# NATO's Level of Ambition in Light of the Current Strategic Context

A Monograph
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In the last two decades, NATO's operations have exposed significant shortcomings in the organization's military capabilities. The Alliance has relied on the U.S. to provide either the bulk of the forces or the majority of the critical capabilities or both. In 2006, the Alliance established its level of ambition to indicate the number and size of the operations that the organization must be able to perform to meet its challenges. However, the Alliance has failed so far in developing the capabilities required to reach that goal. At the operational level, the main issue for the Alliance has been the ability to build and sustain a strong coalition, with enough forces and capabilities to carry on the mission. As an organization, its recurrent challenge has been to keep the members committed to both providing the resources needed for every operation and developing the critical capabilities that the Alliance requires.

In 2010, the Alliance approved a new strategic concept to ensure that the Alliance continues to be effective against the new threats. However, this agreement does not foresee a revision of the level of ambition. In addition, the U.S. has issued a new strategic guidance that suggests a reduction in American participation in NATO. Therefore, the question today is if NATO is able to reach its level of ambition without relying extensively on U.S. military capabilities.

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# Abstract

NATO´S LEVEL OF AMBITION IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT STRATEGIC CONTEXT by MAJOR Alejandro Serrano Martínez, Spanish Army, 52 pages.

In the last two decades, NATO's operations have exposed significant shortcomings in the organization's military capabilities. The Alliance has relied on the U.S. to provide either the bulk of the forces or the majority of the critical capabilities or both. In 2006, the Alliance established its level of ambition to indicate the number and size of the operations that the organization must be able to perform to meet its challenges. However, the Alliance has failed so far in developing the capabilities required to reach that goal. At the operational level, the main issue for the Alliance has been the ability to build and sustain a strong coalition, with enough forces and capabilities to carry on the mission. As an organization, its recurrent challenge has been to keep the members committed to both providing the resources needed for every operation and developing the critical capabilities that the Alliance requires. In 2010, the Alliance approved a new strategic concept to ensure that the Alliance continues to be effective against the new threats. However, this agreement does not foresee a revision of the level of ambition. In addition, the U.S. has issued a new strategic guidance that suggests a reduction in American participation in NATO. Therefore, the question today is if NATO is able to reach its level of ambition without relying extensively on U.S. military capabilities.

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# Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a political organization whose main purpose is to defend the freedom and security of its members by political and military means.[1] Since its creation in 1949, the Alliance has always been a defensive organization. Until its dismemberment at the beginning of the 1990s, the Soviet Union was NATO's main threat. However, although its adversary had disappeared, the Alliance remained a robust political and military tool.[2] In addition, the strategic environment changed so significantly when the Soviet Union collapsed that new threats emerged and posed new challenges to the Alliance's members.[3] In fact, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the global strategic environment has experienced continuous changes.

For the last twenty years, NATO has been trying to adjust its structures and mechanisms to the new and ever-changing circumstances.[4] Although the organization's purpose of defending the security of its members remains the same, NATO has had to adapt its ways and means both to counter the new threats and to remain relevant in the changing strategic scenario. The Alliance made an effort aimed to both improve its capabilities to face the threats and, at the same time, close the gap in military capabilities with the U.S.[5] Regarding the Alliance's ability to conduct operations, the organization established a clear goal in 2006 when the members approved the

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[1] NATO, *Handbook* (Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2006), 15.

[2] David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 1988), 49.

[3] NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 September 2011).

[4] NATO, *Handbook*, 20. The strategic concepts approved in 1999 and 2010 show the adaptation of the Alliance to the new threats and challenges of that changing environment.

[5] Julianne Smith, "Transforming NATO (… again): A Primer for the NATO Summit in Riga 2006," Center for Strategic and International Studies (November 2006): 11, http://www.comw.org/rma/fulltext/0611smith.pdf (accessed 1 October 2011).

level of ambition.[6] Then, NATO showed its will to be able to perform two major joint operations (MJO) and six small joint operations (SJO) simultaneously.[7]

Nowadays, the Alliance has a consolidated position as a main actor in the international arena. The publication of the document "Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" in November 2010 has confirmed its status as a relevant organization for global security and stability.[8] However, the approval of a new strategic concept has not encompassed a revision of the Alliance's level of ambition although the new threats and some operations, namely Afghanistan, demand a level of capabilities not always available to the organization. The evolution of the Alliance itself and the current economic crisis make it even more difficult both for the Alliance itself and for its members to acquire critical capabilities.[9]

In the last two decades, NATO has taken part in several conflicts.[10] NATO operations have exposed significant shortcomings in the organization's military capabilities.[11] Today,

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[6] NATO, *Handbook*, 53. This concept defines the number, scale, and nature of the military operations that the organization should be able to conduct simultaneously.

[7] NATO, "The DJSE Concept," http://www.nato.int/fchd/issues/DJSE.html (accessed 15 July 2011). NATO developed the modular Deployable Joint Staff Element (DJSE) concept to match the operational C2 requirements for the multiple operations that the new level of ambition envisioned.

[8] Ibid., 18. NATO strategic concept is "the authoritative statement of the Alliance's objectives and provides the highest level of guidance on the political and military means to be used in achieving them." This document is the basis for the implementation of Alliance's policy as a whole.

[9] NATO, "Comprehensive Political Guidance," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_56425.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 July 2011). This document lists the capability requirements that NATO would need to improve over the next 10 to 15 years to face "the evolving security environment and the need to deal with conventional and especially asymmetric threats and risks, wherever they arise." In this monograph, the author uses the term critical capabilities to refer to those capabilities that NATO needs to perform an operation or type of operations but the organization do not have them yet.

[10] See Table 1 in page 18.

[11] Daniel Hamilton et al., "Alliance Reborn: An Atlantic Compact for the 21st Century," *The Washington NATO Project* (February 2009): viii, http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/bin/i/y/nato_report_final.pdf (accessed 28 August 2011). The main shortcomings are matching means to agreed missions, improving deployability of its capabilities, and achieving better cooperation between civil and military authorities.

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despite the fact that NATO is currently executing different missions, the Alliance has serious problems meeting the requirements that the current strategic environment demands. The lack of key capabilities in NATO puts at risk the accomplishment of its missions and hinders the participation of its members in operations.[12]

Since the creation of NATO, the United States (U.S.) has always been NATO's military pillar providing the bulk of the Alliance's resources and capabilities. However, the U.S. has lately complained about the lack of commitment of the European NATO countries to reduce the gap in capabilities.[13] The U.S., though a member of the Alliance, has its own national interests along with the will and the means to advance them. Therefore, the allies should not take for granted that the U.S. will always be willing to lead or support any NATO operation. The onus is on the European allies to develop the required capabilities to achieve the organization's goals even with limited or no support from the U.S.

This monograph tries to answer the question whether the current NATO military capabilities are adequate to reach the organization's level of ambition. To orient his research, the author establishes the hypothesis that the military capabilities of NATO members are not sufficient to reach the organization's level of ambition that the Alliance has established to face the threats listed in the Alliance's strategic concept. He asserts that NATO military capabilities rely excessively on U.S. capabilities. Therefore, to achieve its goal, NATO requires the participation of the U.S. in every MJO and, at least, its support with critical capabilities in any other SJO.

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[12] Robert M. Gates, "Future of NATO" (speech, Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, Belgium, 10 June 2011), http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581 (accessed 20 July 2011).

[13] Ibid.

## Background

The origin of NATO is the signature of the Washington Treaty by the Western countries to oppose the threat of the Soviet Union against Europe after the Second World War.[14] During the Cold War era, the organization, led by the U.S., adopted different strategies, always trying to counter the Soviet threat. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union left the Alliance, at least apparently, without a *raison d'être*.[15] To adapt to the new situation, NATO passed a new strategic concept in Rome in 1991. This document was the first formal expression of NATO role and strategy in the emerging security environment.[16] It guided the organization through the multiple and significant transformations in Europe in the 1990s.[17]

The Alliance started a process of adaptation to the new circumstances both to safeguard NATO security and to enable the organization to deal with the new strategic environment.[18] At the end of the Cold War, a number of non-traditional security threats took the place of the conventional military threats.[19] The crisis in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s made the Alliance aware that instability beyond its borders could jeopardize its security. Therefore, the

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[14] NATO, *Handbook*, 16–7.

[15] Jennifer Medcalf, *Going Global or Going Nowhere? NATO's Role in Contemporary International Security* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 60. Medcalf quotes Mearsheimer when he said that the Soviet threat was the glue that held NATO together. He also asserted that U.S. was likely to abandon Europe and, therefore, the Alliance might disintegrate.

[16] Ibid., 55.

[17] NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)." The Alliance declared its intention to participate in the management of crises affecting the security of its members to preserve peace and prevent war in Europe.

[18] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 18. This process encompassed three elements. The first one was NATO partnership programs directed to increase stability in the European and Mediterranean region. The second element was the Alliance's enlargement program. With this program, still on going, the number of NATO members increased from sixteen in 1990 to twenty-eight at present. The third dimension of the adaptation process concerned NATO operations.

[19] Ibid., 17. There was a change in the nature of the threat. The new threats included the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, "rogue" and failing states, access to vital resources, organized crime, and conflict resulting from religious or ethnic enmity.

organization's focus changed from its own defense to concerns related to stability.[20] Thus, the

Alliance adopted the concept of crisis response operations as a part of its crisis management

efforts.[21] This concept provided the organization with new strategic goals. The war in Bosnia-

Herzegovina (1993−1995) was the first occasion in which NATO took part in a conflict.[22] In

1995, NATO became the key actor in the implementation of peace and the stabilization of the

country.[23] This commitment lasted for nine years.[24]

The changes that the Alliance experienced in the 1990s made it necessary to reassess the

strategic environment and adapt the Alliance to the current circumstances.[25] As former NATO

Secretary General Lord George Robertson observed, the Alliance had "evolved from a passive

reactive defense organization into one which is actively building security right across Europe."[26]

NATO reflected those changes in a new Strategic Concept that the members approved in 1999.[27]

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[20] NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991)."

[21] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 100.

[22] NATO, *Handbook*, 144. In April 1993, following UN resolution 816, NATO started Operation Deny Flight to enforce a no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

[23] NATO, "Peace Support Operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52122.htm (accessed 10 September 2011). In April 1993, following UN resolution 816, NATO started Operation Deny Flight to enforce a no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina. After the end of the war, NATO deployed the Implementation Force (IFOR). One year later, this force transitioned to the Stabilization Force (SFOR). See figure 1.

