NATO at 60:
The Global Security Provider

Karl-Heinz Kamp

When the twelve founding members[1] signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington D.C. on April 4, 1949, no one could imagine that they were present at the creation of the most successful politico-military alliance in modern history. What they initially agreed upon was an institutionalised conference of member states, which was developed only step-by-step to an international organisation with a powerful military capability. Today, NATO consists of twenty-eight member states with more waiting for admission. It conducts military operations on three continents, has institutionalised partnerships with some twenty countries and very close relations to key democracies outside of Europe, like Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea.

Given this amazing evolution, the challenge lies in the question of how to structure NATO's history over the last sixty years. One possibility would be to take NATO's disputes and crises throughout the decades as a guiding principle. In 1949, the Washington Treaty was signed when the Soviet Union still kept up the Berlin-Blockade. At the same time, many alliance partners had severe reservation against the newly emerging Federal Republic of Germany. 1959 stood under the impression of ongoing Soviet pressure again with respect to the status of Berlin. In 1969, international protests against the war in Vietnam dominated the scene. A year before, NATO had passively witnessed the abatement of democratic tendencies in Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces— which was considered by some Europeans as weakness. In 1979, NATO members took the "Dual Track Decision" to cope with the

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[1] Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States.

emerging threat posed by Soviet SS-20 nuclear missiles in Europe. This was the prelude to one of the most severe NATO crises, which took the alliance close to breakup in the early 1980s.

Even after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the "victory" of NATO in the Cold War, disputes seemed to be the guiding element in the alliance's history. NATO enlargement, the crisis in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq are catchwords, which all stand for heavy transatlantic or inner-European clashes straining NATO's cohesion time and again.

NATO's Phases

However, focusing just on the crises leaves the question un-answered, of how NATO could survive and—even more—how could it emerge as one of the few real success stories in international politics?

Thus, this article will follow the classification made by Michael Ruehle, one of the most profound observers of NATO's policy, namely, taking historical developments as markers to divide NATO's evolution into three phases.[2] The first one was, by far, the longest one and stretched over four decades from the foundation of the alliance in 1949 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. During that time, NATO was primarily an instrument of Western self-assertion and self defence. It protected Europe against a clearly defined and visible threat posed by the Soviet Union, with its military forces standing immediately at the inner-German border. It kept the United States in Europe and de facto created Europe and North America as a single security space.

The second phase was from the collapse of the Berlin Wall to September 2001. It was characterised by NATO's interest in shaping the political order in Europe. Partnership, membership and, not least, military action in the Balkans were crucial for transformation in Eastern Europe and for filling the power vacuum left by the demise of the Soviet empire.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 marked the beginning of the third phase, in which NATO is now. This phase is characterised by NATO's evolution from a Euro-centric alliance

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[2] Michael Ruehle, "NATO after Riga: A new direction?", *NATO's Nations*, 1/2007, S. 36-41.

into a global stability provider. NATO is no longer defining its tasks geographically but it takes on certain threats and challenges regardless of the region they emanate from.

Elaborating on these three phases more closely shows that NATO has over time developed a tremendous flexibility to constantly adapt to new international conditions caused by major historical shifts. It was this adaptability that led to NATO's institutional success.

FOUR DECADES OF SELF ASSERTION AND SELF DEFENCE

Founded more as a partnership framework without an automatic commitment, it took primarily the Korean War to transform NATO into a genuine military organisation.[3] Until June 1950, there were only a few Committees and Regional Planning Groups taking on certain aspects of transatlantic security. The fact that they were geographically dispersed (London, Rome, etc.) made coordination almost impossible. By the end of 1951 though, NATO had a Supreme Allied Command Europe, headed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The United States agreed to dispatch four divisions to Europe and started building up a coherent overseas command structure.

At the same time, plans were under way to establish a permanent civilian leadership of the alliance. Initially, the North Atlantic Council met only annually on the level of foreign ministers. In May 1950, there was agreement to establish a "Council of Deputies" which met for the first time in July of that year in London. Step-by-step, more responsibilities were given to these deputies and as a consequence, a secretariat was established in Paris. In early 1952, the Council agreed on a secretary general who should preside over the Council meetings and who should run all civilian agencies of the alliance.

