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**Into the Breach:**  
**Why NATO Needs to Update its Strategic Concept**

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the United States Naval War College, Newport, RI in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of National Security Affairs.

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February 12, 2018

As North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) heads of state and government convened in Lisbon in November 2010, the Alliance unveiled a new public-facing document designed to explain its *raison d'être*: the Strategic Concept. It is a document of compromise, designed to reaffirm its collective defense commitment, rationalize ongoing engagement in Afghanistan, and underscore NATO's role in international security..<sup>1</sup> The 2010 Strategic Concept introduces emerging security challenges at the start of the decade and offers potential mitigations, such as cyber, missile defense, and counter-proliferation..<sup>2</sup> The document also reflects the NATO of 2010: flush with success from a decade of enlargement, wary of Russia's aggressive actions in Georgia, and committed to long-term support for Kabul. The document was a signature achievement for the then- Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen..<sup>3</sup>

The by-line of the 2010 Strategic Concept is "Active Engagement, Modern Defense," a phrase that remains relevant regardless of future security challenges. But does the document's content, the closest the Alliance has to a "national security strategy," still apply in 2018? The world has faced many challenges since 2010, with NATO at the forefront of many of them: conflict in Libya, civil war in Syria, instability on Turkey's border, the rise of ISIS, revanchist Russia, and a stubbornly unstable Afghanistan. Recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States, combined with pressure from Washington for NATO to take a proactive role in counterterrorism, apply further impetus for renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> Martynas Zapolskis, "1999 and 2010 NATO Strategic Concepts: A Comparative Analysis," Vilnius: Institute of International Relations and Political Science, January 2012.

<sup>2</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Olga Kolesnichenko, "New Secretary General Gives New Vision," Atlantic-Community.org, August 30, 2010, [www.atlantic-community.org](http://www.atlantic-community.org).

The NATO Alliance must update the substance of its Strategic Concept by 2020 but make revisions within the framework of three “essential core tasks:” Collective Defense, Crisis Management, and Cooperative Security. This will allow NATO to maintain the delicate balance of competing threat perceptions among its members, while refreshing its content to maintain credibility and relevance with the international community, political leaders, and allied publics.

This analysis does not consider the Alliance’s modern relevance. A cottage industry of pundits question the “future of NATO” every four to eight years regardless of the political climate.<sup>4, 5</sup> Rather, this study examines how the 2010 Strategic Concept can adapt to preserve its relevance. An exploration of the concept’s Collective Defense section considers the threats NATO faces and the capabilities it needs to counter them. A discussion of how NATO must approach security challenges outside its borders is addressed within the framework of the concept’s Crisis Management section. NATO’s partnerships are an essential source of its strength, and the centerpiece of its Cooperative Security Strategy section. Finally, this analysis considers pitfalls for updating the Strategic Concept, coupled with steps that can mitigate those dangers.

## **Collective Defense**

Collective Defense is the first “core essential” task identified by the 2010 Strategic Concept, and remains the foundation of the alliance since its inception in 1949. Under the aegis of collective defense, the 2010 document describes both the contemporary security environment as well as “Defense and Deterrence.”<sup>6</sup> Few would suggest that the security environment today

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<sup>4</sup> Judy Dempsey, “Whither NATO?” Carnegie Europe – Strategic Europe, June 19, 2014, [www.carnegieeurope.eu](http://www.carnegieeurope.eu).

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Shapiro, “This is How NATO Ends,” Foreign Policy, February 15, 2017, [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com).

<sup>6</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010.

has not evolved significantly since 2010, with the increase of malign activities from Moscow and continued spread of transnational terrorism being most salient. While this core task remains valid, allies should update the Strategic Concept's language on threats, deterrence posture, defense investment, and new capabilities.

***Threat Perceptions: Many Foreign Cooks Make Multilateral Soup.*** The Strategic Concept addresses the "Security Environment" of 2010.<sup>7</sup> This section's language does not single out Russia as a threat, and makes broad statements about nuclear proliferation, terrorism, instability, cyber, energy, and the environment.<sup>8</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, the enlargement of the Alliance into Central and Eastern Europe compelled NATO to balance the threat perceptions of its member states. Russia's use of "hybrid" or "gray zone" warfare to undermine the sovereignty of its neighbors is a level of aggression not observed since Moscow's 2008 intervention against Georgia.<sup>9</sup> Allies on NATO's Eastern Flank such as Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States, have serious concerns following Russia's malign actions in 2014 against Ukraine, and brace for Moscow's next move. Mediterranean allies focus on instability in North Africa, the Sahel, and the Levant, and insist NATO keep a balanced focus on "southern flank" challenges in cooperation with the European Union.<sup>10, 11</sup> Scandinavian allies see threats both

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Page 10-13.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict" Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2015, Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, Page 1.