[24] NATO, *Handbook*, 143. In 2004, NATO handed over the mission to the European Union (Althea Operation.) The Alliance retains a small military headquarters in Sarajevo to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina with its defense reform program and prepare the country for membership of the Partnership for Peace program.

[25] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 100; NATO, "The North Atlantic Treaty," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 July 2011). In short, those changes were the end of the Soviet Union, the emergence of new threats, the development of the organization's partnership and enlargement programs, and the Alliance's non-Article V operations beyond the NATO area. Article V of the Treaty was still the key element of the Alliance. In this article, the Treaty establishes that the members of the Alliance will consider any attack against one of the members as an attack against all of them. A non-Article V mission is therefore any mission that the Alliance undertakes without a previous invocation of the Article V.

[26] George Robertson, "NATO in the New Millennium," *NATO Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 3.

[27] NATO, "NATO 1999 Strategic Concept," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm (accessed 30 July 2011).

Even though this document reaffirmed that the principal mission of the organization was the collective defense, it also reflected the adaptation of the Alliance to the new challenges in the post-Cold War period.[28]

Within the framework of the strategic concept of 1999, the Alliance conducted stability operations in Kosovo and continued with its enlargement process. However, the terrorist attacks against the U.S. on 11 September 2001 dramatically changed the strategic environment.[29] NATO invoked Article V of the Washington Treaty for the first time since the creation of the Alliance.[30] NATO members took account of the risk of new threats coming from outside Europe and the great challenge that they posed to the Alliance's members and to the organization itself. This circumstance precipitated a shift of the organization's focus—from a political perspective about security "toward a greater emphasis on military capabilities." [31] These events served to broaden the perspective of the Alliance towards a more global role.[32] Therefore, the new goal was to expand NATO reach. As Lord Robertson said in 2002, NATO "will have to be able to act wherever our security and the safety of our people demand action."[33] As a result of that philosophy, NATO took the lead of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) in

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[28] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 100–1. The intervention in the Balkans opened a debate about out-of-area operations. The strategic concept of 1999 addressed the non-Article V missions, the non-traditional security threats, and the out-of-area operations. It changed the organization's area of operation from the "North Atlantic area" to the "Euro-Atlantic area."

[29] Ibid., 22. The events of September 11 provoked several changes in the parameters of the international security environment. First, the attacks showed that weak states could pose a credible threat. Second, they demonstrated the emergence of asymmetric methods that could counter the West's conventional military superiority. Third, they stressed the consideration of reconstruction and development as crucial tools to prevent threats. Fourth, as a consequence of these changes, the length of the commitment in operations to face those threats would have to be decades rather than months.

[30] NATO, "Invocation of the Article 5 Confirmed," http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2001/1001/e1002a.htm (accessed 10 September 2011).

[31] Rebecca R. Moore, *NATO New Mission: Projecting Stability in a Post-Cold War World* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 91.

[32] Ibid., 4; Medcalf, *Going Global*, 117. This decision reopened the debate about out-of-area operations and the geographical limit established in the strategic concept of 1999.

[33] George Robertson, "NATO: A Vision for 2012," Speech at GMFUS Conference, Brussels, 3 October 2002, http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021003a.htm (accessed 15 October 2011).

Afghanistan in 2003.[34] Most NATO countries that sent troops to Afghanistan were also taking

part in operations in Kosovo. In addition, some of them were supporting the U.S. war in Iraq.[35]

The great exigencies of those operations in the realms of personnel, materiel, economy, and

politics made the organization reassess its ability to face the existent threats.[36]

At the beginning of the 2000s, NATO key idea was transformation.[37] The organization

strived to improve its expeditionary capabilities. In 2006, NATO issued the Comprehensive

Political Guidance. This document defined the kind of operations that NATO must be able to

perform within the strategic concept. With this guidance, NATO reassessed the capabilities that

the Alliance would need to perform them.[38] In addition, the Alliance established its level of

ambition. NATO members establish that level in two MJO and six SJO.[39]

The multiple and significant changes in the strategic environment during the 2000s left

obsolete the strategic concept of 1999.[40] In 2010, NATO members approved a new strategic

concept that presented how they collectively perceive the strategic international situation. Its

purpose is to guide NATO evolution to assure that the Alliance continues to be effective against

the new threats.[41] To that end, NATO needs to have enough military capabilities to face the

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[34] Andrew R. Hoehn and Sarah Harting, *Risking NATO: Testing the Limits of the Alliance in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), iii.

[35] ProCon. http://usiraq.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000677 (accessed 15 December 2011). In 2003, the countries that had a significant participation in the three conflicts (Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq) at the same time were the U.S., Great Britain, Spain, Netherlands, Poland, and Denmark. However, most NATO countries participated in at least two of the three.

[36] Moore, *NATO's New Mission*, 88. The events post September 11 revealed how ill equipped were NATO's members "to address contemporary threats and mobilize forces for the 'out-of-area' missions."

[37] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 142.

[38] NATO, "Comprehensive Political Guidance."

[39] NATO, "The DJSE Concept."

[40] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," v.

[41] NATO, "Lisbon Summit Declaration." http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm (accessed 30 July 2011). The Alliance approved this new strategic concept in the Lisbon Summit in November 2010.

diverse and unpredictable threats within the strategic environment.[42] However, even though the document presents an updated strategic environment and constitutes the guidance for the evolution of the Alliance in the next ten years, the organization does not foresee the change of its level of ambition. Therefore, the strategic concept is a philosophical statement of intent rather than a binding document.[43]

In any case, the document reflects on means and asserts that "NATO must have sufficient resources—financial, military, and human—to carry out its missions."[44] The main problem regarding the Alliance's strategic concept is that the nations feel free to interpret it after its approval according to their interests and circumstances. Although, the strategic concept reflects the common understanding of the allies regarding the strategic environment, the members have to renegotiate this consensus case by case. The main reason for this is that the strategic environment and the members' national circumstances evolve constantly. The Alliance's ability to adapt itself cannot catch up with that dynamic.

NATO members restate the importance of the transatlantic link to preserve the peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area.[45] This statement shows the dependence that the Alliance still has on the U.S. capabilities to reach its objectives. Nevertheless, the U.S. has complained uncountable times about the apparent lack of commitment of NATO European countries in light of the effort made by these nations in NATO operations. This situation reached a critical point when the U.S. decided to reinforce its presence in Afghanistan in 2009 before the inability of

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[42] NATO, "Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf (accessed 2 July 2011). Since the Alliance does not consider itself prone to internal instability, the strategic concept focuses on crisis and conflicts beyond NATO borders that can pose a direct threat to the security of the Alliance territory and populations. The Alliance's intent is to achieve security through crisis management. NATO will engage "where possible and when necessary" to prevent and manage conflicts.

[43] Christopher S. Chivvis, *Recasting NATO's Strategic Concept: Possible Directions for the United States* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), 2.

[44] NATO, "Strategic Concept."

[45] Ibid.

NATO allies to deploy the forces and capabilities that the situation demanded.[46] Now, the strategic context is changing again.

The U.S. has ended its operations in Iraq.[47] In addition, ISAF countries reached an agreement to complete the transference of security responsibilities to the Afghan government in 2014.[48] In view of the new situation, the U.S. has issued the document "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense." This directive reorients American strategy "in the light of the changing geopolitical environment and [U.S.] changing fiscal circumstances."[49] Although the document highlights the importance of Europe as a partner in seeking global and economic security, the U.S. sees the new context as an opportunity to rebalance its investment in Europe, "moving from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities."[50] This means that the U.S. will urge NATO members to devote seriously to the organization's capability initiatives now that they are drawing down their commitments overseas. Thus, in view of the current situation, it is still relevant to question if the Alliance is able to reach its level of ambition in light of the new strategic context. However, the main point to answer this question would be not only if NATO has the capabilities to reach the level of ambition but also to what extend this ability would depend on the U.S. participation and to what extend the U.S. would be likely to participate in future NATO operations.

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[46] Gates, "Future of NATO."

[47] Ewen MacAskill, "Six Years after Iraq Invasion, Obama Sets out His Exit Plan," *The Guardian*, 27 February 2009.

[48] NATO, "Lisbon Summit Declaration."

[49] Leon Panetta, foreword to "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense," http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/us/20120106-PENTAGON.PDF (accessed 15 January 2012).

[50] Ibid.

**The Problem**

Every organization has to find a balance between the challenges it has to meet and the capabilities required meeting them. In an ideal case, the organization has enough resources to meet all its challenges. However, in the majority of the situations, the organization has limited resources. Thus, it establishes a level of ambition that expresses the number and type of challenges that it will meet with the capabilities at hand.[51]

Any country or organization must be extremely careful when determining its level of ambition. Whenever it has reached this level of commitment, every other challenge becomes a risk. Hence, the temptation is to establish a level of ambition that covers all the organization's challenges. However, if this theoretical level exceeds the available capabilities, the organization will not be able to determine how many challenges it would be able to face and when a challenge would become a risk. This is NATO's current situation.

In 2006, the member states agreed that NATO should be able to conduct concurrently up to two MJOs and six SJOs.[52] Their intent was to provide logic and focus to the Alliance's efforts to adapt to the strategic environment. NATO members tried to match the organization's capabilities with its possible threats. However, the level of ambition counted on nations' commitment to make economic efforts and develop required capabilities not available at that time.[53] Although the countries undertook some initiatives to acquire critical capabilities, NATO

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[51] Todor Tagarev, "The Art of Shaping Defense Policy: Scope, Components, Relationships (but no Algorithms)," *The Quarterly Journal* 5, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 22, http://kms1.isn.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/24447/ichaptersection_singledocument/f36aaef2-d010-4d0e-b804-ec0783664f02/en/chapter_3.pdf (accessed 1 October 2011).

[52] NATO, "The DJSE Concept."

[53] NATO, "Comprehensive Political Guidance." The Alliance fostered the development of the capabilities that NATO would need to perform the missions that this guidance listed. Those capabilities would enable the organization to reach its level of ambition.

has not met its expectations.[54] Therefore, the lack of those capabilities hinders the Alliance's ability to reach the established level of ambition.

NATO passed a new strategic concept in 2010.[55] This new frame of reference does not foresee the modification of the level of ambition although some authors have explored the future of the Alliance and have concluded that the organization has to revise it.[56] NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, stated that "military might still matters in twenty-first-century geopolitics."[57] With this philosophy in mind, it seems paramount to both establish a level of ambition to deal with all the possible threats and develop the capabilities to be able to reach that level of ambition.

