NATO and a New Strategic Concept

by MAJ (GBR A) Richard ORVIS

"The answer to those states challenging the established global order will not come in the form of carrots or sticks from Washington alone. Confronting the threats of nuclear proliferation, terror and regional instability posed by state and non-state actors alike will require coalitions that are genuinely willing – not forged under US pressure."

Nader Mousavizadeh: Special Assistant to UNSG Kofi Annan 1997-2003, writing in Newsweek 8 Feb 2010.

As the security environment across the world fragments, the economic dominance of the west looks increasingly fragile and 'unorthodox' alliances begin to form between what the US have in the past termed 'rogue states', NATO finds itself dealing with the difficulties of a major counter-insurgency, whilst simultaneously being in a hinterland between the predictability of the Cold War and the uncertainty of future conflict. In short, NATO is fighting a campaign on which its credibility and ultimate survival may rest, against a threat it is not structured or resourced to defeat, in a wholly unpredictable security environment that is set to continue changing well into the middle of this century.

Testing times ahead.

The strategic challenge for NATO planners, as for many Armed Forces around the globe, is to succeed in current operations whilst retaining the capacity to evolve their structures, procedures and capabilities sufficiently to meet the threats of the future; not the threats of the past or present. It promises to be a distillation of these issues which form the backbone of NATO's New Strategic Concept paper due publication in late 2010.

It was set in this context that Lieutenant General Chiarini, Commander of the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps - Italy (NRDC-ITA), invited an influential array of subject matter experts to attend Exercise EAGLE EYE: a series of lectures and discussion forums that aimed to highlight the future strategic challenges facing NATO.

Such was the importance of the seminar that the Commander insisted the whole headquarters be afforded the opportunity to participate in discussions. As a result, an audio-visual link was established that enabled remote conference rooms elsewhere on camp to view and communicate with the main seminar venue in the HQ, a capability that reaped particular rewards during the afternoon.

Guest Speakers

The HQ had great fortune to play host to four distinguished speakers, the first and most notable of which was the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero. The Ambassador spoke of the manner in which NATO would meet the proliferation of new threats facing the Alliance. He spoke of NATO's six priorities: military transformation in the contemporary operating environment (COE), the need

for adequate resourcing of operations from troop contributing nations (TCN), the desire for multinational solutions to complex problems, the importance of applying the Comprehensive Approach, the development of greater connectivity between NATO and non-Alliance bodies and the necessity for NATO internal reform.

Ambassador Bisogniero's opening address set the platform from which subsequent speakers were able to launch. Professor Andrea Margelletti, a foreign policy analyst, chairman of the Centre for International Studies (CESI) and advisor to the Italian Government, spoke eloquently on the change in mindset required for success in Afghanistan. He implored politicians to cease categorising Afghan peoples in terms of 'good and bad', i.e. those individuals we do or do not feel moral equivalence to. Rather, he encouraged senior leadership to seek opportunities for cooperation with whoever and whenever, cognoscente that these opportunities may vary in potential advantage, but that in all cases opportunities should be welcomed.

A Balance of Kinetic and Non-Kinetic Means

Professor Margelletti was followed by Lieutenant General Carlo Cabigiosu, a retired Italian army officer of 41 years active duty who served in his latter years as the Deputy Commander ARRC, COS HQ AFSOUTH in Napoli and Commander of KFOR General Cabigiosu added further colour to the discussion thus far as he stressed the vital role that a stable alliance, such as NATO, would play in an increasingly unsettled world.

He predicted NATO's increasing role on operations with stabilisation and reconstruction efforts and urged greater cooperation between NATO and other cooperatives such as the European Union or the G20.

He emphasised the need for lateral thinking, stating it as erroneous to consider the future security environment simply as an extension or expansion of the present.

NATO would have to evolve, harnessing a more appropriate balance between kinetic and non-kinetic effects, whilst remaining prepared to engage its adversaries in the Battle Spaces of the future, for example cyberspace.

Befitting the high calibre presentations already delivered, the final speaker of the morning session was Professor Massimo De Leonardis, the director of Political Science at the University of the Sacred Heart in Milano and a lecturer of contemporary history at the European University of Roma.

Professor De Leonardis focused on the asymmetry of the current conflicts involving NATO's forces and how a society's perception of an armed conflict's legitimacy, shapes the force's ability and freedom to prosecute that campaign.

By way of example Professor De Leonardis intimated that democracy, whilst regarded as a legitimate form of governance in the West, is less relevant to societies who herald the virtues of martyrdom in the name of Islam. Is this, Professor de Leonardis inferred, an irreconcilable tension between two value systems?

Lively Debate

The thoroughly absorbing lectures of the morning session drew to a close with the promise of an open panel discussion that afternoon. Lunch was but a brief interlude after which the audience were keen to develop issues raised earlier. Chaired by Major General Capewell, Deputy Commander NRDC-ITA, the afternoon panel discussion succeeded in stimulating intellectual debate about NATO's New Strategic Concept. Contributors to the discussion included the Commander NRDC-ITA, Lieutenant General Chiarini, the Commander of Multinational Corps North East (MNC-NE) Lieutenant General Korff and the Deputy Commander ACE Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) Major General Marchiò. Amidst the contemporary questions focused on current operations, a strong theme began to develop that is pivotal to the direction of NATO's Strategic Concept. How will NATO strike a balance between resources to ensure success on current operations whilst retaining flexibility to respond effectively to an evolving asymmetric threat?

Closing Remarks

It was clear that animated discussion could have continued throughout the afternoon and into the evening, but the Deputy Commander drew the panel discussion to a close with a summary of discussions. He offered the audience two rhetorical questions as 'food for thought' to inform future debate on the NATO Strategic Concept: has NATO agreed on the threat it will face in the coming decades? Moreover, how should NATO be resourced and postured to meet that threat?

General Chiarini's brought the seminar to its conclusion with closing remarks that offered a vision of NATO, sufficiently balanced and resourced with 'tools' of the Comprehensive Approach, able to rapidly respond to a wide spectrum of operations. The forum of Exercise EAGLE EYE, with the inclusion of such influential strategic thinkers and decision makers, facilitated the kind of informed debate about NATO's future that goes some way to ensuring the relevance of NATO's New Strategic Concept throughout the coming decades.