Shortly after its foundation, the alliance was enlarged for the first time. With an eye on the Mediterranean, Turkey and Greece were invited to join NATO and in October 1951 a respective protocol to the Washington Treaty was signed. In February 1952, both countries became full members of the alliance. Three years

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[3] See Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO Divided, NATO United* (Westport 2004), p. 9f.

later, in May 1955, the second enlargement occurred when the Federal Republic of Germany gained (almost) full sovereignty and joined NATO as the fifteenth member state. Only days later, the Soviet Union and its satellites signed the "Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Co-Operation" in Warsaw: the Warsaw Pact was born and the bipolar bloc-confrontation, which would determine international relations for the next three and a half decades, had been cemented.

However, the stagnant international situation of two antagonistic political systems competing did not lead to standstill in the relationship between East and West. In fact, the Cold War was much less static as today's sometimes nostalgic retrospects to the allegedly stable and predictable area insinuate. Instead, the bipolar confrontation was characterised by a number of processes. One of them was the evolution of mutual nuclear deterrence, or, as it has been characterised, of "nuclear learning".[4]

NATO was in military terms right from its beginning a nuclear alliance. After the "atomic age" had started with the first nuclear test detonation on July 16, 1945 in the New Mexican desert, nuclear weapons were seen as an efficient and economic means to build up military power. Particularly in NATO Europe, where the war-torn and exhausted economies were unable to afford costly conventional forces, atomic bombs and missiles should help to create efficient capabilities. According to the general mood, nuclear weapons provided "more bang for the buck" (more destruction per dollar) and could easily make up for lacking tank battalions.

After the Soviet Union had achieved its own nuclear capability, it followed the same logic, mockingly circumscribed as nuclear weapons providing "more rubble for the ruble". This mutual trust in the value of nuclear forces (which coincided with the generally positive assessment of nuclear energy at that time) was the reason for thousands of nuclear weapons deployed on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It took many years and a number of severe international crises—like the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962—to make decision makers in East and West look into the nuclear abyss and to have them understand that the employment of nuclear weapons would probably lead to the end of mankind.

[4] Joseph S. Nye, "Nuclear Learning and U.S.-Soviet Security Regimes", *International Organization*, No 3/1987, pp. 371-402.

The more the qualitative difference of nuclear weapons compared to all other kinds of arms or explosives got understood, the smaller got the temptation to use them in any military exchange. The growing notion of mutual assured destruction led to the increasing perception of mutual assured deterrence. This explains why, since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons have never been used again despite the almost-70,000 nuclear warheads that had been deployed at the peak of the Cold War on NATO and Warsaw Pact territories.

Nuclear deterrence prevented the Cold War from becoming a hot one as it burdened even a conventional exchange with the danger of unlimited nuclear escalation. By doing so, deterrence indirectly fuelled another dynamic process throughout the first forty years of NATO, namely a fierce arms competition. The popular term "arms race" seems to be questionable, as it was a competition on two different levels. By and large, the Soviet Union—not bound by market economy conditions or public acceptance—banked primarily on amassing military equipment of all kinds. Much of it, particularly the nuclear posture, was built in so-called "secret cities"—places with artificial names not indicated on any publicly accessible map. NATO and, first and foremost, the United States instead tried to replace sheer quantities by technological quality. This faith in technological progress, which seems a constant in American culture, sometimes led to weird consequences, like the widespread faith in futuristic outer-space weaponry to counter Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles ("Star Wars") in the early 1980s. In any case, as any military hostility was made prohibitive by the cataclysmic consequences of an all-out nuclear war, the two superpowers carried out their system antagonism on the field of armament rivalry. This arms competition had probably wasted an incredible amount of resources but has arguably saved the existence of mankind.

