATO missions, rather than leaving them with the impression that the already defined priorities should remain intact. In Poland, our national defence planning procedures have been based around NATO processes. We largely copied its structure into our system, including all its phases. Adoption of the NATO approach to defence planning has resulted in many other positive changes in the area of defence.

The NATO defence planning process can generate a lot of trust among NATO members and be an important vehicle for change. And more importantly, the Allies should capitalise on that, for instance, when looking for the best ways to implement the Smart Defence and Connected Forces Initiative (CFI). With the increased focus on multinational approaches, defence planning has a chance to become a mechanism of choice for nations. Both Smart Defence and CFI may influence NATO collective defence by increasing the Allies’ interdependence. The NDPP, when supporting the development of such multinational projects, should be able to address concerns which some countries may have with regard to growing dependence on other nations’ capabilities. No doubt, the idea looks like the right one – the NDPP should, and can, influence national decisions to the benefit of developing collective capabilities. However, long term planning must be firmly based on a common vision of the future, which takes into account different geostrategic perspectives of the Allies and their specific national considerations. That common vision, as a clear foundation of sound planning process, is not easy to achieve, but it is a precondition for promoting a longer term focus for the NDPP.

On ensuring availability of required capabilities

NDPP is all about commitments and availability. Certainly, this was much more evident in the past, when forces and capabilities developed through defence planning were simply assigned to NATO commanders and the only Allied mission was collective defence. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the principle of availability must be preserved in today's more complex environment, if NATO planning is to remain militarily relevant. In this context, it is necessary to maintain the connection between defence planning and operational planning. The NDPP should continue to process experience from current operations and, what is equally important, fully take into account article 5 contingency planning. For a number of Allies, contingency planning is critical for collective defence commitments. Availability of forces and capabilities is indispensable to execute these plans. The NDPP is the only viable framework to identify, preserve and, when required, develop these capabilities.

The other challenge that the NDPP has already tried to overcome is accommodation of the EU planning perspective. This is a sensitive issue and burdened with numerous insurmountable differences among member states. However, even within the current constraints, it is possible to ensure better coordination, complementarity and, as a result, better availability of capabilities for both organisations. Options to be explored include a greater use of the NATO-EU Capability Group to discuss key NDPP issues, and better synchronisation of the Planning and Review Process with the NATO defence planning activities.

As a "credibility check" on the above perspectives, it would be good to take a quick glimpse at defence efforts in Poland. They are well endowed financially, at a level corresponding with the NATO 2 percent pledge, and compared to many other Allies, Poland keeps its defence expenditures on a growing curve. Over the last four years, they grew in aggregate terms by 25 percent – by far the highest figure from all NATO nations. Also, Poland adopted a multi-annual, multi-billion programme for the development and modernisation of its Armed Forces. These plans are clearly concentrated on modernisation and development of national defence capabilities. Their implementation will further increase Poland's contribution to NATO, obviously through the defence planning process. The key focal areas there are air defence and lower-tier Theatre Missile Defence.

These systems, when acquired by Poland, are intended to be declared as part of NATO Ballistic Missile Defence. Warsaw also plans to further develop its fleets of utility and specialised helicopters and armored personnel carriers; develop C4ISR systems, and modernise its Navy. The geostrategic location of Poland on NATO borders obviously impacts some choices related to the capabilities and structures. However, the effectiveness of the entire Alliance has been for a long time the point of reference for all Polish efforts related to capabilities development.

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Instead of a conclusion, another word from the distant NATO past. In 1949, NATO adopted its first Strategic Concept. The final part of this document – a basis for the defence planning process - was about “cooperative measures” considered at that time to be “a prerequisite to the successful implementation of the common plans”, such as standardisation, combined training and exercises, cooperation in research and development of new weapons and so on. The introductory sentence to this part reads: The essence of our overall concept is to develop a maximum of strength through collective defence planning³. This statement remains as valid today as it was in 1949. NATO defence planning today, though different in scope and objectives from the past planning arrangements, is still about strength and solidarity. It continues to be indispensable in meeting the objectives of the North Atlantic Treaty, and instrumental in harmonising the Allies’ national defence plans with those of NATO.

³ See the text in the annexes to a monograph by: R. Kupiecki, *Siła i solidarność. Strategia NATO 1949-1989*, PISM, Warszawa 2012.