

# Thoughts... in writing

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*NRF soldiers in a static display*

## Introductory Note

With this issue's first writings we'll intend to start a series of articles aimed to fill a gap that, in our opinion, persists in the content of our Magazine: a space dedicated to the expression, exchange and debate of ideas, concepts, doctrines and procedures that inexorably set the pace of the day to day's life of **soldering**.

Articles that will try to provide different perspectives and opinions on "**hot subjects**" faithful to the motto **liberta di pensiero**, so dear to those that have to provide advise and counselling to the decision makers – no more no less than what an experienced and mature Staff is supposed to guarantee

With these articles we'll try to encourage the participation of our readers in debating their content and provide their own views on the same subject. We deeply believe that by doing so we will enrich our professional knowledge and skills as well as our organizational culture. And it is also our inner conviction, having such a multitude of different experiences and levels of expertise within our HQ that we could not afford to loose this opportunity to decisively promote a small contribute to the growing process of our professionals ... in an unpretentiously way.

This is our "provocative" challenge ...

## Let's talk NRF ...

Today's thoughts will be on the so-called "**NRF Concept**" now in fashion among the NATO community.

Upon the political and military decision of NATO to adopt and implement the NATO Response Force Concept none of us in the military and specifically none of those that work within the NATO environment have remained indifferent to it.



*Signal personnell setting up an antenna*



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And there are a couple of good reasons to remain seized on this subject: firstly, the analysis of the concept in itself (what's behind the curtain, how new is it in our way of doing business?) and secondly what type of impact would its implementation have on NATO's structural organization (would it implicate something similar to the so called "Revolution in Military Affairs"?!)<sup>1</sup>.

Lets try to dissect our doubts and provide our views and answers to these interrogations.

## What's the rational behind it?

The NRF concept seats on the basic but audacious/challenging idea of having a permanent available force capable of doing "**anything, anywhere, anytime**"<sup>2</sup>.

The push to have as soon as possible a force able to provide such capability has undoubtedly its origin and roots in two major events that have dictated a change in the international environment: the unpredictable supersonic collapse (call it implosion if you want) not only of the old USSR but of the majority of the satellite countries and regimes under the socialist/communist tutelage; and linked to it the increasing complexity and multitude of the challenges, risks and threats (where the 9/11 plays a decisive role) that the *new international order* actors face in terms of security and defence on their way to achieve a comfortable international balance of power.

To provide an adequate response to the above concerns and challenges the existing NATO forces and structure revealed themselves inadequate for such purpose since they were generically considered as being too much "reactive" by nature and concept.

The lessons learned from recent events in Central/Eastern Europe and the fear of a world wide "*balkanisation*" of conflicts in line with the predictable type of future engagements<sup>3</sup> have decisively accelerated the whole process of NATO's transformation and consequently the adoption of a new Strategic Concept, a new Command Structure and a new Forces Structure from where the concept in discussion derives.

## The NRF Concept ... How new is new?

Our first question has its roots on the previous perspective. With so many changes carried out already within the Alliance (where it seems that each piece of paper has incorporated the "new" word before every



IFV DARDO during Ex Destined Glory '04

statement) we may still ask a valid question: is it in fact a new concept or is it just "*a late arrival to the scene*" of previous experiences now subdued for NATO's fostering?

Our view is definitely in line with the second possibility. In pure theoretical terms we may say that since imme-



Setting up the Command Post

- 1 Very briefly an RMA can be defined as a complete transformation not just in technological terms but also essentially in conceptual, doctrinal and organizational ones of existing military structures/institutions.
- 2 Conceptually we can expect this type of Force to conduct any type of mission within the framework of Non-Art 5 Crisis Response Operations, overtime, able to be employed out of area (out of NATO's normal AOR) in a short timeframe.
- 3 Non Art 5 Crisis Response Operations rather than Art 5 - conventional warfare type of confrontation

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morial times, nations, countries, organized political groups/entities have had forces at **high readiness** capable of intervening anywhere, anytime and of doing anything to defend their strategic interests when threatened. Certainly, the **anywhere**, the **anytime** and also the **anything** capabilities have evolved in accordance with new political, strategic and operational thinking and in line with new available technologies and technological developments. But the concept in essence has remained the same: to have a "watch dog" ready to go...