<sup>10</sup> Judy Dempsey, "NATO's Reaction to Its Two Threats," Carnegie Europe – Strategic Europe, September 4, 2014. [www.carnegieeurope.eu](http://www.carnegieeurope.eu).

<sup>11</sup> "NATO: Warsaw and Beyond," US and the Americas Programme Meeting Study, London: Chatham House Royal Institute of International Affairs, June 9-10, 2016. [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org).

from Moscow and terrorism,<sup>12, 13</sup> while Turkey has unique security concerns along its southern border.<sup>14</sup> This diverse range of issues for an Alliance of now 29 countries (since Montenegro's accession in the summer of 2017).<sup>15</sup> makes forging consensus on threats increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, an updated Strategic Concept should offer more specific language on threats, from the by-name identification of terrorist groups to calling out the unhelpful role Russia plays in preserving international stability.

***Deterrence Posture.*** Since 2010, the Alliance has strengthened its defense and deterrence posture to address a range of threats. For example, the Alliance agreed at the 2012 Chicago Summit to increase investment in missile defenses and Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance.<sup>16, 17</sup> Following 2014's events in Ukraine, allies developed the NATO Readiness Action Plan, an initiative to increase the number of ready-forces available to react to a crisis, and improved the agility of the NATO Response Force (NRF).<sup>18</sup> This included the commissioning of a "very high readiness" joint task force, able to rapidly react to an emerging crisis much faster than the NRF. In Wales in 2014, the Alliance decided to bolster its posture on

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<sup>12</sup> Globalsecurity.org, "Denmark – Defense Policy," [www.Globalsecurity.org](http://www.Globalsecurity.org), Accessed 5 January 2018.

<sup>13</sup> "Norway to Reorganize Defense Spending in Response to 'Unpredictable' Russia," Defense News, July 1, 2016, Accessed January 10, 2018, [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com).

<sup>14</sup> "Why Turkey called a NATO Article Four consultation," The Economist, London, 28 July 2015, [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

<sup>15</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Montenegro joins as 29<sup>th</sup> Ally," Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 5, 2017, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

<sup>16</sup> "Chicago Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Chicago: May 20, 2012. Paragraph 58. [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

<sup>17</sup> "Summit Declaration on Defense Capabilities: Toward NATO 2020," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Chicago: May 20, 2012, Paragraph 4, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>18</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cardiff: September 5, 2014, Paragraph 8, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

its eastern flank, implementing “Enhanced Forward Presence,” the rotation of multinational battlegroups to the three Baltic States and Poland, and a sister program known as “Tailored Forward Presence” in the Black Sea region.<sup>19</sup> An updated Strategic Concept should account for these developments.

***Defense Investment.*** Among the most critical of the deliverables for the Obama administration at both the Wales and Warsaw Summits was to gain commitment by allies to increase defense spending toward the NATO benchmark of two percent gross domestic product. The Wales Summit declaration explicitly states the need to move toward meeting the two percent guideline, halt declines in defense spending, meet NATO capability targets (the “pot luck” dinner list of military capabilities across the member states), and presses allies to invest at least 20 percent of their defense spending on new equipment, research, and development.<sup>20, 21</sup> These elements have a light touch in the 2010 Strategic Concept, with the oft-cited two percent guideline not featuring at all. Reiterating the developments in Wales and Warsaw would strengthen an updated concept.

***New Capabilities.*** Defense capabilities development remains an important pillar of NATO in the post-Cold War period. The 2010 concept introduces Missile Defense as a “core element” of collective defense,<sup>22</sup> and since then, NATO implemented many of the components of the European Phased Adaptive Approach program, including missile defense radars, sea-based

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<sup>19</sup> “NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence,” NATO Fact Sheet, Brussels: May 2017, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>20</sup> “Wales Summit Declaration,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cardiff: September 5, 2014, Paragraph 14, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>21</sup> “Warsaw Summit Communique,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, Paragraphs 33-34, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>22</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010, Page 16.

sensors and interceptors, and ground-based interceptors in Romania. In 2018, missile interceptors based in Poland will come online, making NATO Missile defense a mature program worthy of note in an updated concept. While the 2010 concept speaks of NATO's defensive-only role in Cyber in broad terms, both the Warsaw and Wales summits identified Cyber as a "core element" of NATO's capabilities.<sup>23, 24</sup> The elevation of cyber and evolution of other capabilities deserves new language.