Obviously, the strategic concept will only be as good as the willingness of NATO members to implement it and provide the resources to develop the needed capabilities.[58] However, every nation has its national interests that may compete or even conflict with those of the organization. In addition, every country has legal, economic, and social limitations to commit its resources to the organization's projects. Thus, the participation of the nations in NATO operations depends, among other considerations, on the strength of their forces and on the commitments that each nation is already undertaking either within or outside NATO.[59] Not all of

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[54] Smith, "Transforming NATO," 11.

[55] NATO, "Strategic Concept."

[56] W. Bruce Weinrod and Charles L. Barry, "NATO Command Structure: Considerations for the Future," National Defense University (September 2010): 2, http://www.ndu.edu/CTNSP/docUploaded/DTP%2075%20NATO%20Command%20Structure.pdf (accessed 1 October 2011).

[57] Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO after Libya. The Atlantic Alliance in Austere Times," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011), http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67915/anders-fogh-rasmussen/nato-after-libya (accessed 15 July 2011).

[58] Jamie Shea, "NATO's New Strategic Concept: Moving from Theory to Practice," *European Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (April 2011): 15, http://www.europeanperspectives.si/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=56 (accessed 1 October 2011).

[59] Todor Tagarev, "The Art of Shaping Defense Policy," 22.

the members are able or willing to participate in every NATO challenge.[60] In fact, some authors

agreed this is the Alliance's main problem.

> NATO is busier than ever, but it has also become less central to many members. It is doing more now than during the Cold War, but its wide range of activities does not easily inspire or sustain public, parliamentary—and hence financial—support. It is performing at an unprecedented tempo, but this operational reality has exposed differences among allies in terms of threat perceptions, strategic cultures, resources, and capabilities. It is not heavily engaged in some key security challenges facing its members, and is not succeeding at some in which it is engaged.[61]

All these factors hinder the Alliance's ability to both obtain resources to carry out operations and

develop new critical capabilities to achieve the organization's goals. Therefore, the potential

problem for NATO is if the organization has the capabilities required to face the threats and

undertake the missions agreed to in the strategic concept. However, the Alliance still struggles to

mobilize the necessary means to accomplish them.

The organization must overcome a number of shortcomings in matching means to agreed

missions, improved deployability of its capabilities, and better cooperation between civil and

military authorities, among others.[62] The budgetary constraints derived from the economic and

financial crisis hinder the Alliance's desires to reform the process of its capabilities planning and

development.[63] Nevertheless, as President Obama put it in Lisbon: "Austerity will not relieve us

of our responsibilities."[64]

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[60] Alexandra Sarcinschi, "NATO 2009 and Its New Strategic Concept: Between Opportunities and Challenges," *Strategic Impact*, Issue 1/2010 (2010): 53, http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/authordetails.aspx?authorid=c8b4b2fd-c769-4e80-b6ec-668a5aa24e03 (accessed 30 July 2011).

[61] Ibid., 54; Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," 21.

[62] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," viii.

[63] Sarcinschi, "NATO 2009," 49.

[64] Shea, "NATO's New Strategic Concept," 16. President Obama refers to the general reduction of defense budgets in NATO countries; NATO, "Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence," http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2010_06/20100610_PR_CP_2010_078.pdf (accessed 15 September 2011). According to this study, in 2009, only two countries did not reduce its defense budgets— Albania and Poland. In addition, only five countries out of the twenty-eight devoted more than two per cent

In fact, the U.S. has been complaining about the increase of its significant contribution to the security of Europe versus the smaller defense budgets of European countries.[65] U.S. politicians and analysts have clearly expressed the American disappointment regarding the lack of effort of the European NATO members to close the gap of military capabilities.[66] Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates was extremely critical of the organization members in his last speech in Brussels before he retired. Gates stated that "if current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, future U.S. political leaders—those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me—may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost."[67] Goldgeier asserted that, if NATO fails to accept and achieve a growing global role, the U.S. might lose interest in investing in the Alliance's future.[68]

In sum, when the allies approve a level of ambition, it should become the reference not only for the employment of forces, but also for the required capabilities and for the contribution of every member to achieve this goal. Recent experiences such as ISAF provide clear examples of how decisive the participation of the U.S. in NATO operations could be. Nowadays, the problem for the Alliance is not only if it could reach the level of ambition without the participation of the U.S. but also that that participation is becoming increasingly unlikely.

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of their gross domestic product to defense expenditures—Albania, France, Greece, Great Britain, and the U.S.

[65] Clark, "The Drawdown in Europe," 16–7.

[66] Gates, "Future of NATO." The Alliance has undertaken several initiatives to close the gap of capabilities between U.S. and the rest of the members. However, the gap remains today risking the accomplishment of NATO's missions and the transatlantic link.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Goldgeier, "The Future of NATO," 4.

## Limitations

The author tries to answer the research question from an operational perspective. This means that he focuses his research on military aspects. Thus, discussions about political, social, and economic issues are beyond the scope of this monograph. The Alliance's military aspect is the most relevant concern from an objective point of view to determine if NATO is able to reach its level of ambition. Nevertheless, the ability of the Alliance to achieve that goal depends directly on the commitment of its members. Political, economic, and social factors affect the extent, intensity, and even timing of that commitment. Therefore, even if the author does not discuss in depth how these factors operate, he does not avoid mentioning them to remind the reader that they condition the military factor.

Regarding the military factor, the author focuses his research mainly on ground forces, especially regarding MJOs. From the military perspective, the requirements to conduct operations encompass joint capabilities—ground, air, and naval forces. However, NATO's main problem has been to deploy large ground forces to carry out MJOs and to sustain them in conflicts of long duration. The SJOs are not so demanding regarding number of troops or duration of the operation. Therefore, in these cases, the focus of the research centers on the ability to provide critical capabilities to accomplish the mission.

## Methodology

To answer the proposed question, the author presents four case studies of operations in which NATO took or is still taking part. He chooses two MJOs and two SJOs to illustrate different challenges that the Alliance had to face in committing its forces. As MJOs, the author studies Kosovo and Afghanistan. These examples show NATO struggle to undertake long-lasting missions. In Kosovo, NATO forces conducted peace enforcement operations and then peacekeeping operations in an environment that evolved from semi-permissive to permissive. Kosovo's example shows how NATO envisioned the management of a crisis response operation

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within a long-term commitment. In Afghanistan, the Alliance's most demanding operation so far, NATO forces conducted combat and stability operations in a hostile environment. The Afghanistan's case illustrates NATO problems at building and sustaining a strong coalition with enough forces and capabilities to carry on the mission.

For SJOs, the author studies NATO Training Mission Iraq and NATO commitment in Libya.[69] These case studies, less demanding in terms of forces than an MJO, focus on the capabilities that the Alliance provided to perform the operations. The first example illustrates how the Alliance adjusted its capabilities to develop stability in a post-conflict environment. This operation is relevant because it requested a remarkably small amount of military forces but demanded a capability that the organization had not developed before. The Libya case shows NATO limitations in terms of critical capabilities and sustainment in a combat operation. This example presents how NATO executed a crisis response operation without the long-term commitment of forces that an MJO would have demanded. However, it also exposes the situation of the Alliance in terms of the critical capabilities that these operations require.

These case studies provide evidence of NATO's capabilities and limitations to undertake each type of operation as an Alliance. After considering NATO issues in the operations that the organization has undertaken, the author studies the Alliance's current military situation. He focuses on indicators of the situation and evolution of NATO capabilities, and changes in the organization's structure. This evaluation provides evidence of NATO's current efforts to overcome its limitations and reach its level of ambition. Finally, the author briefly presents changes in the American strategic orientation. In his hypothesis, he establishes a link between the Alliance's ability to reach the established level of ambition and the participation of the U.S. in NATO operations. The case studies about NATO operations show how relevant the participation

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[69] The author defines the concepts MJO and SJO in the next section. According to those definitions, the author considers Libya as an SJO.

of the U.S. is for NATO to carry out those operations. The study of the U.S. strategic position

provides evidence of the trend of American willingness to get involved in future NATO missions.

## NATO Commitments in Conflicts

In 1993, NATO took part for the first time in a conflict as an organization. This occurred

in Bosnia with Operations Deny Flight and Shape Guard.[70] Since then, NATO has taken part in

numerous operations.[71] In the 1990s, NATO identified numerous flaws regarding interoperability

and suffered shortcomings of capabilities.[72] Therefore, the organization approved several

initiatives to improve its capabilities.[73] Since those efforts did not provide the expected result,

NATO members reassessed the situation in 2006. They defined the type of missions that the

Alliance should be able to perform and the capabilities it would require to do it.[74] In addition,

they defined the organization's level of ambition. Thus, regarding the scale and nature of the

operations, the Alliance divided the operations of its level of ambition in two main groups—MJO

and SJO.[75] Since there is no NATO official definition of these categories, the author defines both

concepts for the purpose of this monograph.

An MJO is a military operation in which the Alliance commits a significant number of

forces, normally for a long period, undertaking an important effort in deployment and

sustainment. This category serves the organization to ensure that both its planners and its state

members consider the maximum level of effort regarding forces and capabilities. Obviously,

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[70] NATO, *Handbook*, 144.

[71] See Table 1 in page 18.

[72] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," viii. The main shortcomings are matching means to agreed missions, improving deployability of its capabilities, and achieving better cooperation between civil and military authorities.

[73] Those initiatives were Defense Capabilities Initiative in 1999 and Prague Capabilities Commitment in 2002. In the Istanbul Summit, the allies adopted decisions about the usability and sustainability of forces. The author details these agreements later on in the monograph.

[74] NATO, "Comprehensive Political Guidance."

[75] NATO, "The DJSE Concept."

these operations need a broad consensus and a significant number of participants to build and sustain the required force. So far, the Alliance has committed its forces in MJOs in three different scenarios—Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

The other type of operation that the Alliance's level of ambition considers is the SJO. In this paper, the author defines these operations by exception—every NATO military operation that is not an MJO is an SJO. The main difference between them is that the SJO is less demanding in size, duration, or capabilities. The SJO does not exclude combat operations. The term joint gives the idea that both types of operations, regardless of their size, may demand forces of one or more services. Therefore, the planners should consider—and the members of the organization provide—the type of resources needed for the operation.

Currently, NATO is carrying out two MJOs—Joint Enterprise in Kosovo and ISAF in Afghanistan—and three SJOs—Active Endeavor in Afghanistan, Ocean Shield in the Indian Ocean, and the training missions Afghanistan. In December 2011, NATO closed its training mission in Iraq that started in 2004.[76] In addition, in March 2011, the Alliance launched Operation Unified Protector in Libya. After seven months of operations, the North Atlantic Council concluded this mission on 31 October.[77] This means that during 2011, the Alliance was executing five SJOs simultaneously. Even with the training mission in Iraq and the operation in Libya, NATO's commitments were still below the organization's level of ambition. However, the following case studies show the significant level of requirement that these operations imposed on NATO members and the significant implication of the U.S. in demanding operations such as Afghanistan and Libya.