To substantiate this assertion it will be worth to remember that particularly within the Air and Navy environments NATO has always had quick response forces acting on a 24/365(6) basis. In land terms, the lately deceased AMF(L) <sup>4</sup> had been so far the NATO's closest embryo to this concept although relying on a very "squared framework arrangement" meaning with little tailoring flexibility.

However, even though the concept cannot be considered new it undoubtedly constitutes a certain "novelty" in terms of NATO, specially because its implementation calls for a joint force to be ready in very short NTM <sup>5</sup> timings and during an extended period of time, which will implicate major changes in the Alliance's decision making and planning processes especially at political-strategic level. The CJTF/HRF <sup>6</sup> Concepts had set the pace for it but they provided lets say a more comfortable timeline for decision makers to deal with. With the NRF Concept this comfort has vanished "de per si" implicating (if we're talking success) a tremendous acceleration in the whole process. In simple terms we cannot have a "proactive force" without having also "proactive" political decisions and military planning. And these will definitely set the pace...



IFV DARDO ready for action!

## Is NATO's leadership ready to change?

Following our previous thoughts and rational the answer to this question relies on the effective capability of NATO leadership to overcome the "reactivity syndrome" that has conditioned NATO's activity in the past and tends to restrain NATO's interventions in the future if no changes at top level are accommodated. This means that NATO key leaders will have to change their mindset in order to meet the goals themselves have set. A quick and effective decision making process needs to replace the old slow and sometimes ineffective one <sup>7</sup> in order not to let the Alliance portray the "patient suffering of an incurable disease" that sooner or later will end up in death...

But will they accept to do it in the short term? To that question, time and specifically the next two years, will provide the answer. Nevertheless, it will be worth to remember that the word "consensus" is still the main word in the lexicon of the Alliance's decision making process and a 26 consensual decision will not be an easy goal to achieve...

## What about our forces? Are they ready to face the challenge?

One of the major concerns every level of Command faces (besides the accomplishment of short timelines for deployment) is to know if their forces can meet the readiness requirements, meaning: are they properly tailored, trained, equipped and available when and where needed? Do they really meet the standards to perform the **full spectrum** of NRF missions?

Lets try to rationalize about these questions. If we take into account the demanding spectrum of **possible missions** <sup>8</sup> that can be assigned to a force within the NRF concept we may well understand that properly tailoring a force **in advance** for every possible scenario and Theatre of Operations it is not an easy task in military terms <sup>9</sup>...

4 ACE Mobile Force (Land)

5 Notice to Move

6 Combined Joint Task Force / High Readiness Force

7 The decision to follow the "coalitions of will" road instead of a broader "consensual highway" is a good symptom of NATO's ineffectiveness in achieving common goals in a timely and consensual manner.

8 Due to NRF possible missions common knowledge we have decided not to elaborate on this issue.

9 In political terms our inner feeling is that this issue is viewed as a "minor" one" ..or maybe not if considered as a "blank check" offered by nations for NATO to use at its own will...



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Adding to that, one of the major shortfalls of this concept resides exactly on the fact that it is almost **mission impossible** to have a "**multirole/multimode force**" that can be successfully engaged in any type of crisis or conflict. Specifically if we think of a scenario where an asymmetric type of conflict is likely to emerge and a non-conventional threat <sup>10</sup> is the one to face.

So far, in our opinion, our forces have not been properly tailored to face this type of challenge. On the land side we have to be fair admitting that the typology of forces made available has not been the most adequate one to fulfil fundamental requirements: forces that are adequately tailored and prepared to "**fight**" the **same type of conflict** a non-conventional threat is ready to conduct, forces that have the ability to perform in the **same conditions** and that are **entitled to act** <sup>11</sup> accordingly to the military needs dictated by the operational scenario. In line with this, we also believe that we will never succeed fighting a non-conventional type of warfare with pure conventional means, nor will we succeed without using "**equivalent**" <sup>12</sup> means and techniques in our engagement.