Collective Defense is the anchor NATO's existence and is as relevant in 2018 as in 1949. However, the world's geopolitical situation evolved since 2010, and new technologies and capabilities present new challenges. To keep this pillar strong, NATO must refresh its strategic vision related to collective defense in a new Strategic Concept.

## **Crisis Management**

Crisis Management is the second "core essential" task in the 2010 Strategic Concept, and reflects the important geostrategic role NATO plays in dealing with defense and security challenges that impact transatlantic security. The concept states that "Crises and conflicts beyond NATO's borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations. NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, stabilize post-conflict situations, and support reconstruction."<sup>25</sup> Given NATO's overseas operations since 2010, it is important to refresh the Strategic Concept's language to reaffirm this

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<sup>23</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cardiff: September 5, 2014, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>24</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>25</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010, Page 19.



role, but also underscore the likelihood of a long-term commitment whenever the Alliance justifies an out-of-area mission.

***Afghanistan.*** In 2014, NATO concluded its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission and launched the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), designed to continue to train and advise Afghan forces in developing their security and defense capabilities..<sup>26</sup> While it is easy to criticize this mission as an endless, costly escapade, there is no other multilateral institution capable of providing the doctrine, training, and expertise required to help Afghanistan get its defense and security house in order. Since 2002, NATO has validated the need to help forge long-term stability, most recently in commitments to the financial sustainment of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces..<sup>27</sup> NATO will continue to play a role in Afghanistan for decades, and the next strategic concept must revalidate this.

***Libya: 2011 Intervention.*** NATO's intervention in Libya was a victory for those who subscribe to a values-based foreign policy..<sup>28</sup> The Alliance, with a mandate from the United Nations, took action (when nobody else would) to stop a brutal dictator from slaughtering his own people. The other half of the Libya story is less elegant: major shortcomings in NATO's ability to provide adequate intelligence, targeting support for airstrikes, and a dearth of precision guided munitions exposed serious capability gaps..<sup>29</sup> NATO's quick victory against Gaddafi left it unsure (and member states unwilling) to take on the post-conflict stabilization aside from token

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<sup>26</sup> Lynne O'Donnell, "U.S., NATO mark end of mission in Afghanistan." *USA Today*, December 28, 2014, [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)

<sup>27</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, Paragraphs 33-34, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>28</sup> Shadi Hamid, "Everyone says the Libya intervention was a failure. They're wrong," Brookings Institute, Washington: April 12, 2016, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, "Open Wide: How Libya revealed the huge gap between U.S. and European military might." *New Republic*, April 26, 2011, [www.newrepublic.com](http://www.newrepublic.com)

efforts at defense institution building. An updated concept could highlight the need for allies to maintain adequate defense capabilities to deploy expeditionary forces able to take on Libya-like contingencies, both pre- and post-conflict.

***Role in countering ISIS.*** Despite initial reluctance, allies have deployed a modest effort to support the global counter-Islamic State (ISIS) coalition..<sup>30</sup> With a security threat on its immediate border, and with Turkey seeking Article 4 consultations to discuss its implications, it was essential for NATO to take action. While NATO does not have a combat role, it does provide important airborne command and control, intelligence, and training for Iraqi forces..<sup>31</sup> Given the threat ISIS poses to North American and European populations, territory, and forces, it is essential for the Alliance to have a strategic basis to explain its actions, and the next Strategic Concept must articulate this need.

***Role in the Maritime Security.*** NATO's maritime forces play an important role in regional security, with its now-concluded Operations ACTIVE ENDEAVOR and OCEAN SHIELD helping to secure the Mediterranean and Horn of Africa from transnational maritime threats. At the Warsaw summit, the Alliance agreed to launch Operation SEA GUARDIAN..<sup>32</sup> This maritime security mission sets the stage for a long-term NATO maritime effort focused on counterterrorism, weapons counter-proliferation, improving maritime situational awareness, and

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<sup>30</sup> Bethan McKernan, "NATO to join the US-led coalition fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria." The Independent, May 25, 2017, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk).