A third dynamic and somewhat contradicting process affecting NATO as an alliance and many member states individually was arms control. Although most of the arms control negotiations were bilateral between the United States and the Soviet Union[5], NATO

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[5] Only the reduction of conventional forces in Europe, which was initiated in the second half of the 1980s and led to the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) signed in November 1990, was negotiated between NATO and Warsaw Pact.

as an institution and individual alliance members were affected as well. One of the examples of a bilateral arms control process that stirred up the entire alliance was the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). This agreement on the withdrawal of all intermediate and short range nuclear forces in Europe signed by US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev in December 1987 marked the end of a long and hefty dispute in NATO on American Pershing and cruise missiles in Europe.

It is up to debate as to whether President Reagan's costly armament programmes (like the Strategic Defence Initiative, or SDI) were the main reason to get the Soviet empire economically to its knees. Probably all processes—deterrence, arms competition and arms control—contributed their share to the end of the Warsaw Pact. Certainly, no one foresaw the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. However, the longer the Cold War took, the more it became evident that in the long run, the communist regime could not win the contest against the economically superior and politically more attractive West with its constitutional elements of pluralism and freedom.

NATO as the "Midwife of Change"

Hardly any expression encapsulates NATO's role in the immediate post-Cold War period better than Manfred Woerner's depiction of the alliance as a "midwife of change".[6] Although the fall of the Berlin Wall came as a surprise for most decision makers in East and West, the then-NATO secretary general grasped much earlier than many others the historical chances stemming from the end of the East-West confrontation and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact.

Still there was much confusion on NATO's future without the threat against which it had been founded. Against whom should the transatlantic defence capabilities be directed and where should the united Germany be institutionally located? Right after the collapse of the Iron Curtain, even odd scenarios seemed worthy to be seriously contemplated. It did not come as a surprise that Soviet voices called for an abrogation of both military institutions. The

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[6] It is worth noting that Woerner used this phrase even before the Berlin Wall came down. See Manfred Woerner, "Address to the German American Roundtable of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung", October 25, 1989, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1989/s891025a_e.htm.

request for a neutrality of a unified Germany was also an option, which seemed at least from a Soviet point of view justifiable. Other suggestions like Germany being a member in NATO and in the Warsaw Pact at the same time were simply bizarre.[7]

At the end, it was the primarily the close German-American coordination and the steadfastness of the political decision makers—first and foremost, George Bush and Helmut Kohl, but not least, Mikhail Gorbachev—which achieved a unified Germany as a full member in NATO—against the resistance of other key NATO members. This was not only a godsend for Germany itself but also a precondition for the viability of the North Atlantic Alliance. It showed that NATO and the transatlantic security relationship—despite the bygone Soviet menace—had its role in shaping the political post-Cold War order in Europe.

Still, the question remained: what will be the task of the new NATO (with a united Germany as a member)? Again, various options were intensively discussed in the international strategic community. Some pointed to the "residual threat" of the Soviet Union—Russia—which would further require a viable defence alliance. Others emphasised NATO's role of institutionally linking the United States to Europe—something that would be further necessary to ease possible tensions among NATO members themselves and to stabilise NATO internally.[8] NATO's remaining task in managing common defence planning was also mentioned as well as its ongoing relevance for political consultations among the member states. The option of NATO providing its military capabilities for operations under the auspices of the United Nations was also seen as a possibility as well as NATO's role as the prime facilitator of arms control in Europe. All in all, the debate showed tendencies of "anything goes" leaving the impression of an alliance that was desperately looking for a raison d'être to be communicated to an increasingly critical public waiting for the "peace dividend".

Two external developments brought some clarity in the question of NATO's future role and determined the alliance

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[7] John Lewis Gaddis, "For Stability, Germany Needs a Foot in Each Camp", *International Herald Tribune*, March 24, 1990.

[8] "By protecting Western Europe from others, the United States also protected the half continent from itself." See Josef Joffe, *The Limited Partnership: Europe, the United States and the Burdens of Partnership* (Cambridge, Mass, 1987), p. 179.

discussions in the years to come: the emerging crisis in the Balkans and the growing demands of former Warsaw Pact countries for membership in NATO. Both incidents were encapsulated in US Senator Richard Lugar's famous verdict spoken in 1993 of a NATO that would go "out of area or out of business". To remain relevant, NATO would have to expand its area of responsibility as well as its membership.