In fact our forces have been assembled having much more in consideration political and economical factors rather than having in account the social/cultural/military conditions in Theatre. A "**politically correct**" force is not necessarily the most effective one. Good for diplomacy ... bad for military achievements... Bottom line: you cannot successfully win a "**dirty conflict**" with a "**tidy force**"...

And its certainly fair to say that the major paradigmatic contradiction (nearly touching paroxysm) the military face in this type of conflicts is between, the "**zero casualties policy**" every government is looking for to appease national public opinions linked with the

already mentioned conduct **of a clean fight** <sup>13</sup> and the need to succeed **no mater what** <sup>14</sup> ...

However, we cannot forget or discount that this is "a fact of life" and that soldiering is about achieving political/strategic objectives using (or threatening to use) the military force (using a clausewitzian expression, we are to perform the continuation of politics by other means) in combination with other lines of action/operations that have little to do with our way of doing business but that are normally setting the pace for the intended end state <sup>15</sup>. Soft Power prevails and will prevail in most (if not all) circumstances...



This contradiction is probably the leitmotiv why forces tend to be over protected, over equipped, over careful and as a result, unfortunately, improperly tailored, equipped and trained which certainly are key factors for a successful or unsuccessful performance of a military force.

- 10 We've decided to use this terminology in order not to allude to a specific type of threat (guerrilla, terrorism, etc..) since we believe that the unpreparedness of our forces at this moment is similar to each one you may consider.
- 11 ROE sufficiently strong to cope with the existing threat and not with the political perceptions of the conflict.
- 12 The expression equivalent refers to the necessary adequacy/adaptability to the threat/environment in order to succeed.
- 13 That imprisons forces activities and turns Cdrs on the ground hostages of political/diplomatic decisions
- 14 Using an humoristic expression I would say that Cdrs on the ground may feel like a surgeon that was given a fork and a knife to perform open heart surgery ... he may succeed but...
- 15 We're talking about mainly of political, diplomatic and economic initiatives that tend to cohort what would be considered the most effective way of conducting the military side of the overall strategy



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This means, in our opinion that our forces are not ready yet to meet "any kind of engagement – our anything" as required and expected. Will they ever be?....

## Are we ready to do it anywhere?

Despite of the fact that we cannot assume to be ready to do "anything" we certainly detain the capability to act in certain types of crisis scenarios where the operational demands (threats/risks/challenges/objectives) can be considered of medium to low intensity. Therefore, we may say that we are now ready to at least engage in some type of conflicts and successfully accomplish certain types of missions.

But can we assume that we can do it anywhere? In pure theoretical terms yes. In practical terms ... our answer is no. Why? Because from a military standpoint, and among other reasons, one the major understood and agreed NATO shortfall leys on the inexistence of "an autonomous strategic lift capability" that is crucial to achieve this desiderate. This means



that the Alliance is relying on the "good will" of a nation or nations that will turn or not (in line with their own interests) this capability available <sup>16</sup>. Also, because at this moment the NATO CIS equipment available for NATO operations is so "stretched" that is reasonable to assume that only the "decay" of some missions will turn other missions possible which in military terms is an "easy to say" not an "easy to do" thing...

Last but not the least... the political constraints/restraints. No matter Nations have made forces available for the NRF CJSOR they will only make them effectively available if, and only if, it is of their strategic interest to do so! Adding to that, we have the conviction that in the future the Alliance will only promote an intervention where international legitimacy is perceived even if legality has been ab initio conceded. The legitimacy aspect will be of the utmost importance for a cohesive and non-defied Alliance's intervention in the future. Otherwise, it will be voted, sooner or later to a major crash. The Alliance's centre of gravity will be inexorably hit if that happens...let's not forget that the Organization has recently stepped out of a major crisis and that we're still leaking the wounds...

