

NATO BEYOND 2020: PRESERVING STRENGTH, ADAPTING CAPABILITIES

Ten Actions to Boost Political Will in the Alliance

Mário Nicolini

Take NATO's most recent discussions, and political will has occupied center stage: Investing more in defense? Making forces available to operations? Keeping momentum in the smart defense initiative? Big issues ultimately come down to the willingness of political leaders to pursue a given objective. However, it would be all too convenient to blame the political class alone. Most political decisions are prepared and implemented by lower echelons; bureaucracies must be given due attention, as success requires action from those responsible at all levels.

Since the end of the Cold War, it has proven extraordinarily difficult to sustain support for the use of military capabilities in operations, even when mandates were clear about the required numbers and rules of engagement. An even greater problem, exacerbated by immediate concerns about success in Afghanistan, has been to invest in transformation - and that is NATO's number one challenge for the future.

Interoperability among Allies has suffered while critical enablers in European forces are still at short supply. The spending gap between both sides of the Atlantic is dimming prospects for improvement in the near term. And the world around us is changing at a pace unprecedented in human history, promising unforeseen and possibly very serious consequences on security and defense.

A window of opportunity is opening from 2015 onwards with the expected drawdown of forces in ISAF. But precisely because of the slowing operational tempo, gathering political support for the reinvestment, reconstitution and transformation of our forces, rather than cashing in on another peace dividend, will be hugely challenging. Transformation starts with people and mindsets. This paper flows from the assumption that mindsets can be changed and political will can be mobilized - and indeed it must be - in order for the Alliance to "continue to be effective in a changing world, against new threats, with new capabilities and new partners". This is what our leaders agreed in the new Strategic Concept. What steps can be taken to support this evolution?

NATO needs a strong Secretary General to replace Mr Rasmussen when he leaves office next year. The former Danish Prime Minister is a controversial man. In the few years he has spent at NATO's helm, he has cultivated a host of detractors, particularly among NATO insiders. Rasmussen has been under fire for his unchecked public pronouncements, for underestimating complexity, bending NATO's decision making process, and pushing the NATO bureaucracy to serve his "own" agenda instead of the one tasked by Nations. But for all the criticism he has attracted, this Secretary General has enjoyed unwavering support among Ministers and Heads of State. In the words of one former NATO ambassador, Rasmussen's "determination to succeed is a force of nature". Supported by several influential Nations, Rasmussen has managed to nail politically sensitive topics, such as the redesign of the NATO Command Structure and the reform of NATO agencies, whose size and geographic footprint are no longer justified. He has also managed to create exceptional momentum behind multinational cooperation under the "smart defense" banner, which in turn helped to get the long overdue Allied Ground Surveillance drone project off the ground. NATO needs the rare breed of leaders that is embodied by Anders Fogh Rasmussen to push ahead with reform and transformation. And given Europe's reluctance to choose leaders for their organizations, Washington's role will be key.

Nations need the best professionals in NATO's international staffs. NATO should pursue the new personnel policies initiated under Mr Rasmussen, based on selecting people on merit rather than nationality and on promoting rotation rather than incumbency in order to infuse NATO with fresh thinking. Nations, for their part, should make a consistent effort to develop and make available to NATO their experts (and place

them in positions of responsibility as they finish their international term). Only such staffs, working as impartial agents, can generate the quality of information that is required for preparing complex political decisions, shape consensus and execute as directed. The quality and professionalism of international servants lies particularly in the interest of smaller nations, who are generally unable to cover the whole spectrum of NATO's agenda and by default focus on a limited set of topics of national concern.

NATO needs more strategic debate (and action). For this, the organization has to develop a more informal way of doing business. The current Alliance is operationally oriented and should be retooled to create space for substantive discussions on long term issues. The formal nature of meetings, probably reflecting NATO's military character, has been a factor preventing debate about wider security issues. The nature of the future strategic environment, as well as lower appetite among members for military action, justifies a looser method of political discussion. One should not expect the North Atlantic Council to take immediate decisions on topics such as extreme weather events, internal tensions or changing migration patterns, but the various working fora, including the Ambassadors, should do their best to tackle the issues and begin defining NATO's role in the emerging environment. Debate can usefully be facilitated by informal food for thought papers. Allies may want to be reassured that no pre-determined conclusions or tasking would be pulled out of the sleeve at such meetings. But it is no longer justified to object to placing such topics on the agenda for the fear of inviting knee-jerk military reactions. In no respect should this be interpreted as an excuse for doing nothing - and thereby fuel the dreaded interpretation of NATO as **No Action Talk Only**. Rather, it could

better prepare the ground for future decisions. Nor should it really touch the world of overseeing military operations (even if these meetings would also benefit from a more strategic focus). NATO, after all, should serve as a “unique transatlantic forum for all topics related to the security of its members”.