The smouldering Balkan crisis and the creeping dissolution of Yugoslavia blew up in mid-1991, when the Yugoslav National Army attacked Slovenia and Croatia to avoid their secession. The situation further escalated in early 1992 to heavy fighting in the entire Bosnia after the European Community acknowledged the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina. NATO got formally involved in the crisis in the autumn of that year when it started the no-military-flight zone over Bosnia imposed by the United Nations. Still the situation got worse as neither NATO (except occasional air strikes), nor the United Nations or the European Union could agree on decisive action to stop the civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

In July 1995, Serbian forces seized the UN-controlled zone of Srebrenica, killing thousands of Bosnian people. This catastrophe emblematised the incapability of the "international community"— be it NATO, UN or EU—to get their acts together in order to stop the atrocities in the region. At the same time, Srebrenica was the wake-up call, particularly for the United States to get more seriously engaged in pacifying the Balkans. The result was the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed on December 14, 1995, which stopped the civil war between the different ethnic groups. Authorised by the United Nations, NATO provided the so-called "Implementation Force" (IFOR) to supervise the provision of the peace accord. Hence, NATO got a new role by taking a long term military engagement beyond its own borders. One year later, IFOR was replaced by the Stabilization Force (SFOR), which was in place until 2005.

The Kosovo war expanded NATO's portfolio even further. Rising violence of Serbian forces against the Kosovo-Albanians in the second half of the 1990s led NATO to seriously contemplate military action to pacify the situation. In late 1998, NATO had developed sophisticated plans for air strikes against the troops of the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic. A couple of months later, on March 24, 1999, NATO began the bombing of Serbian air

defence sites. Without being attacked and without a mandate of the United Nations Security Council, NATO had started a war for the sake of humanitarian rights, which lasted almost three months and cemented NATO's role as peacekeeper on the Balkans. The NATO-led stabilisation force Kosovo-Force (KFOR) is still engaged in the region with more than 13,000 soldiers. Hence, the Balkans was the catalyst for NATO evolving from a pure defence organisation to a European stability force.

Parallel to the widening of NATO's tasks and responsibilities, the alliance expanded its membership as well. With the beginning of the 1990s, an increasing number of former Warsaw Pact countries raised the idea of their potential NATO membership. The motives differed from country to country—some were searching for protection from Russia; others wanted to visibly shift their sides from the "East" to the "West" or hoped for support in the process of transformation to democratic societies.

NATO's initial reaction was relatively reserved; also for various reasons. Some wanted to avoid any provocations vis-à-vis Moscow (which had apparently problems enough to fully accept the unified Germany in NATO); others were reluctant to take security and defence commitments for the countries of the former "Eastern Bloc". Moreover, the question was brought up whether decision making in NATO—already a structural problem for any consensus-based institution—would not be further complicated by new member states bringing their own sets of problems and disagreements into the alliance.

Thus, when German Defence Minister Volker Ruehe publicly raised the idea of NATO enlargement in March 1993[9], the echo was almost nil. Particularly the US administration was cautious as key figures of the Clinton administration (like the secretary of state, Warren Christopher, or the presidential advisor, Strobe Talbott) were pursuing a "Russia First" approach in order not to destabilise the delicate process of transforming the former Soviet Union. Instead of inviting new allies, the Clinton administration developed the "Partnership for Peace", which was a program to prepare applicant countries for the requirements of NATO membership.

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[9] See Volker Ruehe's Alistair Buchan's Memorial Lecture, "Shaping Euro-Atlantic Policies - A Grand Strategy for a New Era", *Survival*, Nr. 2/1993, pp. 129-137.

Since the Partnership for Peace was perceived as a waiting loop for applicants, its acronym PfP was mockingly transmogrified into "Program for Procrastination" or "Partnership for Postponement". Still, PfP and the following partnership initiatives—like the "Mediterranean Dialogue" (MD), which was initiated in 1994—opened a new chapter in NATO's history. NATO increasingly became a supporter of military and political transformation far beyond its borders.