Nevertheless, the maintenance of the Transatlantic Link is absolutely essential for the survivability of NATO not only as a Military Alliance but also, and above all, as a Security Alliance (in which it has transformed itself lately...). <sup>17</sup>

## Can we do it anytime?

We purposively left our thoughts on this question to answer last since we believe the answer to this que-

<sup>16</sup> The US are the one and only to have this capability at hand; if we consider the worldwide operational demands/engagements the US are currently facing we're led to admit that it will be very difficult for NATO to rely on the permanent availability of US means for Alliance's purposes.

<sup>17</sup> In our opinion the survivability of the Alliance rests on the capability and ability of political leaders to overcome the different perceptions on the conduct of international affairs and world policy that both sides of the Atlantic have which recently caused major fractures among allies. The balance to attain, between national interests and multilateral interests is paramount and will become the key factor for success in NATO's future decisions. If this common understanding is not achieved two extremely dangerous outcomes are possible: An Alliance just in nomine that has no effective and decisive intervention in the resolution of worldwide security and defence problems (opening the way to unilateral interventions with unforeseeable consequences) or an Alliance that will only rely on the so called European Pillar leaving NATO dependent on the scarce military resources Europe can provide. In both cases the fading and collapse of the Alliance will be inevitable...





*CIS personnell setting a satellite link*

stion derives in great part from the previous ones. The political, strategic and military constraints we've talked about earlier will have a decisive role on our capability to perform anytime. However, if we narrow our universe of analysis, and just relate our rational to the existing limited capability to act (not everything, nor everywhere) we're led to admit that within certain limits we can do it anytime. But can we actually do it? Technically, we tend to believe that the "reduced" size of the force in equation against the overall available forces within the Alliance, will allow, as planned, an easy-going rotation among NRF packages without major bumps on the road. However, that will also depend on the capability of Nations to regenerate their own forces and to commit funds not only to allow missions to proceed but also to improve the quality of Units made available. And a positive or negative response by Nations to these demands will certainly dictate our capability to engage anytime.

The other remote possibility is to have a sort of "NRF Countries' Club" where the burden of missions would rely on a restricted number of nations, which in the long run would prove not to be a long lasting solution due to evident political and economical reasons.

## Concluding

The remaining overall interrogation relates to the consequences this process may have, considering its future impact within the Alliance: can these changes be considered a real Revolution in Military Affairs for NATO? Our prospective answer is that, it will certainly have an impact not only on NATO's overall approach and future decisions and developments but also at National level where Countries will be "forced" to adhere to new political / military goals if they do not

want to be left "out of the loop or dumped in the last seats of the train".

However, it will be a parallel process conducted at different paces (Nations will do it at own will) which means that looking at the overall long term concurrence that NATO aims to achieve, the desired outcome cannot be foreseen in the next few years. And let's not elude ourselves with the so-called NRF full operational capability (FOC) in 2006, which can only be understood and accepted under the context, limitations, constraints and restraints above exposed. We'll still have by then shortfalls to deal with, troops not fully prepared to engage any type of mission, equipment that is not fully adequate, etc. ... Have no doubts about it! <sup>18</sup> Thus, it will become not an RMA but rather an Evolution in Military Affairs (EMA) ....

For our own benefit ...

The actual situation recommends prudence and use of military common sense judgement on our "mission analysis". A thorough account of the available capabilities and existing limitations is the only way to remain focused on effective mission accomplishment within the NRF concept as it is. Otherwise an overoptimistic acceptance of missions/tasks and excessive risks may lead us to be overrun by events and incapable of coping with some mission requirements: its not advisable to do steps bigger than the size of your legs; doing it it's half way through to a major fall... <sup>19</sup>

Most of our readers are probably asking by now why were we so "pessimistic" in our evaluation of these subjects. To them our answer is ... we do not think we're being pessimistic nor optimistic...we're just trying to be pragmatic and realistic ...

But we do sincerely hope that the majority of our analysis, perspectives and prospective is wrong for the benefit of the Alliance we all try to serve the best we can.

See you next time, fellow readers... 

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<sup>18</sup> Our conviction is based on the delays that similar initiatives have been subject. As an example refer to the CJTF implementation process ...

<sup>19</sup> We certainly cannot afford failure. That would be the beginning of the end...