<sup>31</sup> "Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels: May 25, 2017, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>32</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, Paragraphs 90-94, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

capacity building..<sup>33</sup> The 2010 concept does not address the importance of NATO's maritime operations, which should be included in a refreshed document.

Regardless of geopolitical conditions, crisis management remains an essential core task of the Alliance has been the life-blood NATO cohesion since the Soviet threat dissolved. To retain the character of a multi-dimensional alliance that is about more than just collective defense, the next Strategic Concept must reinvigorate its Crisis Management language.

### **Cooperative Security**

The 2010 Strategic Concept identifies partnerships in the “Cooperative Security” section..<sup>34</sup> NATO *partners* are distinct from NATO *allies*, and for the Alliance, the term “partner” describing its relationships with countries that are not Washington Treaty signatories. The 2010 concept expresses the value the Alliance places upon partnerships: “The promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe. These partnerships make a concrete and valued contribution to the success of NATO's fundamental tasks.”<sup>35</sup> Through its post-Cold War history, NATO has used partnerships to forge closer political, military, and interoperability bonds with countries who are not members. This includes partnership with the European Union, its unique relationship with Russia, and bonds with non-NATO countries. Many NATO partners deploy troops alongside NATO; notably Sweden, Finland, and Georgia..<sup>36</sup> While the 2010 concept addresses NATO's complex “partnership” with Russia, the European Union (EU), and

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<sup>33</sup> “Operation Sea Guardian,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels: October 27, 2016, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>34</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010, Page 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, Page 26.

<sup>36</sup> “Partners,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, November 11, 2015, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

other important relationships, an updated Strategic Concept must reflect developments since the Lisbon Summit.

**Russia.** The 2010 concept's includes language describing the alliance's unique relationship with Moscow..<sup>37</sup> Authors developed the language not long after Russia's August 2008 intervention in Georgia, following which NATO suspended meetings of the NATO-Russia Council and condemned Moscow's actions against Tbilisi..<sup>38</sup> Georgia is an important NATO partner, major contributor to ISAF, and is the largest non-NATO troop contributor in RSM..<sup>39</sup> Since 2010, Russia's revanchist activities deteriorated its relationship with NATO even further. These actions include: the February 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea..<sup>40</sup> direct support of pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass (Ukraine); its involvement in shooting down Malaysian Airlines flight 17 (MH17) in July 2014..<sup>41</sup> threats of nuclear targeting against Denmark..<sup>42</sup> violations of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty..<sup>43</sup> violations of Turkish airspace; military

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<sup>37</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010, Page 29-30.

<sup>38</sup> Marcel De Haas, "NATO-Russia relations after the Georgian Conflict" Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael), April 2009, <https://www.clingendael.org>.

<sup>39</sup> "Georgian soldier killed in Afghan convoy attack: coalition," Reuters, August 3, 2017, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

<sup>40</sup> Maria Snegovaya, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine," Institute for the Study of War, 2015, Washington DC: Page 9. Accessed February 28, 2018, [www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org)

<sup>41</sup> Taylor Wofford, "Russian State Media Says CIA Shot Down Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17," Newsweek, July 22, 2014, [www.newsweek.com](http://www.newsweek.com).

<sup>42</sup> Richard Milne, "Russia delivers nuclear warning to Denmark," Financial Times. March 22, 2015. [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com)

<sup>43</sup> Michael Gordon, "Russia Has Deployed Missile Barred by Treaty, U.S. General Tells Congress," New York Times, March 8, 2017, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

intervention in Syria and support for Assad; and accusations or suspicions of interference in the elections of NATO countries, to include France,<sup>44</sup> Germany,<sup>45</sup> Italy,<sup>46</sup> and the United States.<sup>47</sup>

With Moscow's abysmal track record of cooperation, a 2020 Strategic Concept should address Russia's recalcitrance head-on. The NATO Summit pronouncements from Wales and Warsaw offer sharp condemnation of Russia,<sup>48, 49</sup> and this strong message must be brought forward into a 2020 Strategic Concept. Such language also reinforces the need to continue increasing allies' defense investment in conventional forces and cyber capabilities.