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[76] NATO, "NATO Assistance in Iraq," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51978.htm (accessed 15 February 2012). NATO permanently withdrew its forces from Iraq on 31 December 2011 when the mandate of the mission expired and there was no agreement on the legal status of NATO troops operating in the country.

[77] NATO, "NATO and Libya: Operation Unified Protector," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_71652.htm? (accessed 30 October 2011).

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| COUNTRY | OPERATION | START | END | CATEGORY | COMPONENT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BOSNIA | DENY FLIGHT | APR93 | DEC95 | SJO | AIR |
| | SHARP GUARD | JUN93 | OCT96 | SJO | MARITIME |
| | DELIBERATE FORCE | JUL95 | AUG95 | SJO | AIR |
| | JOINT ENDEAVOR | DEC95 | DEC96 | SJO | LAND |
| | JOINT GUARD | DEC96 | JUN98 | SJO | LAND |
| | JOINT FORGE | JUN98 | DEC04 | MJO | LAND |
| KOSOVO | ALLIED FORCE | MAY99 | JUN99 | MJO | AIR |
| | JOINT ENTERPRISE | JUN99 | | MJO | LAND |
| ALBANIA | ESSENTIAL HARVEST | JUL01 | SEP01 | SJO | LAND |
| AFGANISTAN | EAGLE ASSIST | OCT01 | MAY02 | SJO | AIR |
| | ACTIVE ENDEAVOR | OCT01 | | SJO | MARITIME |
| | ISAF | AUG03 | | MJO | LAND |
| | NATO TRAINING MISSION | NOV09 | | SJO | LAND |
| IRAQ | NATO TRAINING MISSION | AUG04 | DEC11 | SJO | LAND |
| PAKISTAN | DISASTER RELIEF | OCT05 | FEB06 | SJO | LAND |
| SOMALIA | ALLIED PROVIDER | OCT08 | NOV08 | SJO | MARITIME |
| | ALLIED PROTECTOR | MAR09 | APR09 | SJO | MARITIME |
| | OCEAN SHIELD | AUG09 | | SJO | MARITIME |
| LIBYA | UNIFIED PROTECTOR | MAR11 | OCT11 | SJO | AIR/MARITIME |

**Table 1. NATO operations.[78]**

## Major Joint Operations

NATO has conducted four MJOs so far—in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.[79] In

Bosnia, the Alliance performed a peacekeeping operation.[80] Likewise, in Operation Joint

Enterprise in Kosovo, NATO transitioned form enforcing the peace to a peacekeeping

operation.[81] Both operations developed successfully and NATO could redeploy forces as the

stability increased. Operation Allied Force compelled Serbia to stop violence in Kosovo. This

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[78] Author's table. Source NATO web page. The division between MJOs and SJOs follows the author's criteria according to his definition of the two types of operations. The column Component shows the predominant type of forces in each operation.

[79] In Kosovo, the Alliance executed two operations in that theater in a row. See Table 1.

[80] NATO, *Handbook*, 144–5.

[81] Ibid., 150.

operation set the conditions for the deployment of KFOR.[82] Afghanistan is the only operation in which NATO has had to increase the strength of its forces in the mission. NATO performs this mission in an increasingly hostile environment. This case study offers the possibility of following the increase of requirements of this mission. It also presents evidences of the lack of capabilities of the Alliance to face a conflict in a demanding environment.

## Kosovo

In 1998, violence erupted between Serbian security forces and Kosovar Albanian population. The international community became increasingly concerned because of the escalation of the conflict, its humanitarian implications, and the possible repercussions in the stability of the region. After one year of unsuccessful diplomatic efforts, NATO launched an air campaign against the Milosevic regime on 24 March 1999.[83] After renewed diplomatic contacts, NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia concluded a Military Technical Agreement on 9 June.[84] The following day, as soon as the Serbian troops started their withdrawal, NATO suspended the air campaign.[85] On 12 June, the first elements of Kosovo Force (KFOR) entered Kosovo. The first problem of KFOR was to get enough forces to deploy to all parts of Kosovo to

[82] Ibid., 149.

[83] Ibid., 150. The organization's political objectives were to bring about a verifiable stop to all military action, violence and repression; the withdrawal from Kosovo of military personnel, police and paramilitary forces; the stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence; the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organizations; and the establishment of a political agreement for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

[84] Ibid.

[85] "On 10 June, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 welcomed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's acceptance of the principles for a political solution, including an immediate end to violence and a rapid withdrawal of its military, police and paramilitary forces and the deployment of an effective international civil and security presence, with substantial NATO participation." Ibid.

establish security and civil control.[86] On the initial deployment, KFOR strength was around

20,000 troops. The planned final size was 52,000 troops from NATO member countries, partner

countries and non-NATO countries. However, the build-up of forces was slow. By August, there

were around 38,000 troops in Kosovo plus another 7,000 troops in the Former Yugoslav Republic

of Macedonia.[87] All the forces were under a unified command and control structure. The initial

structure had four Multinational Brigades each of them responsible for a region of the country.[88]

The main contributors to the operation were the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy.[89]

When the conflict in Kosovo started, the U.S. already had around 8,400 troops deployed

in Bosnia. Although it took the lead in Operation Joint Guard, the U.S. tried from the beginning

to limit its participation with ground troops in KFOR. For this country, this operation implied

another long-term deployment overseas.[90] Therefore, the U.S. sent 5,500 troops to Kosovo while

reducing the amount of forces in Bosnia that dropped to 4,600 in 2000.

In 2001, KFOR reached 44,000 troops.[91] Improvements in the security environment led

NATO to start reducing KFOR strength. Therefore, the forces decreased to around 39,000 by the

beginning of 2002, 26,000 by June 2003, and 17,500 by the end of that year.[92] Regarding U.S.

participation, the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom caused a reduction of American forces in the

Balkans down to 1,800 troops in Bosnia and 2,500 in Kosovo.[93] These reductions did not alter the

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[86] International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 1999,* 31. This quick deployment had to enable the return of refugees and to deter reprisals by the ethnic Albanian population against the Serbs.

[87] Ibid.

[88] NATO, *Handbook*, 151.

[89] IISS, *The Military Balance 2001*, 28, 56–79. In 2001, France and Germany deployed 5,100 troops each. Italy had 4,200 soldiers and Great Britain 3,900. The U.S. participated with 5,400 troops.

[90] IISS, *The Military Balance 1999*, 12.

[91] Ibid., 30. NATO contributed with 37,900 troops, of which 5,000 deployed in Macedonia. Another 5,900 troops came from non-NATO countries.

[92] NATO, *Handbook*, 150.

[93] IISS, *The Military Balance 2003*, 28.

general structure of the mission. NATO forces focused on developing the standards that the
United Nations defined as necessary for normalization, such as the return of refugees and the
stabilization of the political, economic, and social life in the province.[94]
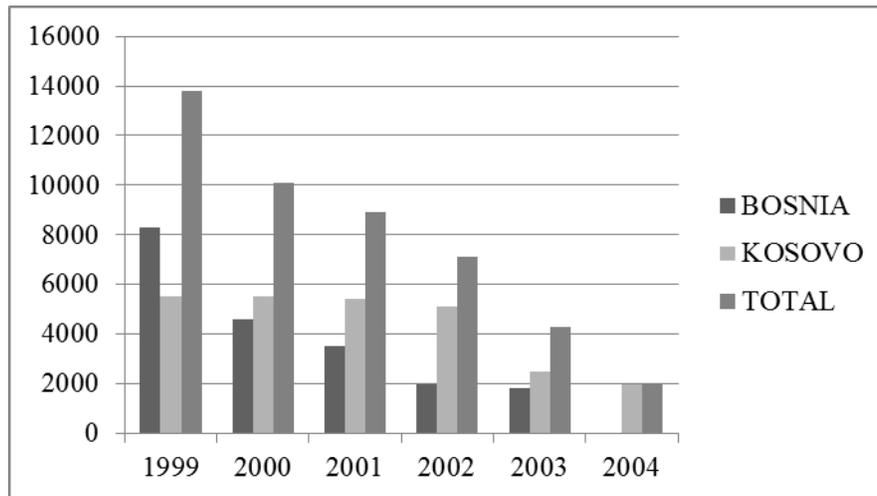


**Figure 1. U.S. commitment in the Balkans.**[95]

In 2004, a spring of renewed violence resulted in an attack against NATO troops. NATO decided
to commit the operational reserve of 2,500 additional troops to face this situation.[96] The existence
of contingency plans for those eventualities enabled the rapid deployment of the reinforcements.[97]
In August 2005, the North Atlantic Council decided to restructure KFOR, replacing the four
existing multinational brigades with five task forces.[98] The success in the stabilization of the
country and the demand of more forces for Afghanistan conflict led to the adoption of a new
structure. In June 2009, taking into account the favorable evolution of the security environment in
Kosovo, NATO approved the gradual transition of KFOR mission to a deterrent presence. This

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[94] NATO, *Handbook*, 150.

[95] Author's graphic. Source IISS, *The Military Balance.*

[96] Ministère de la Défense, "Kosovo: Chronologie et Repères Historiques" [Kosovo: Chronology and Historical Landmarks], http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/kosovo/dossier/kosovo-chronologie-et-reperes-historiques (accessed 6 October 2011).

[97] NATO, *Handbook*, 151.

[98] Ibid., 150–1.

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decision directly implied an organizational change from task forces to battle groups and the

reduction from 13,000 to 10,200 troops in 2010.[99]

As the mission achieved its goals towards stability, NATO reduced KFOR strength

accordingly. At the end of 2010, KFOR structure consisted of only two Battle Groups—led by

Italy and the U.S.—and five multinational Joint Regional Detachments, with a total of around

7,300 soldiers.[100] In October 2011, KFOR comprised 6,240 troops from 30 different countries

(twenty-two NATO and eight non-NATO nations.) Around a fifty per cent of that strength

corresponds to the U.S., Germany, France, and Italy. In addition, NATO keeps a KFOR

Operational Reserve Force on call of around 700 troops.[101]

## Afghanistan

The U.S. launched its operation in Afghanistan without NATO direct support.[102] For

Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. led a coalition that achieved a quick military victory in

October 2001.[103] This success resulted in a UN-supported conference in Bonn in December 2001.

The nations participating in this conference created ISAF to assist the established Afghan

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[99] Ministère de la Défense, "Les forces françaises au Kosovo" [French Forces in Kosovo], http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/kosovo/dossier/les-forces-francaises-au-kosovo (accessed 6 October 2011).

