

The evolution of NATO's Strategic Concept

Gen. Vincenzo Camporini

4 April 1949. Soon I was going to celebrate my third birthday and therefore I could say, with some affection and familiarity, that NATO and I are almost peers.

12 Western states, including the newly formed Italian Republic, joined the Treaty and “reaffirmed their trust in the aims and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all people and governments. They stated decisively to safeguard the freedom of their people, their common heritage and their civilizations, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They aspired to promote prosperity and stability in the region of the North Atlantic. They decided to unite their efforts in collective defence in order to preserve peace and security”.

These words express concepts that, today as in the past, underline the necessity of such an organization and, above all, by acknowledging the premises of the Treaty within the nations, due the real essence on which the Italian Armed Forces are founded and today I have the honour to lead.

The Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) represents the trans-Atlantic link that binds Europe and North America in a unique alliance of defence and security. The essential and enduring purpose of NATO, expressed in the Treaty of Washington, is to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members through political and military means. To this end, since its inception in 1949, NATO has assured the collective defence and has been also an indispensable forum for consultation on security issues as well as an essential pillar for peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the continuous change of the geopolitical context, the Alliance has undertaken, in response to new challenges that have arisen, a new type of responsibility, among which, the one of contributing to ensure stability in areas which have been put at risk by regional and ethnic conflicts together with the task of preventing risks related to the resurgence of international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

In order to give substance to the preamble of the Treaty, NATO, since 1952, has undertaken three successive Strategic Concepts, two of which just in the last 20 years. The main difference between the first document, that addressed mainly the military dimension of the Alliance, and the two later versions, can be summarized as follows: the Heads of State and Governments of member Nations wanted to indicate, clearly, the Alliance policy and objectives, its "raison d'être", the environment in which it should operate, up to include a "vision" for the future in the medium term.

In 1991, NATO sensed the need to confirm its "raison d'être": the Organization existence should not be called into question after the collapse of the USSR and of Warsaw Pact and the therefore needed a Strategic Concept capable of giving a new guidance for member Countries and, above all, a strong signal of openness to the Countries of the former Eastern bloc.

The last Strategic Concept of 1999 was formulated after NATO's experience in the Balkans following the dissolution of Yugoslavia that occurred during the entire decade.

For the first time a real operation was conducted outside the traditional sphere of action of the Alliance, and therefore outside of Art.5.

The common denominator, in both cases, was therefore represented by a significant transformation of the strategic context in which NATO was living and acting. Within a period of about 10 years the role of the Alliance shifted from substantial military deterrence, without any real operational commitment, to practical contribution to crises management, even through the imposition of peace with the use of force.

But Article 5 of the Washington Treaty has continued to be the cornerstone of the Alliance and, curiously, the real application of that article, that was never realised during the Cold War against traditional threats, has materialized at the beginning of XXI century in order to confront the terrorist threat.

It would be sufficient to look, today, at the map of "NATO 60 years later" in order to get a clear idea of the changes which NATO must face, it is clearly visible how different is today Alliance from what it was only ten years ago: in structure, members, external relations and areas of action.

This simple fact makes evident the need to redefine a new frame of reference that only a revision of the Strategic Concept can provide.

The approach to the theme of a new Strategic Concept stems from the simple observation of the profound changes in the global security scenario that have occurred in the last decade and raise questions about the role, missions and tasks of NATO today and in the future.

In this light, it seems proper to ask oneself how these changes can be reflected in the new Strategic Concept, and what relationship there is between this document and the Declaration of Alliance Security that will be completed by the Summit of the Heads of State and Governments in April 2009.

The dynamic and the complex characteristics of today's global security context need to be reflected within the concept under consideration, with an increasing emphasis, on new significant threats, collective defence and solidarity among Allies. An increased complexity of the scenario calls for "more complex answers" for which NATO requires suitable tools that should go beyond the mere military context.

If, on one hand, the basic principle of collective defence and security requires more and more frequently to deal with challenges outside the borders of the Alliance, we must recognize that notion of classical and traditional threats uniquely identified (typical of the cold war) has been changed and is fragmented in many different risks and threats extending the obligation of collective defence to a whole range of possible responses to threats, which are differently perceived and "prioritized" by each individual member Nation.

These considerations are not new nor innovative by far.

While the need for greater deployability is, in fact, one of the guiding concepts of the changes that NATO is bringing to its military structure and instrument in the field of transformation have been ongoing for, quite some time, efforts directed at identifying possible future scenarios and corresponding traditional and complementary skills, which will enable the Alliance to continue to carry out, effectively, its missions (Cyber defence, Maritime Situational Awareness and Energy security).

