

Ålands fredsinstitut

The Åland Islands Peace Institute

Report from NATO New Strategic Concept Seminar in Helsinki 4.3.2010

The NATO Strategic Concept is a document that guides the Alliance as it pursues its agenda of safeguarding the common security interests of its members. It is said to express NATO's enduring purpose and nature and its fundamental security tasks, identify the central features of the security environment, specify elements for the Alliance's broad approach to security and provide guidelines for the further adaptation of its military forces. The existing document was approved by Heads of States and Governments of the NATO member states in 1999.¹ On the 4th of March 2010 a NATO New Strategic Concept Seminar was organized in Helsinki by the Foreign Ministries of Finland and Sweden. The seminar gathered speakers from many different international organisations and backgrounds to discuss a comprehensive approach to crisis management as a part of the process of drafting a new Strategic Concept for NATO. Several of the speakers and moderators at the seminar are members of the Group of Experts that has been assigned with the task of drawing up recommendations for a new Strategic Concept.

As I entered the Siirtomaasali of the Conference & Events Centre of Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa Hotel, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt was wrapping up his introductory speech, emphasizing the importance of what he referred to as "flow security": protecting air transport systems, shipping lanes and pipelines, as well as the need to secure both cyberspace and orbital space.² The room was full of people and I could not spot a single empty chair. Finally a lady in the back waived me over and offered me her seat. She was part of the staff of the conference centre and I gratefully accepted her seat. The back of the room was full of press people recording the introductory session.

Mr. Bildt was followed by Mr. Jeroen van der Veer, Vice-Chairman of the above mentioned Group of Experts and former Chief Executive of Shell. Mr. van der Veer made an effort to answer the question of why a new Strategic Concept is needed. Firstly, he argued, September 11 attacks, cyber threats, piracy, the High North and climate change have changed the security environment and constitute new threats for NATO to consider. Secondly, NATO has increased its number of members from 16 to 28 since the drafting of the old Strategic Concept. Mr. van der Veer emphasized the importance of the Strategic Concept for the public understanding of the alliance and claimed that NATO has very high public support in most European Member States (up to 80 %), whereas the public support in the US is exceptionally low (around 50 %). He also spent some time discussing the importance of a good relationship with Russia, describing NATO's relation with this partner country as a cornerstone. Mr. van der Veer dismissed the reports claiming that Russia's recently released military doctrine proclaims NATO as the number one threat as based on misunderstandings and mistranslations, claiming a more correct understanding is that Russia perceives that NATO's potential actions may pose dangers for Russia. Nevertheless, Mr. van der Veer acknowledged that Russian representatives have perceived the concept of a comprehensive approach to crisis management as threatening, and preferred speaking of a co-operative approach.

¹ Official text of the NATO Strategic Concept of 1999 available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm

² Mr. Bildt's remarks are available in written form at <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/12529/a/140850>

In the first session of the seminar, Mr. Aivis Ronis, also a member of the NATO Group of Experts, chaired a panel consisting of President Ahtisaari, Ms. Sarah Cliffe, World Bank Director for the World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development, and Mr. Cedric de Conning, Research Fellow with ACCORD and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The title of the panel was Evolving World Order – Setting the Scene for Crisis Management. However, the panelists did not seem to reach any agreement on how this scene should be set. As a matter of fact, there even seemed to be a disagreement on who should be on the scene. Mr. de Conning emphasized his independence and stated firmly his opinion that NATO should not at all engage in crisis management, which would be better suited for the UN to handle. On the other hand, Mr. Ronis suggested that the increased number of chess pieces in the seminar logo perhaps could be read as a subtle message to Finland and Sweden to take a more active role in the game.

The second session of the day was conducted under the headline Building capabilities – Bringing Actors together for a Comprehensive Approach. The session was moderated by Mr. van der Veer and included as speakers General Stéphane Abrial, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, Mr. Antoine Gérard, head of UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) liaison office in Brussels as well as Mr. Hugh Powell, former UK Senior Representative in Southern Afghanistan. General Abrial spoke of the capacity of the military to quickly plan and undertake complicated operations, but also of the need to include civilian and non-NATO actors as early as possible in any operation, preferably already at the training stage, in order to coordinate actions “in theatre”. Yet also this panel was thoroughly divided regarding the issue at stake. Mr. Gérard welcomed the opportunity to interact through the transparent process NATO has adopted for the drafting of its strategic concept and seized the opportunity to raise his worries regarding the lack of a common definition of the comprehensive approach. Mr. Gérard stressed that humanitarian aid is not and should not be a tool of crisis management and that it need not be integrated into a military mission. On the contrary, Mr. Gérard argued that such integration may hamper the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance and thus endanger the possibility of negotiating humanitarian assistance. Mr. Powell on the other hand suggested that there is no neutral space for development or assistance in a counter-insurgency environment. According to Mr. Powell, Medicine sans frontiers in the Helmand province in Afghanistan were able to operate without being perceived as an enemy of the Taliban only because they were providing care for Taliban fighters and their presence was merely tolerated by the NATO forces.