[100] United Nations Security Council, "Report to the United Nations on the operations of the Kosovo Force," http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Kos%20S2011%20363.pdf (accessed 14 November 2011).

[101] NATO, "KFOR placemat as of 5 October 2011," http://www.nato.int/kfor/structur/nations/placemap/kfor_placemat.pdf (accessed 20 October 2011).

[102] James Sperling and Mark Webber, "NATO: from Kosovo to Kabul," *International Affairs*, no. 85 (2009): 500; Vincent Morelli and Paul Belkin, "NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance," *Congressional Research Service* (October 2008): 9, http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf (accessed 28 August 2011). NATO did not have an active role until the Alliance took over command of ISAF in August 2003.

[103] Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, 16. The countries part of the coalition that supported U.S. military operations were Canada, Denmark, Norway, Germany, France, and Great Britain, all of them NATO members.

Transitional Authority.[104] Eighteen countries contributed initially to ISAF with total strength of

5,000 troops.[105] The initial ISAF mandate foresaw five phases—assessment and preparation,

geographic expansion, stabilization, transition, and redeployment.[106] The U.S. participated in

ISAF but continued conducting combat operations with the coalition of OEF. Thus, since the

creation of ISAF, there have been two different efforts in Afghanistan.
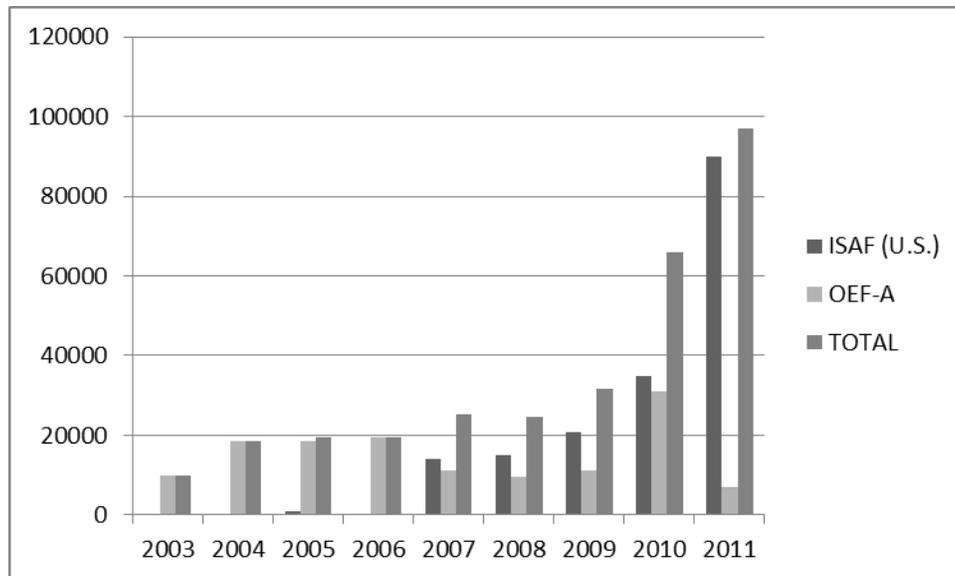


**Figure 2. U.S. commitment in Afghanistan.**[107]

In early 2003, the U.S. launched Operation Iraqi Freedom. The debate within the allies over Iraq

failed to produce a direct role for NATO.[108] However, NATO members agreed to assume a

greater role in Afghanistan in the belief that this decision would help strengthen the Alliance.[109]

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[104] NATO, "ISAF," http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html (accessed 15 September 2011).

[105] Reyko Huang, "Fact Sheet: Interim Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan," Center for Defense Information (February 2002), http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/isaf.cfm (accessed 20 October 2011). Those countries were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Great Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. France, Italy, Germany, and Great Britain were the main contributors.

[106] NATO, *Handbook*, 157; Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, 27.

[107] Author's graphic. Source IISS, *The Military Balance*.

[108] Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, 25.

[109] Ibid., 19.

Therefore, in August 2003, NATO assumed leadership of the ISAF operation. This was the first time that the Alliance operated outside of Europe.[110] However, some of the members worried about NATO ability to undertake this mission.[111]

When NATO took over the command of the mission, ISAF was only conducting operations within the Kabul area. In October 2003, United Nations Security Council resolution 1510 extended this mandate to cover the whole country; therefore, ISAF transitioned to the second phase of the operation. The plan for the expansion considered four stages with a defined timeline. First, ISAF took control of the northern area in October 2003. The expansion to the west took place in February 2005. ISAF forces controlled the southern area in December 2005. Finally, ISAF expanded to the east region in October 2006. Each of those stages meant an increase of the deployed forces. Therefore, ISAF forces went from less than 10,000 in 2003 to around 35,000 at the beginning of 2007, when the mission had already expanded to the entire Afghan territory.[112] However, even though NATO was assuming the responsibility for the execution of all military operations in the country, the organization itself did not have a plan to support the mission.[113]

In January 2007, President Bush decided to focus on solving the problem in Iraq. Thus, he increased the troops in OIF to contain the insurgency.[114] In 2008, both U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps struggled "to meet the demands of protracted conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq."[115] By late 2008, NATO members agreed that the conflict in Afghanistan required more troops.

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[110] Ibid., iii.

[111] Ibid, 26. Those concerns referred to NATO troops available and lift capabilities to transport and sustain the necessary number of troops in Afghanistan.

[112] NATO. "ISAF's Mission in Afghanistan." http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69366.htm (accessed 15 October 2011).

[113] Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, 1. The authors state that the wonder in 2006 was what would fall apart first—Afghanistan or the ISAF mission.

[114] Michael Duffy, "The Surge at Year One," *Time*, 31 January 2008, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1708843,00.html#ixzz1oCFKFHEx (accessed 15 December 2011).

[115] IISS, *The Military Balance 2008*, 13.

However, the estimation of the requirements overwhelmed NATO countries' capability to deploy additional forces.[116] In the meantime, the forces in Afghanistan remained slightly stable.
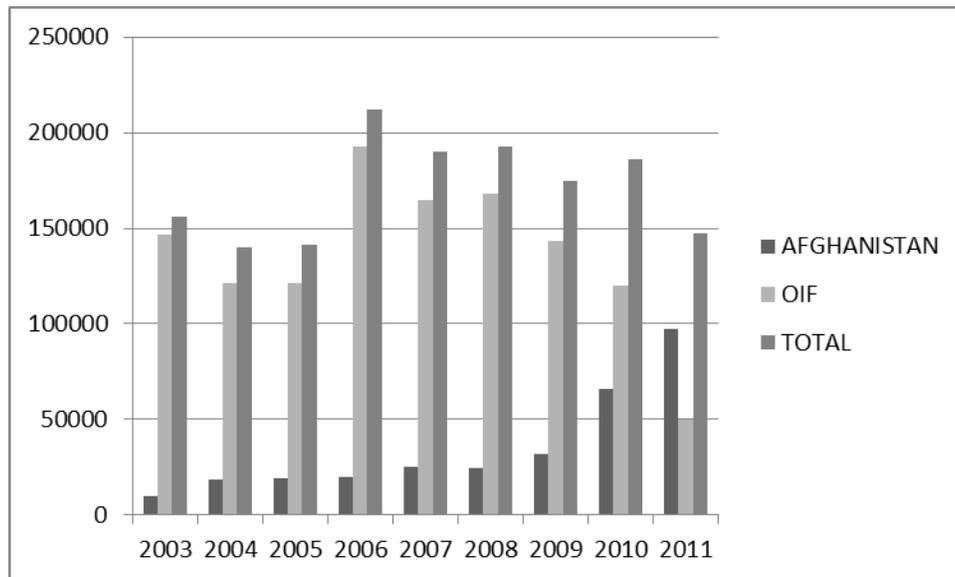


**Figure 3. Comparison of U.S. commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan.**[117]

In 2009, the U.S. administration decided to increase the momentum of the situation in Afghanistan sending more troops and equipment.[118] The American troop levels rose from 15,000 in 2008 to 98,000 by the end of 2010.[119] The deployed forces in October 2011 reached 130,000 soldiers. Forty-nine countries take part in this operation. The U.S. contribution means almost seventy percent of the total of forces. Apart from this, the main contributors are Great Britain with 9,500, Germany with 5,000, Italy and France with around 4,000 each. These four countries represent seventeen per cent of the entire force.[120]

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[116] Morelli and Belkin, "NATO in Afghanistan," 7.

[117] Author's graphic. Source IISS, *The Military Balance*.

[118] Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, ix.

[119] NATO, "ISAF placemats archives," http://www.isaf.nato.int/isaf-placemat-archives.html (accessed 30 October 2011).

[120] NATO, "ISAF Placemat as of 18 October 2011," http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/media/PDFs/18%20october%202011%20isaf%20placemat.pdf (accessed 30 October 2011).
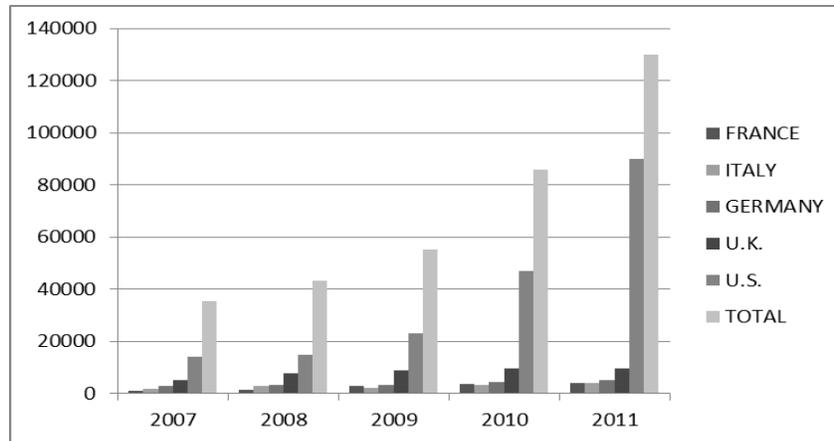
**Figure 4. Evolution of forces in Afghanistan during ISAF phase 3 "Stabilization" (2007–2011).** [121]

## Small Joint Operations

The Alliance has carried out various SJOs since 1990. All of them have had different characteristics. These operations include help in humanitarian crises, air space and sea control, and the fight against piracy, among others. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a common pattern for them. The distinctive features of these operations are the limited nature of their objectives and the requirements of level of commitment for the organization. As the author mentioned above, the Alliance is currently executing three SJOs. The study of these operations focuses in the capabilities that they require rather than in their size or duration. The following case studies show that as soon as the requirements of capabilities increase, NATO limitations appear.