In late 1994, Washington changed its view on enlargement completely (mostly due to domestic reasons[10]) and spearheaded the membership debate in the following years. Despite pressure by the United States and Germany, it took until 1999 to admit the first three new members after the end of the Cold War; Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were admitted into NATO. Five years later, in 2004—after heavy debates with Moscow about whether the Baltic states as former Soviet republics could become NATO members—a group of seven countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) joined the alliance. After another five years, in April 2009, Albania and Croatia became members.

Taking both developments—enlargement and the Balkan crisis—together, NATO has proven that it can go out of area and can well remain in business.

NATO AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

Every year now, the United States and its allies commemorate September 11, 2001, as a tragic date, which changed the international security landscape as profoundly as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the end of the Soviet Union. It was not only the loss of thousands of lives in the Al-Qaeda attacks against New York and Washington D.C., which had a lasting impact on Western and particularly US security policy. Instead, the fact that a small group of people with limited organisational structures, imperfect skills and comparably scarce resources could do so much harm to the largest military power on earth has fundamentally changed

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[10] Strobe Talbott was replaced by Richard Holbrooke, previously US Ambassador in Germany and a staunch supporter of the enlargement idea. Moreover, President Clinton did not want to provide an easy target for the Republicans in the upcoming mid-term elections in November 1994.

American threat perceptions and had long lasting repercussions on NATO in general.

The first one, the war in Afghanistan, is immediately affecting NATO until today. Legally backed by United Nations Resolution 1368[11] and politically supported by NATO, which had invoked Article V of the Washington Treaty (the alliance's collective defence clause) for the first time in its history, the United States started bombing Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. With its initial goal to oust the Taliban regime, which had provided safe haven for Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden, the operations in Afghanistan had a strong motivation of revenge. The incentive to stabilise and reconstruct the country emerged months later when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created in December 2001. In August 2003, NATO took the leadership of ISAF, assuming responsibility for securing the entire country.[12]

Since then, NATO is struggling with the colossal burden of helping to bring security and prosperity to one of the poorest countries in the world that had been torn by war and violence over decades. Much has been achieved so far but still the alliance is burdened by a number of contradictions and shortcomings. NATO's success in the region is highly dependent on a large number of non-military institutions (United Nations, European Union, World Bank, Non Governmental Organisations) that the alliance has hardly any influence on. Moreover, NATO has to communicate the fact that (unpopular) military actions are the precondition for the success of the (much more popular) non-military measures—a task which is not easy in democratic and media-oriented societies. Some allies even conceal the fact that in Afghanistan a war is going on, which can lead to harm and sacrifice on all sides. Lastly, although all NATO members emphasise the utmost relevance of succeeding in Afghanistan, only a few act accordingly and devote an appropriate amount of military and non-military resources to the common effort. Given these deficiencies—some implicit and some self inflicted—Afghanistan will remain NATO's top priority for many years to come.

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[11] This resolution condemned the terrorist attacks as "a threat to international peace and security" and emphasised the "inherent right of individual or collective self-defense" of those who were attacked.

[12] ISAF's role was originally limited to providing security to the Kabul area. Two months after NATO had taken over, ISAF's mandate was extended over the entire Afghanistan.

Despite all the difficulties at the Hindu Kush, one should not underestimate the high level of cohesion NATO showed over the last years. Afghanistan has been a bloody conflict that in the meanwhile has lasted significantly longer than the Second World War. Still there is consensus among all allies to stay as long as it will take to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for Jihad terrorism again.

