

NATO summit reveals cracks in Atlantic Alliance

By Peter Schwarz
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On November 20 in Lisbon, NATO adopted a new strategic concept. It is the seventh in the 61-year history of the military alliance and the first since 1999.

The summit was preceded by months of preparation and discussion. A group of experts chaired by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright issued recommendations for the new strategy in May.

After a long tug of war, the strategic concept has now been adopted and was presented to the public in Lisbon. Those attending the summit celebrated it as a historic breakthrough. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "This summit will go down in history. The strategic approach is clear, and it shows we are all working on the same footing."

In reality, the eleven-page document barely manages to paper over the fault lines that have opened up between the 28 members of the largest military alliance in the world. It is a verbal compromise between divergent interests. The different factions were able to agree on many formulations only at the last minute.

Where the summit was unanimous was that the military should in the future play a far more important role in political and social life. In addition to collective defence with conventional and nuclear weapons, the new strategy sanctions international interventions of various kinds, such as those NATO has already conducted in the former Yugoslavia and is presently carrying out in Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa and elsewhere in the world.

The strategic concept lists a variety of reasons that could serve NATO as a pretext for war in the future. These include "the proliferation of ballistic missiles, of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction," "instability, including by fostering extremism, terrorism and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics and people," and the attacking and disruption of "vital communication, transport and transit routes on which international trade, energy security and prosperity depend."

Even environmental issues can be exploited for military aims. "Key environmental and resource constraints, including health risks, climate change, water scarcity and increasing energy needs will further shape the future security environment in areas of concern to NATO and have the potential to affect significantly NATO planning and operations," states the document.

NATO will also become active in completely new areas which previously had been largely beyond the clutches of the military. These include the "ability to prevent, detect, defend against and recover from cyber-attacks" and "assessing the impact of emerging security technologies."

Important means of communication, such as the Internet, and

scientific and technological research are similarly to come more directly under the influence and control of the military. The consequences will be the erosion of democratic rights, the involvement of the military in domestic politics, and the merging of military, police and intelligence agencies.

While the participants at the Lisbon summit were largely in agreement on the growing role of the military, there were disagreements about the strategic direction of the alliance that could be concealed only with difficulty. In particular, deep differences exist concerning the attitude to Russia.

The Eastern European countries, which joined the Atlantic Alliance after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, emphasize the role of NATO as a territorial defence alliance against Russia. They insist on a strong American military presence in Europe, which they regard as protection against a possible rapprochement between Germany or France and Russia.

Germany, however, which has close economic relations with Eastern Europe and is dependent on Russian energy supplies, called for better relations between NATO and Russia. It wants to avoid once again being squeezed between the two largest nuclear powers of the world, limiting its capacity for external action, as was the case during the Cold War.

Under the presidency of George W. Bush, Washington put Russia under great pressure—by the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe, through the planned construction of a missile defence shield and the support of so-called "colour revolutions" in former Soviet republics. The US used the contradictions between the "old" and "new" Europe to strengthen its own position in Europe. The proposal for the inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO met with fierce resistance in Moscow. In 2008 in Georgia, an armed conflict between Russian and American forces was narrowly averted.

Under Obama, Russia and the US have converged again. First, because the US needs Russian support in Afghanistan, and in part because it is devoting more attention to the conflict with China and does not want to drive Russia toward Beijing. In April of this year, Obama and Russian President Medvedev signed a new START agreement limiting strategic nuclear weapons.

In a concession to the Eastern European states, the new NATO strategy now gives a clear commitment to collective defence under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Article 5 requires all NATO countries to provide military assistance to another member if its security is threatened.

If there were, for example, a conflict between Russia and any one of the Baltic NATO member states where there are unresolved issues concerning ethnic minorities, NATO would be obliged to intervene

militarily against Russia. Moldova, which borders NATO member Romania, and whose breakaway province of Transnistria is under Russian military protection, could be another possible source of conflict.

The new strategic concept also holds out the possible NATO accession of Ukraine and Georgia. It stresses that it is “keeping the door to membership in the Alliance open to all European democracies that meet NATO’s standards” and that its aim is to “continue and develop the partnerships with Ukraine and Georgia.”