### NATO Training Mission−Iraq

In 2004, the interim Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi requested NATO support to his government through training and other forms of technical assistance.[122] NATO leaders agreed to assist the Interim Iraqi Government "to develop adequate national security structures as soon as

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[121] Author's graphic. Source NATO, "ISAF placemats archives." In the case of the U.S., the data include both ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom.

[122] NATO, "NATO Assistance in Iraq."

possible, to provide for the future security of the Iraqi people."[123] Therefore, the North Atlantic Council established the NATO Training Implementation Mission with around fifty military personnel. The tasks were to provide training to Iraqi military forces, to support the development of Iraqi security institutions, and to coordinate the delivery of equipment.[124]

With the approval of the Concept of Operations for the mission in October 2004, NATO established a framework to expand its assistance to the Iraqi Interim Government with the training of its security forces and the coordination of offers of training and equipment. The mission changed its name to NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I) and increased to some 300 training and support personnel.[125] In further expansions of the mission, NTM-I developed new mechanisms to train Iraqi Security Forces in other areas such as training for the federal police, navy and air force leadership education, defense reform, defense institution building, and small arms and light weapons accountability.[126]

NATO created NTM-I as a non-combat mission under the political control of the North Atlantic Council. The mission coordinated its activities with Iraqi authorities and with the U.S.-led international stabilization force. In fact, the mission commander was the U.S. Forces Iraq Deputy Commanding General for Advising and Training. He was responsible for the coordination between NATO mission and the separate training program led by the Multinational Force.[127] As the NATO mission commander, this American general officer reported to the Supreme Allied Commander, Operations, in Brussels, who retained overall responsibility for the program.[128]

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[123] NATO, *Handbook*, 160.

[124] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 157.

[125] NATO, *Handbook*, 160.

[126] NATO, "NATO Assistance in Iraq."

[127] NATO, *Handbook*, 160.

[128] NATO, "NATO Assistance in Iraq." The Allied Command for Operations reports through the NATO Military Committee to the North Atlantic Council.

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The mission's plan of operation comprised four phases. First, NATO assessed the situation and prepared the mission. Second, the organization developed an approach to match the requests of the Iraqi government with NATO available resources. The third phase consisted in the transfer of the training activity to Iraqi authorities, along with the reduction of NATO presence. In the final phase, NATO completed the transfer of authority and NTM-I forces will withdraw from Iraq. This program developed training activities in Iraq and outside the country.[129]

NTM-I carried out in-country activities through specialized branches. The Strategic Security Advisor and Mentoring Division provided training and support to Iraqi authorities to achieve full operational capability in three high level operations centers—the Prime Minister's National Operation Centre, the Minister of Defense's Joint Operations Centre, and the Minister of Interior's National Command Centre. The NATO Training, Education, and Doctrine Advisory Division opened the Military Academy and the War College at Ar Rustamiyah. This activity focused on the development of a middle and senior-level officer corps trained in modern military skills, including democratic values. The Armed Forces Training and Education Branch assisted the development of a Non-commissioned Officer corps. Other activities included the National Defense College, opened on 27 September 2005, the Defense Language Institute, and the Defense and Strategic Studies Institute. Out-of-country training included activities in national training facilities and Centers of Excellence throughout NATO member countries. In October 2004, the Allied Command Transformation established the NATO Training and Equipment Coordination Group to coordinate the out-of-country training, equipment, and technical assistance that NATO as a whole or by individual NATO member countries offer to the Iraqi government.[130]

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[129] Stato Maggiore della Difesa, "Iraq NTM-I," http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni_Militari/operazioni-internazionali_concluse/Iraq-NTM-I/Pagine/Missione.aspx (accessed 15 January 2012).

[130] Ibid.

In 2009, NATO and the Government of the Republic of Iraq signed an agreement that

provided legal protection for NATO to continue with its training mission until the end of 2011.

Since the extension of this mandate did not prove possible, NATO withdrew the NTM-I from Iraq

on 31 December 2011.[131] Over time, thirteen member countries and one partner country

contributed to the training effort either in or outside Iraq, through financial contributions or

donations of equipment.[132] Italy provided the bulk of NATO participation with ninety-one troops,

including the Deputy Commander of the mission.[133] Overall, this mission was not particularly

demanding in regards to the Alliance's capabilities. Nevertheless, this was the first time that the

Alliance undertook a specific mission to support the post-conflict stabilization of a nation through

the training of its security forces. The development of the Operational Concept for this mission in

2004 was a step forward in the Alliance's doctrine development. This experience served the

Alliance to launch a similar operation in Afghanistan.[134]

## Libya

At the beginning of 2011, Libya experienced social protests that followed Tunisian and

Egyptian patterns of what the media called "the Arab Spring."[135] The protests resulted in an

armed conflict between government and rebel forces. The regime's repression against the civilian

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[131] NATO, "NATO Assistance in Iraq." NATO remains committed to developing a long-term relationship with Iraq through its structured cooperation framework.

[132] Stato Maggiore della Difesa, "Scheda Notizie Relativa alla Partecipazione Italiana alla Operazione NATO Training Mission Iraq" [News about the Italian Participation in the Operation NTM-I], http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni_Militari/Operazioni_internazionali_in_corso/Iraq-NTM-I/Documents/SCHEDA_20NOTIZIE_20IRAQ.pdf (accessed 6 October 2011). These countries are Albania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Great Britain, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Rumania, United States, Turkey, Ukraine (Partnership for Peace), and Hungary.

[133] Ibid.

[134] NATO, "NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52802.htm (accessed 2 October 2011).

[135] Yaroslav Trofimov, Jay Solomon and Nour Malas, "Arab Spring Gives Way to an Uncertain Autumn," *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 August 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903461304576524701611118090.html (accessed 20 November 2011).

population led the United Nations Security Council to pass resolutions 1970 and 1973. The former demanded Libyan leader Gadhafi stop the violence and guarantee the human rights of the population.[136] The latter demanded a cease-fire and authorized the establishment of a no-fly zone. It also authorized member states and regional organizations to "take all necessary measures… to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack" by Gadhafi's government forces.[137] The resolution 1973 excluded a foreign occupation force of any form on Libyan soil.[138]

Following resolution 1973, several countries established a coalition to implement the no-fly zone.[139] The U.S. initially took the lead of the coalition and coordinated its activities through its Unified Combatant Command in Africa. However, the U.S. wanted to scale down their involvement to a supporting role. On 22 March, NATO responded to the UN call by launching an operation to enforce the arms embargo against Libya. Two days later, NATO decided to enforce the UN-mandated no-fly zone over Libya. On March 28, NATO took over the responsibility of the overall mission with the name of Operation Unified Protector. Finally, on 31 March, NATO air and sea assets began taking actions to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas. The coalition expanded to eighteen countries—including four non-NATO nations.[140]

Operation Unified Protector ended on 31 October 2011. Approximately 8,000 troops took part in the operation. There were over 260 air assets that executed over 26,500 sorties, including

[136] United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1970," http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/245/58/PDF/N1124558.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 30 October 2011).

[137] United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1973," http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 30 October 2011); NATO, "London Conference on Libya: Chair's Statement," 29 March 2011, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/20110927_110329_-London-Conference-Libya.pdf (accessed 30 October 2011).

[138] Ibid.

[139] The initial coalition consisted of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Great Britain, and the United States.

[140] Henry Boyd, "Operation Unified Protector: Allied Assets Deployed to Libya," The International Institute for Strategic Studies, http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-voices/operation-odyssey-dawn-ellamy-harmattan-mobile/ (accessed 20 November 2011); NATO, "NATO and Libya."

over 9,700 strike sorties. These assets destroyed over 5,900 military targets. NATO also

committed Early Warning airplanes—the only assets the Alliance owns as an organization. The

allied forces also counted with twenty-one naval assets that implemented the arms embargo and

provided humanitarian assistance.[141] In the operation, NATO capabilities provided real-time

tactical control that facilitated the task to close Libya's entire airspace. In addition, naval vessels

and surveillance aircraft, including NATO AWACS, provided real-time monitoring and

coordination of air activity over the Libyan airspace.[142]

This operation is the first that NATO has undertaken after the approval of the new

concept. NATO Secretary General Rasmussen asserted that the operation in Libya showed that

NATO allies do not lack military capabilities.[143] Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

agreed that this operation proved the potential of NATO European countries, taking the lead of

the operation with American support. However, he argued that the operation exposed significant

shortcomings that he attributed mainly to underfunding. Gates pointed out that the organization

lacked critical capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets. He stated

that "[t]he most advanced fighter aircraft are little use if allies do not have the means to identify,

process, and strike targets as part of an integrated campaign."[144] In particular, the air operations

center responsible for the operation struggled to operate at half of its theoretical capabilities.

Finally, Gates complained of the Alliance's lack of logistical capabilities because "the mightiest

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[141] NATO, "Operation Unified Protector: Final Mission Stats,"
http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_11/20111108_111107-
factsheet_up_factsfigures_en.pdf (accessed 20 November 2011). The air assets included fighter aircrafts,
surveillance and reconnaissance aircrafts, air-to-air refuellers, unmanned aerial vehicles, and attack
helicopters. Naval forces consisted of supply ships, frigates, destroyers, submarines, amphibious assault
ships, and aircraft carriers.

[142] NATO, "Operation Unified Protector: NATO No-Fly Zone over Libya,"
http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/unified-protector-no-fly-zone.pdf (accessed 20
November 2011).

[143] Rasmussen, "NATO after Libya."

[144] Gates, "Future of NATO."

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military alliance in history is only eleven weeks into an operation against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country—yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions, requiring the U.S., once more, to make up the difference."[145]

In summary, NATO is currently conducting two MJOs and three SJOs. Although this level of commitment is still below the Alliance's level of ambition, the previous case studies show that the organization struggles to get the needed resources to execute its operations. In the case of the MJOs, NATO has conducted both Kosovo and Afghanistan at the same time, as the level of ambition envisioned. As MJOs, these operations have been demanding in terms of troops and duration. However, in Kosovo this demand decreased over time while in Afghanistan it increased continuously. The need of troops overwhelmed the member's capacity. The decision of the U.S. of sending more troops allowed the Alliance to regain momentum and keep on accomplishing the mission.[146] Regarding the SJOs, the Alliance should have no problems to execute these operations because of the low level of demand that they pose to the organization. However, when the execution of these missions requires critical capabilities, like in the case of Libya, the participation of the U.S. makes the difference for the success of the operation.

