

Defence and Force Planning in Historical Perspective: NATO as a Case Study

*By Holger Pfeiffer**

The purpose of this essay is to offer information and reflections on defence and force planning in historical perspective, using NATO as a case study. To this end, I shall start with some basic definitions of the terms used, and for a better understanding I intend to place the definitions in a broader context, also embracing operational planning and the relationship between operational and defence planning, including the issue of force generation. While the basic definitions will be valid for NATO as well as national defence planning, there are actually some significant differences between the two, and I shall briefly discuss these differences between NATO and national planning, before homing in on my proper subject, the development of NATO defence and force planning. I shall then consider in some detail the relationship between defence and force planning in a NATO context, briefly refer to the defence planning disciplines other than force planning, and explain why for the rest of my essay I shall focus primarily on force planning, as the most comprehensive of all defence planning disciplines. In order to provide the historical perspective, I shall go back to the late seventies and address chronologically developments through the eighties and nineties to the present time, trying not to get lost in detail but to identify the salient features of the developments over the last 25 to 30 years.

1. Definitions

1.1 Formal definitions and their implications

I had originally planned to start this part of my essay by giving the formal NATO definitions of the terms, but when I asked my previous office, the Division for Defence Policy and Planning to provide me with these, I found out to my surprise that with one half exception, there are no agreed NATO definitions of these terms.

* Holger Pfeiffer is former Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Defence Policy and Planning of NATO. This essay is based on his lecture delivered to the Higher Command Studies Course of the Baltic Defence College in autumn 2007.

The half exception concerns the term defence planning, for which AAP-42, the NATO Glossary of Standardisation Terms and Definitions contains the following definition: “The political and military process used by nations to provide the capabilities needed to meet their defence commitments. Note: NATO defence planning takes into account the political, economic, technological and military factors that influence the development of capabilities to implement the Alliance strategy.” (NATO, 2007:3). This definition was agreed by the Terminology Panel of the NATO Committee for Standardisation (NCSTP). But when it was forwarded to the Military Committee Terminology Conference for inclusion in AAP-6 (the NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions), it was rejected. Several nations wanted to change it, in different ways, and SHAPE suggested that both the words “defence” and “planning” were well understood and that there was little to be gained by developing an agreed definition.

For force planning and operational planning, there are no NATO agreed definitions per se, only some explanations or elaborations of the terms in agreed documents which could serve as informal definitions. A major reason for this lack of agreed formal definitions is probably the fact that the way in which nations organise the work which they conduct under the heading of force or defence planning (or some other terms such as military planning) differs from nation to nation. Any attempt to find a definition which in a meaningful way covers all these differences is likely to be quite difficult, and it is indeed questionable whether the effort of reaching unanimous agreement among 26 nations on such a definition would be worthwhile. Nevertheless, we need a common understanding of what it is that we are, and will be, and for this purpose I suggest that we begin with some fairly simple, basic definitions, which later we may wish to develop further.

As the broadest, overarching term I would suggest defence-related planning, which embraces two broad planning areas, defence planning and operational planning. Defence planning is the planning activity that deals with establishing and maintaining armed forces over time, so that they are available when needed, and operational planning is about employing and deploying them. Both of these broad planning areas can be broken down into more specific planning disciplines: operational planning, for example, into contingency planning or crisis response planning, and defence

planning into force planning, armaments planning, logistics planning and a number of others which I shall return to a little later.

Before getting into these details, however, I should like to address briefly the relationship between these two broad areas, operational and defence planning, and more particularly the issue of which, if any, is in the lead, or which is driving which. Conceptually, they are in a chicken and egg relationship: defence planning must provide the forces which are needed to execute existing or expected operational plans. In that sense, looking at the relationship as a continuing and evolving process, operational planning has the lead and defence planning must base itself on and react to the requirements of operational planning. On the other hand, at any given time, realistic operational plans must be based on the forces and their capabilities that exist, or will exist, at the time of the operation, in other words, on what defence planning has provided. In that sense, defence planning is in the lead. In real life, this chicken and egg problem is as unproblematic as it is for chicken and eggs: they happily exist in an interrelationship in which the lead alternates continuously.

For NATO, however, one aspect of this interrelationship is considerably more problematic than for nations individually, which is the reason why I am addressing it here. That aspect concerns the actual provision of forces for operations. For nations and nationally led operations that is in principle quite simple: the same authority which decides on carrying out an operation also decides which of its forces it wants to use for the operation. For a NATO operation, however, an intermediate step is needed, the transfer of authority over specific forces from national command to NATO command, for the specific operation.

During the Cold War, this was foreseen in a fairly simple and straightforward way. We had, as operational plan, a General Defence Plan (GDP), which foresaw a role for, and assumed the availability of, almost all forces of the member nations (with some exceptions for forces to remain under national command). We had an Alert System, which, in case of an escalating crisis, foresaw the declaration of different alert measures and stages, some of which were to trigger off the transfer of authority. Within the force planning system, nations had committed their forces in different categories, such as “assigned” or “earmarked”, and the definition of these categories related to the possible transfer of authority. Assigned forces, for

example, were forces for which nations had committed themselves to transfer authority at the declaration of Reinforced Alert.