The second implication from September 11—the war in Iraq—was much more traumatic and led, as one insider had put it, to a "near death experience" for NATO.[13] Although the alliance as an institution was not involved in the regime change in Baghdad, the question of the legality and legitimacy of toppling Saddam Hussein led to some of the fiercest debate among NATO members in the alliance's history. The George W. Bush administration, supported primarily by the United Kingdom, claimed that Iraq was actively developing weapons of mass destruction. In addition, Washington insisted on the existence of close links between the regime in Iraq and the Al-Qaeda terrorist network. Both concerns taken together were interpreted as an existential threat for the United States and its allies, which justified military action against Iraq to establish a non-aggressive and democratic government in the country. Further reasoning, which had already been expressed by the Clinton administration, assumed that a regime change in Iraq would lead to a domino-effect towards freedom and democracy in the entire region. As a result, the bombing of Baghdad started on March 20, 2003.

The dividing line between supporters and opponents of an attack against Iraq did not go only through the Atlantic but right through Europe as well. The bitter disputes between the supporters of the war (primarily the Eastern European NATO members) and the critics (primarily France and Germany) were so damaging that many other key aspects of NATO policy were seriously affected. For instance, the security cooperation between NATO and the European Union, which was already a delicate affair due to Turkey's EU ambitions, got almost fully paralysed.

Still, even the critics of the operation did not want to cause too much damage to the transatlantic relationship.[14] Thus, in 2004,

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[13] These were the words of the former US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns.

[14] Some countries opposing the war even clandestinely provided intelligence information to the US-led coalition.

NATO members agreed on a training mission for Iraqi forces, to help the build-up of an efficient and democratically controlled military in the country. Moreover, in the same year, NATO launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in order to outreach to the Middle East by establishing partnerships with key countries in the region.

Both wars, the broadly accepted one in Afghanistan and the disputed one in Iraq, spurred NATO's evolution to an alliance with global interests and a global horizon. This trend was further amplified when NATO, from 2005, conducted airlifting operations for the African Union (AU) in Darfur. Since then, NATO has become a true global actor, running military operations in four crucial regions: Europe, Middle East, sub-Sahara Africa, and Asia.

Towards a New Strategy

On its sixtieth anniversary summit in Kehl/Strasburg, NATO's heads of states and governments agreed on drafting a new and contemporary strategy for the alliance. The current document, the so-called Strategic Concept, had been approved in 1999 and could not stay abreast of the dramatic political developments of the last decade. Key events, like the defining moment of "9/11", the war in Afghanistan, NATO's "near-death experience", along with the transatlantic disputes over the war in Iraq or the admission of nine new member states, are not reflected in NATO's present strategy. Intermediate papers, like the Comprehensive Political Guidance (approved in 2006) or the Declaration on Alliance Security (approved in 2009), have been written to provide the alliance with at least some political guidance. However, given their very general character, codifying more or less the lowest common denominator, they could not provide serious strategic counselling for NATO's further evolution.

Thus, a new strategy was long overdue. The new Strategic Concept will be drafted in the coming months by a group of external experts—the so-called *Eminent Persons*—and is scheduled to be presented for approval of the NATO's heads of states and governments at their next summit in late 2010 in Lisbon.

Given the changes in the international political landscape,

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[15] A term coined by the then-US NATO ambassador Nicholas Burns.

the new Strategic Concept has to meet at least five requirements at the same time. First and foremost, it has to clearly define NATO's roles and missions. This has been tried time and again throughout the recent years. However, the result was an entire collection of functions which were compiled in order to be prepared for all foreseeable contingencies.

Hence, the second requirement of the strategy will be to set priorities in order to bring demands in line with the resources. Such a hierarchy will imply that elements at the lower end of the spectrum might be omitted, even if some NATO members should have different preferences. On the other hand, clear priorities can function as a benchmark for the performance of NATO members.

Third, by defining a common vision for NATO, the new Strategic Concept must become a tool for re-engaging and re-committing all NATO member states to the core principles of the alliance. This must include the insight that undivided security can only be based on undivided solidarity. A new consensus on these basics is inevitable to counter the trend of a re-nationalisation of foreign, security and defence policy—as currently can be observed in Afghanistan, where the "we" in NATO's operations is crucially missing.