## Analysis of Current NATO Military Capabilities

Some authors suggest that the real issue is not if NATO remains credible as a military alliance but if NATO continues to exist as a genuine political community with a consensus on the meaning of security in the twenty-first century.[147] However, the Alliance has never renounced to have an effective military tool; therefore, the Alliance needs to have enough military capabilities to face the diverse and unpredictable threats within the strategic environment.[148] In fact, the new

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Morelli and Belkin, "NATO in Afghanistan," 5; Hoehn and Harting, *Risking NATO*, ix.

[147] Moore, *NATO's New Mission*, 96.

[148] Rasmussen, "NATO after Libya."

strategic concept presents a remarkably ambitious and optimistic scenario. According to the document, NATO will deploy robust military forces where and when required for its members' security. This idea has to guide the development of capabilities and capacities to carry out the essential tasks listed in the strategic concept. The goal is to ensure that NATO has the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of their populations.[149]

The organization must overcome a number of shortcomings in matching means to agreed missions, improved deployability of its capabilities, and better cooperation between civil and military authorities, among others.[150] Thus, the Alliance fosters a continuous process of reform, modernization, and transformation of its members' military capabilities.[151] However, the Alliance still struggles to mobilize the necessary means to accomplish its tasks.[152] The economic and financial crises provoke budgetary constraints, especially in defense. This situation undermines the nations' ability to acquire new capabilities. Therefore, the Alliance has not had enough support to carry out the process of reform of its capabilities planning and development.[153] Nevertheless, NATO members should consider President Obama's advice when he reminded them in Lisbon that, even in this economic situation, they have a responsibility to the Alliance.[154]

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[149] NATO, "Strategic Concept." The strategic concept lists three essential core tasks that will contribute to assure the security of NATO territory and populations—collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.

[150] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," viii.

[151] NATO, "Strategic Concept." Among the actions to achieve the needed capabilities, the nations agreed to develop and maintain an appropriate number of mobile and deployable forces, as well as the ability to sustain them while conducting operations, including at a strategic distance.

[152] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," 21.

[153] Sarcinschi, "NATO 2009," 49.

[154] Shea, "NATO's New Strategic Concept," 16.

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## NATO Initiatives on Capabilities

Since the creation of NATO, the U.S. took the lead in the military defense of the organization.[155] The changes in the post-Cold War strategic landscape advised the convenience of changing the organization's mindset.[156] However, the Alliance kept on relying heavily on the transatlantic link and the U.S. commitment to achieve the organization's objectives. The evolution of the Alliance within the new strategic framework did not entail the modernization of its military capabilities—those of its members—to reduce the gap with the U.S. NATO participation in Bosnia revealed clear shortfalls in the organization's capabilities and lack of interoperability among its members.[157] In 1999, NATO approved the Defense Capabilities Initiative at the Washington Summit to "bring about improvements in the capabilities needed to ensure the effectiveness of future multinational operations across the full spectrum of Alliance missions, with a special focus on improving interoperability."[158] However, this initiative relied solely in the nations' commitment to undertake initiatives to improve the Alliance capabilities. Therefore, it failed because it lacked a clear agenda to follow the nations' programs and achievements.[159]

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 revealed the need of more concrete measures to improve the capabilities of the organization.[160] Thus, in 2002, the Alliance replaced the Defense Capabilities Initiative with the Prague Capabilities Commitment. NATO's key idea behind this

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[155] Frank R. Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 26.

[156] Hamilton, "Alliance Reborn," 2.

[157] Sperling and Webber. "NATO: from Kosovo to Kabul," 493–4.

[158] NATO, *Handbook*, 175.

[159] Ibid., 176.

[160] Ibid.

decision was transformation.[161] This concept of transformation encompassed the initiative about

capabilities, the creation of the NATO Response Force, and the change of the organization's

command structure to enhance its adaptation to the new circumstances.[162] With a sense of

urgency to achieve the needed capability improvements, the Prague Capabilities Commitment

relied on member states making national commitments and agreeing to specific deadlines to

achieve new capabilities.[163] The initiative also enhanced cooperation inside the organization

because the nations could collaborate with other allies to achieve the objectives.[164]

The year after the approval of the Prague Capabilities Commitment, the Alliance took

charge of ISAF mission in Afghanistan. This commitment posed increasing demands on members

to fulfill the required capabilities to accomplish the mission. After the Istanbul Summit of 2004,

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated that "if NATO wants to continue to meet

its commitments—in Afghanistan, Iraq or elsewhere—our military means must match our

political ambitions."[165] In 2006, NATO Defense Ministers looked over the evolution of the

Prague capability initiatives.[166] That year, NATO approved the Comprehensive Political

Guidance. Having in mind that reassessment of capabilities, NATO defined the kind of operations

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[161] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 142.

[162] NATO, *Handbook*, 176. The capabilities agreement pursued the improvement of NATO means in 400 specific areas. These initiatives covered eight fields: chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense; intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition; air-to-ground surveillance; command, control and communications; combat effectiveness, including precision-guided munitions and suppression of enemy air defense; strategic airlift and sealift; air-to-air refuelling; and deployable combat support and combat service support units.

[163] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 145–6.

[164] NATO, *Handbook*, 177. The main innovation was that the Alliance put in place measures to track and monitor progress and take action to resolve any problems that arise.

[165] Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "NATO after the Istanbul Summit" (speech, Netherlands Atlantic Association, The Hague, Netherlands, 5 July 2004), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-27C80ADE-EDBAEEA8/natolive/opinions_21184.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 August 2011).

[166] NATO, "Riga Summit Declaration," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-6C420612-81995943/natolive/official_texts_37920.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 November 2011). In Riga, the members also discussed the progress of the nationally-led initiatives on strategic airlift and sealift capabilities; the situation of the missile shield initiative; and the range of possible new capability-related initiatives in such areas as resources, deployability, defense against terrorism, and training.

that NATO must be able to perform and establish its level of ambition determining the number of those operations the organization should be able to execute simultaneously.[167]

## Troops Available

The accomplishment of NATO missions requires military capabilities not only in terms of equipment but also in terms of troops. As in the case of the equipment, the Alliance also depends on its members to have enough forces to accomplish its missions.[168] During the Alliance's first experience in crisis response operations in Bosnia in 1995, apart from a shortfall of the required capabilities to accomplish its missions, the organization identified several shortcomings such lack of interoperability and lack of an adequate command and control structure. The previous paragraphs showed the different initiatives with which the Alliance tried to ensure effectiveness and improve interoperability. Those initiatives sought to "ensure that Alliance forces have the means necessary to conduct operations swiftly and effectively for as long as necessary."[169] However, the first experiences of the Alliance in operations proved that the quantity and quality of troops should be another concern for NATO.

Intuitively, anyone can tell that NATO members have available military forces to defend their interests and therefore to take part in the Alliance's operations. However, NATO cannot dispose of those national forces nor does it have independent military forces to undertake military operations. Thus, when the Alliance decides to launch an operation, the organization starts a force generation process in which the member nations offer their forces according to the operation requirements and their own interests.[170] Taking for granted the availability of those national forces for the Alliance's missions, NATO focused its improvements in equipment and

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[167] NATO, "Comprehensive Political Guidance."

[168] NATO, *Handbook*, 96.

[169] Ibid., 176.

[170] Ibid., 96.

interoperability. However, whenever NATO committed its forces to long-duration conflicts and, in addition, undertook more than one of those missions simultaneously, the Alliance realized that its members' forces were inadequate in number and structure for crisis response and out-of-area operations.[171]

The Alliance's organization includes the Force Structure. NATO defines this concept as "organizational arrangements that bring together the forces placed at the Alliance's disposal by the member countries, along with their associated command and control structures."[172] Each unit has a predetermined readiness status that establishes the time in which it will be available upon request. Theoretically, these forces are available for NATO operations. In practice, every new mission—or new requirement for an operation already in execution—implies a force generation process in which each nation decides if it will take part and with how many forces. In addition, each country has specific rules of deployment and transfer of authority to NATO command.[173] The reason why a member nation takes such decision is beyond the scope of this monograph. However, to understand the Alliance's limitations, it is important to highlight that, regardless of the organization's mechanisms of force generation, the availability of forces depends on every nation's interests.

In 2004, the North Atlantic Council agreed on several initiatives that directly affected the use of forces. First, NATO decided to expand its mission in Afghanistan. Second, the Alliance decided to offer training for Iraqi security forces. Third, the Alliance renewed its commitment with Kosovo.[174] In these circumstances, the main concern of the Alliance was to improve the level of deployability, usability, and sustainability of NATO forces. Thus, the member nations re-

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[171] NATO, "Improving NATO's Capabilities," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-3BB4211F-684AE676/natolive/topics_49137.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 August 2011).

[172] NATO, "Military Organization and Structures," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49608.htm (accessed August 15, 2011).

[173] Ibid.

[174] Jaap de Hoop, "NATO after the Istanbul Summit."

examined its procedures of force planning and force generation and agreed on targets to improve the availability of forces.[175] NATO established that each country should aim to have forty per cent of the total of national land forces structured, prepared, and equipped for deployed operations; and eight per cent of those forces undertaking or planned for sustained operations at any one time. The Alliance estimates that this initiative "has led to a 7% increase in the number of land forces that are deployable and a 21% increase in the number that can be sustained on operations and other missions."[176] However, the nations have not reached those goals yet.[177]

## Command Structure

Along with the improvement of its capabilities, the Alliance also requires the development of the appropriate mechanisms to command and control troops in a specific mission. In fact, the transformation of the Alliance's structures has also been a characteristics of the evolution of the organization.[178] In 2002, the reorganization of NATO Command Structure was one of the pillars of the Alliance's transformation process. The organization moved from a geographically focused structure toward a functional one. At the strategic level, NATO had two headquarters—Allied Command for Transformation and Allied Command for Operations. At the operational level, the Command for Operations had three joint headquarters. Two of them had subordinated land, air, and naval component command headquarters. The third joint headquarters was a deployable one.[179]

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[175] Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, (press conference, Brussels, Belgium, 24 June 2004), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-27C80ADE-EDBAEEA8/natolive/opinions_21227.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 30 August 2011); Jaap de Hoop, "NATO after the Istanbul Summit."

[176] NATO, "Improving NATO's Capabilities." The Alliance raised these goals later to 50 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Weinrod and Barry, "NATO Command Structure," 8.

[179] NATO, "NATO's Command Structure: The Old and the New," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69721.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 15 October 2011).