Even the controversial missile defence shield is to be built by 2020—not as planned by Bush as an American project, but rather as a NATO project. The strategic concept does not say who might pose the danger of a missile attack, since Turkey had spoken out strongly against the naming of Iran.

To reassure Russia, Moscow has been invited to join the missile defence shield. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev came to Lisbon and responded positively. According to some reports he promised to allow NATO greater access to Russian transport in supplying military equipment to Afghanistan.

Especially in Germany, this cooperation with Russia was celebrated as a “historic breakthrough.” NATO Secretary General Rasmussen also described it as an unprecedented step. “For the first time in history, the NATO countries and Russia are cooperating in their defense,” he claimed.

In fact, nothing is settled. The Russian president himself made no firm commitments. He said only that he was prepared to conduct further talks, and warned: “We must be involved on an equal footing or we will not participate.” Moreover, many sections of the political and military elite in Russia, including Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, are far more sceptical concerning cooperation with NATO.

Following the recent elections in the United States, opponents of closer cooperation with Russia have gained ground. It is questionable whether Congress will ratify the START agreement signed in April. In Germany, this has given rise to concern.

Despite paying lip service to disarmament, the new NATO strategy holds firm to the nuclear deterrent. Although it states that NATO pursues “the goal of creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons,” the next sentence reads: “As long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear power”.

The commitment to a world without nuclear weapons was inserted at the insistence of Germany, which as a non-nuclear power is pushing for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe in order to reduce its military dependence on the United States.

France, which has its own nuclear weapons, refuses, however, to abandon them. It considers its nuclear force, the *force de frappe*, as the guarantor of its position of power in Europe and rejects giving NATO any say in this matter. France, in particular, had opposed describing the European anti-missile shield as a substitute for nuclear deterrence. The conflict between Germany and France was resolved shortly before the summit at a meeting of President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel.

The strategic concept completely excludes the question of financing, which had led to considerable tensions in the run-up to the summit. While the Pentagon has increased its annual military expenditure since 2001 from \$403 billion to \$708 billion, European military spending over the same period fell by two percent annually. Totalling \$295 billion, it is not even half that of the US.

The *Financial Times* quoted a defence expert who, in view of the financial gaps, compared the Lisbon summit with “a surrealist play.”

NATO sets out fresh ambitions, “yet in Europe, the very resources to deal with those threats are being cut back hugely,” she said.

In view of massive cuts being made in social spending, hardly any European government sees itself in a position near-term to greatly increase unpopular military spending. Instead, the military is being reorganized and restructured.

France and Britain have recently agreed closer military cooperation in order to preserve the international capabilities of their armed forces. Germany has abolished compulsory military service, reducing its troop strength, but at the same time increasing the number of soldiers available for international assignments.

From Germany’s perspective, a more relaxed relationship with Russia is the pre-condition for remaining capable of military action internationally. US support for the Eastern European countries, and new tensions between Washington and Moscow, are met in Berlin, therefore, with growing aversion.

The reorganization of the European armed forces is accompanied by a concentration of the European defence industries, which have stepped up the competition with their American counterparts. Germany, France and Spain combined sections of their aerospace industry ten years ago to form EADS. Airbus manufacturer EADS is not only the biggest competitor to Boeing in commercial aircraft, but also the second largest arms company in Europe.

Washington is particularly annoyed that European arms manufacturers are also providing materiel to Russia and China. For example, France is attempting to sell a Mistral class helicopter carrier to Russia.

The growing cracks in NATO reflect tectonic shifts in international relations. In particular, the 2008 financial crisis and its consequences have sharpened economic and political differences between NATO members.

There are sharp disputes over currency matters and exports between Berlin and Washington. The US, which is increasingly focussing on the Pacific and the conflict with China, has little interest in militarily bolstering its economic rivals in Europe. The tensions between Germany, France and Britain, between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, and between Europe and Russia provide numerous opportunities for Washington to manipulate the political situation in Europe and keep it under control.

In Lisbon, the NATO members have agreed to extend the deployment in Afghanistan until 2014, and thereafter to leave large military contingents in the country. Failure in Afghanistan is in many European capitals seen as a death sentence for NATO, with incalculable consequences. But the willingness to be subordinate to the US in future international military actions has decreased markedly in most European capitals.

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