Ministers and Heads of State need candid talk.

In some respects, NATO’s gentlemanly British culture has run its course. With defense cuts reaching so deep and uncertainty about the future looming large, the time is overdue for candid talk and reporting. The NATO meetings on defense plans of the recent two years have shown the way. NATO’s Defense Planning Process, a critical glue holding Nations’ defense plans together and an objective source of data, needs further work to make its outputs more politically relevant. NATO need not shy away from more frequent Chairman’s reports, not only when official reports cannot be agreed by Nations but also if these are considered too watered down to provide any value, provided that they are written in a constructive spirit. It is hoped that such reporting, and a more informal - yet again - method of chairing ministerial meetings would generate greater personal engagement by Ministers. After all, there tends to be a sigh of relief - and smiles around the table - every time that someone in the room tells the simple truth, without the usual diplomatic nuance. The Alliance should consider more frequent meetings at ministers’ level, particularly among Defense Ministers. This could introduce camaraderie and a shared mindset - if not strategic culture - of the kind that the EU Foreign Ministers have built in the Foreign and General Affairs Councils. NATO could also offer an Incoming Ministers Program, which could comprise a full day of briefings to new members

of the community and first-hand accounts of the challenges faced by NATO and its Nations.

NATO needs a better culture of civil-military dialogue. This may come as a surprise, considering the decades of civ-mil cooperation in the political-military organization that NATO represents. Yet there is an opportunity. Mirroring the increasingly integrated international bureaucracy that is moving into the new NATO Headquarters across Boulevard Léopold, Nations would also benefit from a “rapprochement” between their civilian and military representatives. Common meetings of the NAC and the Military Committee dealing with the same issue could be a start, instead of the MC-first-NAC-second tradition that is replicated at working group level. Discussions among the military, rooted in operations and practice, and the civilians, mired in policy and theory, would no doubt enrich both sides.

Europe needs stronger US support for breaking the NATO-EU deadlock. This challenge has haunted policymakers for years now. The increase of transparency inherent in full-fledged political dialogue, which may include common tasking for both organizations to proceed jointly, would make the job of national defense planners easier. It may expose the unnecessary duplication that everyone senses is out there, but remains covered for bureaucratic - and sometimes political - reasons. Deeper still, it would probably further expose the real challenge of generating capability, which is outside the organizational design, and related to Europe’s reluctance to use force. In any case, full strategic dialogue and better transparency could “cleanse the debate”; Nations would be led to finding political solutions to political problems while arguing technically where issues are technical.

NATO should declassify the output metrics. Designed in 2011 and “populated” by data in

2012, the ten-something metrics depict each Nation's effort in meeting collective priorities. A former colleague termed them as an "X-ray of Nations' performance". The primary agreed objective for the output metrics remains to mobilize political will by introducing peer pressure among Allies. The metrics may give credit where credit is due and ultimately shame the freeriders - into action. Alas, they remain classified, and as such have limited utility vis-a-vis national parliaments and publics. Since so much effort has gone into defining and agreeing this set of criteria, NATO must now find a way by which those Ministers that deem the metrics useful can use them openly in their quest for more political support and investment into NATO.

NATO must involve its Finance Ministers. While some ideas to this effect have been bandied around for some time, nothing has really happened. Finance Ministers should be asked by their Heads of State and Government to attend the next NATO summit and be encouraged to speak. They should see first-hand NATO's planned high-visibility exercises. They should be flown to Afghanistan. They should be presented with a bleak future without NATO. Yes, more heavy lifting must be done at home when national budgets are drawn up, but the Alliance can - and should - help in reaching this key target group.

NATO should use military exercises to promote security awareness and NATO's relevance in its Nations. As the Alliance moves from operations to exercises, its new agenda around the Connected Forces Initiative needs full public exposure. Preserving and redirecting defense investment post-ISAF will be tough, and exercises may never spark the public's imagination as much as real-world engagement - or perhaps they could. All politics is local: NATO exercises, or national add-ons to them, can be

organized in many Nations, making NATO and the Armed Forces more visible and relevant for national purposes. Therefore, communications strategy should be integrated into exercise planning from the outset.

Allied Command Transformation, NATO's future force architect and exercise designer, will need a robust presence in Brussels to be visible, influential and useful for both the military and civilian communities. NATO needs the vital capability to scan the horizons to both provide a long term vision for capability development and forge a shared perspective among Nations about threats and opportunities. The ACT has initiated its Futures Work, a promising and ambitious line of products, in which Nations should be fully involved. Central Europe certainly should make its voice heard in the process.

Author is Executive Director at the Institute for Security and Defense Studies, Ministry of Defense, Slovakia. He has advised successive State Secretaries of Defense and served as Defense Counsellor at both NATO and the EU from 2008

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