After an hour long lunch break, the seminar continued with panel three, discussing the Growing role of the EU in Security Policy and Crisis Management. This session was perhaps the least interesting one, providing only general points about the rapid development of the EU’s role in crisis management and the need to strengthen the analytical capabilities as well as the security priorities of the EU. It was followed however by some interesting comments regarding the status of Finland’s and Sweden’s relations to NATO. A Swedish diplomat in the audience voiced his opinion that the EU does not attempt to compete with NATO and that Finland and Sweden already are to be regarded as non-voting members of NATO. This was not accepted by the moderator of the session, Ambassador Dr. Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz, who insisted Finland and Sweden are not yet ‘married to’ NATO, only ‘engaged to be married if the mother-in-law (that is the Finnish and Swedish public) agree’. Ms. Claude-France Arnould, Deputy Director-General for Crisis Management and Planning Directorate at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, concerned herself with the questions of how European States can convince the US of their commitment and contribution

to promoting and protecting US interests in the world and how to get the public to support defence and crisis management spending. To the latter question, she argued there is a one-word answer, namely: jobs. In the US defence and crisis management spending is linked to creating new jobs at home, which is the key to building public support for such spending.

The final session of the day was moderated by Ambassador Kim Traavik, the Norwegian Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Council. Finnish Minister of Defence, Mr. Jyri Häkämies, opened the session entitled Making future Crisis Management Operations successful. He was followed by Mr. Donald Steinberg, Deputy President for Policy of the International Crisis Group. According to Mr. Steinberg, while the traditional distinction between soft and hard security issues is becoming increasingly blurred, it may still today be difficult to get NATO to commit troops to a genocidal situation in Africa. Comparing to the available resources for humanitarian crises caused by natural disasters, Mr. Steinberg argued that the international resources available for preventing or rebuilding after a conflict are diminishing. Nevertheless, Mr. Steinberg suggested that one must not underestimate the will of citizens to support international crisis management efforts. In order to illustrate his point, Mr. Steinberg recalled an episode from when he worked as President Clinton's PR advisor at the time of the Black Hawk Down incident. At that time, when President Clinton was faced with the pain of the relatives of the deceased he thought he had made a great mistake and tried to apologize for the incident. On that occasion however, one of the mothers of the deceased, angered that she was not receiving the answer she had wanted, spoke up to tell the President what he should be saying, namely, that their sons had died as heroes, that they had given their lives in a struggle to save many hundred thousands of others. The final speaker of the session, Brigadier General Karl Engelbrekton, former head of the Nordic Battle Group, returned to the theme of a comprehensive approach, underlining the need of the military to train the way they fight. The session ended with a small discussion on humanitarian intervention, where Mr. Steinberg in response to a question from the audience noted that the concept of the responsibility to protect was unanimously adopted and took it as evidence that there is still support for humanitarian intervention, though he recognized that in the US the notions of democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention have lost considerable support after the Iraq intervention.

What then is a comprehensive approach to crisis management? As I have recounted above, many of the speakers at the seminar admitted themselves that this is a concept that lacks clarity. It has been argued that the concept commonly is understood as an approach aimed at integrating the political, security, development, rule of law, human rights and humanitarian dimensions of international missions.³ It is however clear that different actors attach different preconditions to such integration. It is also clear that NATO's ambition to manage crisis is not uncontroversial. On the contrary it has been met with suspicion for pragmatic reasons by other international actors such as Russia and humanitarian organisations and also for issues of principle by some experts and humanitarian organizations alike. This is certainly a cause for worry as, to re-use the words of President Ahtisaari during the seminar, "the image of danger is a self-fulfilling prophecy". NATO's new Strategic Concept therefore must clarify NATO's role in such a way as to make sure it is not perceived itself as a threat by other actors.

Heidi Öst, heidi@peace.ax, 16.3.2010

³ Rintakoski, K. and M. Autti (eds.) "Comprehensive Approach – Trends, Challenges and Possibilities for Cooperation in Crisis Prevention and Management" Crisis Management Initiative Seminar Publication (Finland Ministry of Defence; Helsinki) 2008. Available at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/YSAR-7LPT6W/\\$file/comprehensive-approach.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/YSAR-7LPT6W/$file/comprehensive-approach.pdf?openelement)