It is important to note that this also includes the well established concept of the "Comprehensive Approach", already growing in the Balkan and Afghan theatres, which must be expanded and applied to all the other types of threat and risks scenarios and should become a "corner stone" of the next Strategic Concept.

It should be noted, however, how the adjustment of the Alliance's role and im-

plementation of exceptional theoretical initiatives have been recently merged as it should be with the pragmatism imposed by the reality of a complex political and economical situation: issues that have strongly influenced the development of a large number of modernization projects in the military field.

It is therefore clear that the opportunity to develop themes that relate to the military dimension requires a shared political vision on NATO's future role and realistic level of ambition and to the weight attributed by the Alliance to the balance between defence systems and individual and collective security: These are clearly issues in political nature, they have been long debated and, to date, remain substantially open.

Alongside the need to define, or refine, new risks and threats together with the notions of collective defence and solidarity, there is a need to review, in a critical and realistic manner, the importance that NATO should and could have in the third millennium within its role of "defence and security provider".

If the transformation aims to provide the necessary flexibility and deployability to allow NATO to intervene "world-wide, from the military perspective, also in a context of changing international scenarios, the concept of "deterrence "(and therefore of strategic superiority) remains pivotal.

This is clearly a difficult task, already under discussion for some time and for which there are still no shared interpretations nor shared visions. Defining a credible, shared, realistic level of ambition, planning the structure and the forces necessary to achieve it, it is an indispensable prerequisite to outlining the Alliance's new Strategic Concept.

In short, before discussing on how to transform NATO it is necessary to determine "what must be transformed" and it is crucial to find full agreement between Nations.

Many of the stated challenges require a commitment that goes beyond a simple military response in the classical sense and demand a strong interaction between the Allies at a political and economic level prior than at military one. These issues require timely reflection and inputs at the highest political level (NATO credibility itself both at international and domestic level and, perhaps, even the future of the Alliance could be at stake).

While NATO prepares itself for its sixtieth birthday, the celebrations should not

hide the challenges that await it, starting with both at operational level (like the mission in Afghanistan) and at strategic level. Member States must face the political dimension otherwise, the risk of finding an alliance unprepared for future challenges is real. The success of NATO during the Cold War was due to a clearly defined mission, to adequate resources and a long-term commitment to invest in training and the necessary skills.

The scope of the considerations expressed above favours, therefore, a reflection on the focus of the revision of the current Strategic Concept in order to provide an opportunity to better face the future. More specifically, in the following concepts, I summarize the focus of the Key Concept that should be present in a new document:

- Art. 5 remain the cornerstone of the Alliance solidarity, and its implications should be contextualised in the light of the new geo-political scenario and in view of new risks and threats;

- The new Strategic Concept must enable member countries to find a renewed consensus on the role, function and tasks of the Alliance;

- In order for NATO to be capable of an effective deterrence it must pass a broad spectrum of skills and also it must be able to deploy flexible, deployable and sustainable forces;

- NATO must jointly work towards the implementation of new initiatives in the field of arms control and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;

- The complexity of the geo-political landscape requires the further development and implementation of the "Comprehensive Approach" concept. Within the new strategic concept, NATO should define a clear application of this concept. Rules should be established to implement, initially in its own area, the development of such a holistic approach in the conduct of activities. Within crises management, NATO itself should be "one" of the means of a wider comprehensive approach capable to operate in synergy (and with a "multi-agency" spirit), with the key International and non-governmental organizations.

- Whatever will be the outcome of this comparison between the different perceptions and national sensitivities, among the main tasks of the Alliance, that of maintaining transatlantic security and defence must remain the ultimate goal of NATO's activi-

ties: this task can be fulfilled nowadays only by providing an effective contribution to international stability;

- The Alliance must remain faithful to the 'open door policy' in a frame of common respect for the founding values of the Alliance; also the relationships with Russia should be resumed in an effective and efficient way in order to restore the climate of trust set up after “Pratica di Mare”.

To conclude, it is essential to recall that all, the underlining principles and values which constitute the “core” of the Alliance must be clearly visible and credibly and linearly presented to the public opinion and to the people of our Countries as well as to the Countries where NATO operates today. The importance of Public Diplomacy could not be overemphasized as one of the highest priorities within all initiatives and actions, either be political or military, that NATO will undertake.

NATO, Happy Birthday!