**European Union.** The 2010 Strategic Concept states that the Alliance seeks to "...fully strengthen the strategic partnership with the EU, in the spirit of mutual openness, transparency, and complementarity and respect for the autonomy and institutional integrity of both organizations."<sup>50</sup> However, the practical cooperation between NATO and the EU is a perpetual challenge, and has proven difficult to translate a desire for increased partnership into tangible deliverables.<sup>51</sup> Disagreements between Cyprus and Turkey complicate EU-NATO interaction.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Laura Daniels, "How Russia hacked the French election." Politico, April 23, 2017, [www.politico.eu](http://www.politico.eu).

<sup>45</sup> Simon Shuster, "How Russian Voters fueled the Rise of Germany's Far Right." *Time*, September 25, 2017, [www.time.com](http://www.time.com).

<sup>46</sup> "Russia's Putin denies meddling in Italian election." Reuters, January 11, 2018, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

<sup>47</sup> David Sanger, "Putin Ordered 'Influence Campaign' Aimed at U.S. Election, Report Says," *New York Times*, January 6, 2017, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>48</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cardiff: September 5, 2014, Paragraph 16, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>49</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, Paragraph 9, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>50</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Active Engagement, Modern Defense: Strategic Concept, Brussels, 2010, Page 28.

<sup>51</sup> William Drozdiak, "Why can't NATO and the EU just get along?" Brookings Institute, September 28, 2015, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

In addition, the United Kingdom, in light of London's forthcoming exit from the EU, is reluctant to green-light cooperation for fear of weakening NATO's primacy in defense matters..<sup>53</sup>

However, the EU's deep involvement in European (and extra-regional) defense and security matters is a fact of geopolitical life.

Rather than reprise boilerplate text of cooperation and complementarity, a new Strategic Concept should consider mapping out tangible and achievable areas of EU-NATO cooperation for the decade, such as codifying both organization's collaboration in the Mediterranean to alleviate the refugee crisis..<sup>54</sup>

**Bilateral Partnerships.** Perhaps the most important evolution in Cooperative Security over the past decade has been the expansion of NATO's bilateral partnerships (defined as between NATO *as an institution* and a particular country). NATO's partners provide critical forces and capabilities to its operations, and its partnership programs allow those countries to 1) develop interoperability; 2) participate in training, schooling, and exercises; and 3) deploy forces alongside NATO in combat. Finland, Sweden, Georgia, and Ukraine are all known for being robust contributors to operations that have deployed forces alongside NATO in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya..<sup>55</sup> Beyond a core of key partners contributing to military operations, NATO enjoys strong bilateral "global" partnerships with Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, and Pakistan. This adds to a robust group of

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<sup>52</sup> Robbie Gramer and Kavitha Surana, "Cracking the Cyprus Code," *Foreign Policy*, March 14, 2017, [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com)

<sup>53</sup> Robin Emmott. "Brexit casts doubt over new EU and NATO defense strategy," Reuters, June 27, 2016, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

<sup>54</sup> "Warsaw Summit Communique," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Warsaw: July 9, 2016, Paragraphs 90-94, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>55</sup> "Partners," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, November 11, 2015, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

forums that include 21 partners participating in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, seven partners in the Mediterranean Dialogue, and four Persian Gulf partners in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative..<sup>56</sup>

Moving ahead, a new Strategic Concept should advance the important role of NATO's partnerships, in particular with "enhanced partners." At the 2014 Wales Summit, the Alliance launched the Partner Interoperability Initiative (PII) to provide greater "ease of use" for Finland and Sweden (both have been threatened by Moscow since 2010) in its interactions with institutional NATO..<sup>57</sup> Summit declarations from the Chicago, Wales, and Warsaw summits all reflect advancements in bilateral partnerships under the aegis of Cooperative Security – all of which should be reflected in an updated Strategic Concept.

### **Pandora's Box: Why Forging a New Strategic Concept Could Be a Disaster**

The safest approach for the alliance, it can be counter argued, is to not approach the issue of the Strategic Concept at all – and rather declare that the 2010 concept remains relevant and press forward with more urgent issues. There are four compelling arguments why the alliance should avoid opening the Strategic Concept. First, despite Russia's malign actions, NATO remains an alliance divided over the intensity of that threat, and moving the language from summits into an updated concept might be unpalatable in select capitals..<sup>58</sup> Second, some allies will avoid being "boxed in" with commitments to increase defense spending, and others will argue that multiple allies make pledges that result in no action. These detractors – Washington

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<sup>56</sup> "Partners," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, November 11, 2015, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

<sup>57</sup> "Partnership Interoperability Initiative." North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, June 7, 2017, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int)