Fourth, the new strategy has to be grounded on the previous one but it has to be forward oriented. Just to reconfirm already agreed wording would be insufficient. Moreover, the new strategy should not be an intellectual "Maginot Line" that only codifies NATO's "acquis communautaire". Instead it must reflect political-military premises and implications in the broadest sense, in order to avoid strategic surprises.

Finally, NATO's new strategy must contribute to winning the battle of narratives. It has to be a public rallying point to gather support, particularly for the military dimension of security. It must be seen as a strategic communications tool vis-à-vis an increasingly critical public. This will be all the more important as many NATO governments fail in (or refrain from) sufficiently communicating the need for foreign and security policy necessities to their electorates.

As if all these were not already difficult enough, NATO members' positions on what the alliance is all about differ significantly. Different historical backgrounds (today, twelve of twenty-eight NATO countries stem from the former "Eastern Bloc")

and different geographical settings lead to fundamentally diverse views on NATO's current raison d'être. The questions of *how* to achieve security and stability against *whom* and with *what* kind of means are answered differently.

DIVERGING VIEWS

The differences among the alliance members become particularly apparent with respect to three key issues: the mutual security commitments according to Article V of the Washington Treaty, NATO's relationship with Russia, and the future role of nuclear weapons.

With respect to the security commitments, the divergence is obvious. NATO is a political-military alliance whose key purpose is to provide collective security and collective defence for its members. Article V of the NATO Treaty encapsulates this duality by implying the right to protect the population, the security interests, and the territory of all NATO states. However, contrary to many popular views, Article V is not a "security guarantee": it does not oblige NATO states to immediately defend their allies militarily. Instead, in the case of an attack, each member is required to take "such action as it deems necessary" to restore the security of the transatlantic area, and military action may be one of the measures.

Despite this flexibility in the wording, NATO's security commitments had been credible during the Cold War. The first Warsaw Pact soldier stepping on NATO's territory (probably in Germany) had triggered the Article V mechanism and the military presence of many NATO allies on German soil had made a concerted military response highly likely.

Today, the meaning of Article V is much more difficult to define and many alliance members have their doubts with regard to the credibility of NATO's security assurances. Moreover, there is no consensus on what it is that has to be defended. At least four questions require clarification and consensus:

· How to balance NATO's role in *self defence* (NATO territory) vis-à-vis *security* (expeditionary operations and stabilisation missions far beyond NATO's borders)? Is there a trade-off between both tasks? Can NATO's mission in Afghanistan really be seen as "Article V at a distance"? Is NATO currently able to defend all NATO territory at any time when the brunt of its deployable forces is in a long term commitment at the Hindu Kush?

· How to maintain the credibility of Article V? If NATO constantly emphasises the relevance of defence commitments, how can they be made plausible to allies and to potential aggressors? Is there a need for contingency plans or military exercises that simulate territorial defence scenarios (probably on the territory of NATO's eastern members)?

· When does Article V apply? During the Cold War, NATO awaited proof that an aggression was under way before its own defence operations started. In an age of missile technology proliferation, vital threats may materialise before troops are sent in, for instance, when long range missiles tipped with weapons of mass destruction are prepared for launch by potentially hostile regimes. To await the proof of aggressive intentions would mean to wait for the launch of the missile—with hardly any chance of avoiding the deadly consequences. Given these dangers, can NATO shirk from discussing the element of pre-emption as a means to provide security to its members?

· How to deal with collective self defence against new threats? Article V only defines "armed attacks" as the trigger to commit allies to mutual assistance. However, attacks against computer networks (cyber attacks), the release of hazardous material or the cut-off of energy supplies can hardly be seen as armed attacks but will still require solidarity and common action. Is there a need to amend the wording of the Washington Treaty?

Closely connected to the question of NATO's role of both defence and security is the question of how to deal with Russia. This is a major issue in almost all NATO debates as it has major implications for other elements of NATO policy, like the open door policy (enlargement) or the development of missile defence components.

The dilemma is striking: on the one hand, NATO and Russia are engaged in a unique partnership "at 29" (28 NATO members plus Russia) organised in a special forum, the NATO-Russia Council. On the other hand, a large number of NATO allies—given their histories and geographic locations—view Article V as primarily directed against Russia, since there is hardly any other country imaginable that would be able to launch a military attack against NATO territory.