With the new strategic concept, the Alliance agreed upon a framework for a new NATO Command Structure. The three main ideas are effectiveness, horizontality, and cost. Despite the fact that NATO is struggling with the availability of its forces, the new structure's goal is to provide headquarters that are more agile, flexible, and able to deploy on operations. The new structure retains the same two Strategic Commands—Operations and Transformation. However, at the operational level it consists of only two Joint Force Headquarters. Each of these headquarters should be able to deploy up to an MJO into theater.[180] This capability is consistent with the Alliance's level of ambition. In the new structure, there is no mention to SJOs. Nevertheless, NATO does have enough resources to command and control this type of operations. The Alliance could lead them from any of its two operational headquarters. NATO could also delegate in one of the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Headquarters that several nations offer to the organization within the Force Structure. However, this option would depend on the will of the nations to take part in the operation.[181]

## Trends of the U.S. Participation in NATO

The U.S. has been—and still is—the basic pillar of NATO security strategy. In previous sections, the author pointed out how dependent NATO has been on U.S. support not only in capabilities and troops but also in leadership. During the Cold War, the European countries relied on U.S. leadership for the defense of Europe against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The U.S. military capabilities were the central piece of that strategy of defense, with the contribution

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[180] NATO, "Background on NATO Command Structure Review," http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_06/20110609-Backgrounder_Command_Structure.pdf (accessed August 6, 2011). This document uses the denomination "MJO." This concept is equivalent to that of MJO that the author defines in this monograph.

[181] NATO, "The New Force Structure," http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69721.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 15 September 2011).

of the allies' military forces.[182] During the 1990s, the U.S. commitment in the Balkans proved

essential to stabilize the situation. The lack of military capabilities, along with flaws in

preparation and interoperability of NATO forces, were a clear characteristic of the Alliance's

operations in this period.[183] After the terrorist attacks against the U.S. in 2001, several

circumstances challenged the strength of the transatlantic link. First, the political support of

NATO European nations to the U.S. did not materialize immediately in military commitment.

Second, once they commit forces in operations, these nations proved unable to close the gap of

capabilities with the U.S. and improve the availability and interoperability of their forces.[184]

Nowadays, the U.S. is about to put an end to more than ten years of war. The end of the

mission in Iraq and the decision to complete the transference of security responsibilities to the

Afghan government in 2014, place the U.S. at a strategic turning point. The document

"Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense" provides guidance to

sustain U.S. global leadership in light of the changing geopolitical environment and [U.S.]

changing fiscal circumstances. The focus of this new strategy lays on the Asia-Pacific region and

the Middle East.[185] Although the document presents Europe and NATO as critical partners in

seeking global security, the new strategy reopens the debate about the right level of involvement

of the U.S. in Europeans issues.[186]

Sean Kay asserts that this opportunity has to serve to change NATO force structure

towards a new one with Europe in the lead. According to him, America would only take part in

Article V, defense contingencies operations. Therefore, the U.S. should work with the allies in the

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[182] Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship*, 26.

[183] Medcalf, *Going Global*, 65−6.

[184] Gates, "Future of NATO."

[185] Leon Panetta, foreword to "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership."

[186] U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense," 3, http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/us/20120106-PENTAGON.PDF (accessed 15 January 2012).

short-term (over the next 2–3 years) to develop the capacities that Europe needs to assume the responsibility for security provision in and around its area. Furthermore, Kay proposes a new level of ambition to achieve that goal. He asserts that Europe should be able to conduct a Libya-style war and a Balkans-style peace support operation simultaneously and without U.S. support. In short, he defends that America should disengage from Europe now because, "[a]fter all, NATO is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself."[187]

In summary, the Alliance's strategic concept states that NATO must be able to deploy robust military forces to advance the organization's objectives. However, NATO still has problems to mobilize the resources it needs to accomplish its tasks. So far, it has been relying on the U.S. to provide either troops or critical capabilities whenever the operations require them. It is not so clear if the U.S. will disengage from NATO as Kay proposes. Nevertheless, the new American strategic approach clearly states that NATO has to make an effort to close the gap with the U.S. The U.S. expects that the draw down in the conflict of Afghanistan will encourage its European allies to invest in capabilities. The Alliance's level of ambition should be the reference to that effort. However, this level of ambition must consider both European members' responsibilities and the likelihood of U.S. participation and support to a future NATO operation.

## Conclusion

In this monograph, the author tries to answer the question whether the current NATO military capabilities are adequate to reach the organization's level of ambition. He conducts his research to demonstrate that the military capabilities of NATO members are not sufficient to reach the organization's level of ambition. In his hypothesis, he establishes that, to achieve that goal, NATO requires the participation of the U.S. in every MJO and, at least, its support to any

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[187] Sean Kay, "A New Kind of NATO," *Foreign Policy* (posted by Steven M. Walt), http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/11/a_new_kind_of_nato (accessed 15 January 2012).

SJO that requires critical capabilities. The evidences that the author provides in this work prove that hypothesis true.

The Alliance established its current level of ambition in 2006. So far, NATO has never needed to commit forces up to that level of two MJOs and six SJOs. The Alliance is currently performing two MJOs and three SJOs. During seven months in 2011, there were five SJOs— including the already finished operations in Iraq and Libya. Since this level of commitment is still below the organization's level of ambition, the author asserts that any negative conclusion about the execution of those missions serves to demonstrate flaws in the organization's ability to reach its level of ambition.

Regarding the operations that the Alliance has undertaken, the analysis in this paper shows that the SJOs do not entail an overwhelming burden to the Alliance in terms of troops. In the case of NATO Training Mission in Iraq, the real requirement was to execute a mission totally new for the Alliance and develop doctrine and mechanisms to perform it. Neither the amount of troops nor the duration of the mission has been a challenge for the Alliance. This is the case of most SJOs. However, the operation in Libya proves that, when the mission demands critical capabilities, NATO still struggles to provide them. In this case, the U.S. decided to step down from its initial leading role and allow NATO to take the lead of the operation. Despite this, the U.S. was the larger contributor with forces and equipment to the mission. Therefore, the conclusion is that the SJOs do not normally challenge the Alliance's ability to reach its level of ambition. However, if the execution of any of these operations requires the employment of critical capabilities, NATO has to rely on the support of the U.S. to accomplish the mission.

The examples of MJOs show that they normally entail the deployment of a significant amount of forces during long periods. Although the execution of these operations also requires critical capabilities, the key factor here is the amount of troops. The study of the MJOs in Kosovo and Afghanistan shows NATO struggle to provide forces to two different theaters. However, from the level of ambition's point of view, the organization has been able to reach that goal.

Therefore, the questions are if the deployments were sustainable and in what circumstances. The two case studies present two entirely different circumstances. KFOR was a peace enforcement operation that followed the withdrawal of Serbian troops from the region. This operation developed in a favorable way and NATO could draw down forces relatively quickly. In addition, the reluctance of the U.S. to commit more forces in the Balkans provided an unusual balance between American and European forces. Thus, considering a Kosovo-type MJO, the conclusion could be that NATO is able to reach its level of ambition. Nevertheless, the conflict in Afghanistan gives a different perspective to this discussion.

Afghanistan posed a challenge to the Alliance because this operation has been increasingly demanding more forces. NATO perceived that the levels of usability of its forces were not enough to accomplish the missions. Regardless of the drawdown of forces in the Balkans, NATO struggled to provide the needed amount of forces to ISAF. The deterioration of the situation in the country and the inability of NATO countries to increase the number of troops in a decisive manner forced the U.S. to commit more forces in 2009 and 2010. Today's American effort in Afghanistan reaches around seventy per cent of the total of forces. This operation provides a clear example of how decisive the participation of the U.S. in NATO operations could be. Therefore, the conclusion is that the ability of NATO to reach its level of ambition depends on how demanding the MJOs are. In the case of an MJO like Afghanistan, NATO would not be able to reach the level of ambition without the participation of the U.S.

When NATO established the level of ambition, the organization was trying not only to reassess the strategic environment but also to give a new impulse to its capabilities initiative. However, the effort regarding capabilities that the members have made so far has not been enough to achieve the organization's goals. When the Alliance approved a new strategic concept in 2010, the nations committed once more to provide the required capabilities that the Alliance demands in view of the current strategic environment. However, neither the failure of the

capabilities initiatives nor the approval of the strategic concept have led the Alliance to revisit its level of ambition.

The operations in Libya and Afghanistan prove that NATO is far from being the robust organization it wants to be. The members' budgetary challenges have delayed the attainment of the organization's goals. Any new initiative to resolve this situation requires the commitment of its members to fulfill what they agreed on about modernization and capabilities. The same approach is applicable to the usability and sustainability of troops. This failure in developing capabilities evidently hinders NATO's ability to reach its level of ambition. Since, the U.S. has covered the gaps so far, the Alliance has been able to execute simultaneously up to two MJOs and five SJOs. However, as the author stated before, the participation of the U.S. has been necessary to achieve such goal.

As a member of the Alliance, the U.S. takes part in NATO operations. However, this participation has frequently been a burden to the U.S. The Americanization of the effort in Afghanistan and the American role in Libya prove that the participation of the U.S. is the key to the success of NATO operations. In a broader context, these examples lead to the conclusion that, when NATO undertakes demanding operations, U.S. participation and support enable the organization to reach its level of ambition. However, the new orientation of the U.S. strategy places American interests away from Europe. Therefore, NATO should reevaluate the level of ambition in light of a realistic assessment on capabilities that also considers the possible evolution of the U.S. strategic orientation.

In summary, the Alliance's ability to reach its level of ambition without a preponderant American support does not only depend on the type and number of operations. The key consideration though would be the requirements of those operations in terms of critical capabilities—as in the case of Libya—or amount of troops—as the 130,000 soldiers presently deployed in Afghanistan. The examples in this paper show that the more demanding the operation, the more the Alliance needs the U.S. support to succeed. Therefore, as a final

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conclusion, the author asserts that the only way for the Alliance to ensure its ability to reach its level of ambition in the current strategic context is to count on the U.S. commitment to support NATO operations.

Finally, the author states that the Alliance established its level of ambition more as a goal to achieve the needed capabilities than as a way to use the means at hand to meet the challenges of the organization. Nowadays, the two premises in which NATO based its decision proved wrong. First, the Alliance has not been able to develop the capabilities envisioned. Second, the U.S. new strategic guidance opens the possibility to a reduction of American participation in European affairs. Thus, the Alliance needs to adapt to the new circumstances. The members of the organization have to develop capabilities that allow the organization to reduce its dependence from the U.S. In addition, NATO should reassess the level of ambition considering the new strategic context. The best option is to establish a level of ambition that the European nations could reach without a heavy reliance on U.S. support. The issue though is that this new level of ambition would not probably meet all the organization's challenges and threats. Thus, the risks of the Alliance could increase to an unacceptable level.

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