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Keller, "A New Strategic Concept for NATO?" American Enterprise Institute, September 2017, [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org).

likely among them - will only be further aggravated by a perception of empty promises..<sup>59</sup> Third, it can be argued that the Alliance's interventions in Afghanistan and Libya were not successful (or legal), and came at too high a price, making a reaffirmation of NATO's role in crisis management foolhardy..<sup>60</sup> Finally, while partnerships bring benefits, some governments (both allied and partner) might be reluctant to feature cooperation too prominently..<sup>61</sup> One can assert that if a country wants to participate fully in NATO exercises and operations, they should formally join. These four issues, combined with allies' conflicting signals from the United States on NATO's importance (Washington is a key leader and indispensable broker in Strategic Concept development), leave critics hopeful that NATO will leave the 2010 Strategic Concept well enough alone. However, these issues can be mitigated through deft diplomacy and engagement.

### **Moving Forward**

NATO has continued to reaffirm the three core tasks of Collective Defense, Crisis Management, and Cooperative Security at summits since 2010..<sup>62</sup> This trifecta provides a relevant framework (with sly alliteration) to communicate why the Alliance still exists after 69 years, two fifths of those since the fall of the Berlin Wall when many declared NATO "dead." This analysis concludes that there is ample justification for NATO to update its Strategic Concept, with significant developments under each of the three pillars. NATO's Collective

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<sup>59</sup> Stanley Sloan, "Don't Expect a New Strategic Concept Anytime Soon," The Atlantic Council, February 24, 2017, [www.atlanticcouncil.org](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org).

<sup>60</sup> Ademola Abass, "Assessing NATO's Involvement in Libya," United Nations University, October 27, 2010, [www.unu.edu](http://www.unu.edu)

<sup>61</sup> Suvi Turtiainen, "Despite Crimea, Finland and Sweden stay wary of NATO," European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2014, [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu).

<sup>62</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Cardiff: September 5, 2014, Paragraph 16, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).



Defense must continue its road to rejuvenation as Moscow threatens the Alliance's Eastern Flank. Interventions in Afghanistan and Libya demonstrate NATO's importance outside its borders, and the Alliance must preserve its readiness to quickly act in the face of threats to transatlantic security. NATO's partnerships expand a global common of networked security. However, an endeavor to update the Strategic Concept is not without risk, with a case to be made that timing is wrong for a new NATO strategy. To mitigate this risk, three steps will make it easier to forge consensus:

***Leadership.*** First, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg should take the lead on the update. This is a lesson learned from the 2010 document, when Secretary General Rasmussen played an active role in shaping the text with input from senior members of the allied missions to NATO..<sup>63</sup> It cannot be a bottom-up approach that becomes mired in NATO bureaucracy to avoid "too many pens." Nevertheless, Allies with important leadership roles must play an active part.

***Simplify the Process.*** Second, the Alliance should avoid a repeat of the "Group of Experts" approach from the 2010 concept. Since the recommended goal is to refresh the document along the lines of the 2010 document, a lengthy process of consultation across Allied capitals would not be productive. The process in 2010, led by former Secretary of State Madeline Albright was valuable to producing a balanced document, but is unnecessary for a course correction..<sup>64</sup>

***Begin Now.*** Finally, allies should commit itself to update the document by the end of 2020 at the next NATO Summit in July 2018. This would provide Secretary General Stoltenberg

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<sup>63</sup> Patrick Keller, "A New Strategic Concept for NATO?" American Enterprise Institute, September 2017, [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org)

<sup>64</sup> "NATO's New Strategic Concept: Group of Experts," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Accessed January 17, 2018, [www.nato.int](http://www.nato.int).

the mandate to initiate work and have a direct hand in its formation. Stoltenberg has proven to be an inclusive and balanced leader who can maneuver the delicate range of issues and perceptions. Finally, it also provides a low-cost “deliverable” for the 2018 summit, with potential high impact.

Though NATO existed throughout the Cold War without a “Strategic Concept,” the 1990’s Alliance determined that a public-facing document would deliver an important message to publics on why a Cold War institution still had relevance. Every change in U.S. administration or build-up Summit sparks a range of articles from skeptics who question whether the alliance is still relevant. With each iteration, the pundits, not NATO, are swept into the dustbin of history. An updated Strategic Concept in 2020 sends a clear message that the Alliance is there to stay and plots its course for the next decade.