The Georgia crisis in 2008 has worsened the situation. The media in the Baltic states raised the question of how NATO might have reacted if Russia had chosen to take military action in order to "protect" Russian minorities in Estonia or Latvia. In the meantime, NATO has declared that it will not return to "business as usual", but,

at the same time, that it will re-establish relations between Brussels and Moscow. Hence, it still remains unclear how NATO intends to deal with a partner as important as it is difficult to handle. Some of the open questions are:

· Shall a lasting relationship between NATO and Russia be primarily based on values or on common interests? Apparently, the popular but hollow term of "strategic partnership" is not enough to describe the realities of the relationship with Russia. Can NATO as a community of values be engaged in a special partnership, if a common value base is missing? Is Russia really an indispensable partner for NATO when at the same time Moscow undermines all efforts to impose pressure on Iran in order to stop Teheran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons?

· How to keep up a close relationship if Russia's self-assertiveness (and, in the eyes of some allies, its aggression) increases? Can NATO agree on a common position vis-à-vis Moscow if the historical experiences with Russia differ so widely within the alliance? How can there be true cooperation when a significant number of NATO members regard Russia as a threat to their security and territorial integrity.

· How much influence on NATO's decision making can and should be granted to Russia? How to deal with those cases where both sides differ fundamentally (such as missile defence and enlargement)? Can both sides agree to disagree or will Russia always expect a solution that takes its own positions into account?

One topic that long seemed to be of secondary interest but is likely to come back into the political limelight is the nuclear question.

The reasons for the nuclear renaissance in NATO's strategic debates are manifold. Iran is actively pursuing a military nuclear programme which could not be stopped either by the threat of sanctions or by political or economic incentives offered by the international community. As the pace of Iranian nuclear developments goes on unconstrained, Teheran might be able to conduct a nuclear test explosion soon. This might force other countries in the region to strive for nuclear weapons as well and would catapult questions of nuclear threats and nuclear deterrence high on the political agenda. The current unrest in Iran is not likely to change this doom picture as the desire of developing nuclear capabilities finds bipartisan support in the country.

A similar situation could emerge in Asia. North Korea, which

joined the club of nuclear powers in 2006, is not willing to scrap or return the nuclear devices it has already produced, regardless of its promises to end the nuclear programme. The country has even executed another nuclear test and is actively pursuing the development of long range missile technology. Depending on the coming developments, the danger of further nuclear proliferation will increase in this region as well.

These ongoing trends will not only end the recurring pipedreams of a nuclear-free world but will also require NATO to reflect more thoroughly about the role of its nuclear capabilities. The 1999 Strategic Concept limited itself to very general statements about the further relevance of nuclear weapons. Today, pertinent questions need to be answered:

· What is the purpose of NATO's nuclear forces stationed in Europe? Against what kind of opponents are they directed? Is there any likely contingency in which they have a role?

· Are NATO's current nuclear capabilities in line with the deterrence requirements of the 21st century? If not—how to bridge the gap between military hardware and political needs?

· Is the deployment of US nuclear weapons on European soil necessary for the credibility of nuclear commitments or of NATO's resolve? If not, can they be withdrawn? How might the Eastern European NATO members react to a potential removal of US nuclear forces from Europe?

None of these questions—be it on Article V, on Russia or on nuclear deterrence—can be answered right now. Thus, to develop a new, meaningful strategy, which sets a clear course and provides guidelines for sober prudent planning, will be an extremely demanding task. The process might deepen the cracks in the alliance and display the fundamentally different positions. On the other hand, NATO cannot avoid a painful but mind-clearing strategic debate in order to prepare the alliance strategically for the challenges of the forthcoming years. This requires, however, that all NATO governments engage their public in an educated debate about the basics of foreign and security policy requirements—an obligation many capitals flinch from taking seriously.

Dr. Karl-Heinz Kamp is the Research Director of the NATO Defence College in Rome.