Although this system remained in principle in force for some time beyond the end of the Cold War, it became quickly apparent that, in practice, it would no longer be applicable in situations in which it was no longer expected that all nations would make available all of their forces, but only a small proportion of these forces would be needed. That led to the development of the force generation process as we now have it, and, within NATO, to a less direct relationship between defence planning and operational planning, or more specifically between the products of defence planning and the requirements of operations than previously, with potentially negative consequences for the credibility of both processes. Overcoming these negative consequences and ensuring an optimal relationship between defence and operational planning is one of the challenges the Alliance is still struggling with, as the perennial problems with meeting the CJSORs (Combined Joint Statement of Requirements) of current operations and the NATO Response Force (NRF) show.

1.2 Difference between national and NATO defence planning

These remarks on force generation have already led me into the second part of my essay, the identification of some significant differences between NATO defence planning and national defence planning. The most important of these is, in fact, the need to include, or to bring about, the notion of a commitment by participating nations to the Alliance, or more precisely, to meeting the requirements of the Alliance by, first of all, developing and maintaining the necessary forces, and secondly, through some form of force generation, making them (or an appropriate part of them) available when needed. Bringing about this kind of commitment, and providing the procedural framework, the practical arrangements and substantial justification for it, lies at the heart of NATO defence planning, and indeed at the heart of the Alliance, because being committed, and able, to come to each other's aid through a common effort is after all what an Alliance, and certainly this Alliance, is all about.

That is the reason why NATO defence planning, or force planning, has often been referred to as the glue which holds the Alliance together. In order to be able to perform this function, NATO defence planning needs

to address one other aspect which does not, or at least not nearly as prominently, figure in national defence planning - burden sharing. Nations can only be expected to make, and to maintain, their commitment to the Alliance, and more particularly their commitment of forces, if they are convinced that it is a reasonable commitment, and they will only be convinced of that if they have the impression that the other Allies are equally committed and that each is carrying a fair share of the overall burden.

NATO defence planning tries to meet this requirement in two ways. The first is by identifying the overall requirement, breaking it down into reasonable shares for each Ally and steering nations towards meeting such a reasonable share of the overall requirement. The second is to provide visibility, to show how well nations meet their share of the overall requirement. It is worth highlighting these as two closely related, but distinct aspects of burden sharing. That is also why, when the principle of burden sharing is addressed in NATO documents, it is usually formulated as the need for each member country to carry, and to be seen to carry, a fair share of the overall burden.

While thus commitment and burden sharing play a much more prominent role in NATO than in national defence planning, the reverse is true for the management of defence resources. Of course, NATO defence planning must take into account financial and economic constraints, as also recognised in the note which is part of the AAP-42 definition I quoted earlier, but it does, and can only do, so in a fairly general sense, for example when trying to assess the ability of a nation to contribute as a basis for determining that nation's fair share of the burden. For national defence planning, on the other hand, determining the precise size of the defence budget, or more precisely, enabling government and parliament to determine the defence budget in a sensible way, and then determining how, on what to spend that budget, are the central tasks which drive everything else.

In comparing NATO and national defence planning, one could go into considerably greater detail, not least in view of the significant differences which exist, as already mentioned, amongst the different national planning systems. For the purpose of this essay, however, which is intended to use NATO as a case study, it may suffice to have drawn attention to these

three important differences, concerning commitment, burden sharing and defence spending, as background to a closer look at NATO defence planning and force planning.

1.3 Defence planning and force planning

Let me recall the basic definitions I suggested earlier: defence-related planning consists of two broad areas, defence planning and operational planning, which both can be broken down into more specific planning disciplines. The defence planning disciplines, if one follows recent practice as for example reflected in the Comprehensive Political Guidance (CPG) agreed by Heads of State and Government at Riga, are force planning, armaments planning, C3-planning, logistics planning, air defence planning, civil emergency planning, nuclear planning and resource planning. I make the qualification “if one follows recent practice”, because the situation is not quite as clear and straightforward as this enumeration and also my very simple definitions might suggest. It is actually quite complex, both in historical perspective and in substance.

Historically, defence planning and force planning have, for a long time, been used as synonyms, and indeed to this day the NATO force planning procedure is set out in a document titled “Defence Planning Procedures”. Some of the disciplines, such as C3-planning and logistics planning have only fairly recently emerged as distinct disciplines, and the term armaments planning has, over the last twenty years or so, been used for quite disparate activities which had perhaps more to do with monitoring or managing armaments cooperation than with planning. Moreover, some of the planning disciplines, such as logistics, air defence and civil emergency, do not fit neatly into the distinction between defence planning and operational planning, because they include operational elements. Equally, resource planning, which in NATO terminology refers to planning for and the use of common funding (Military Budget and NATO Security Investment Programme – NSIP), embraces elements of defence planning and of conducting operations. A NATO Inter-Staff Group, established by the Secretary General, is currently working on a codification and streamlining of this often confusing terminology and, more substantially, of the underlying processes.

Even if one accepts the recent differentiation between defence planning as the broader and force planning as the more specific term, the fact remains that the two largely overlap and that force planning is by far the most comprehensive of the defence planning disciplines, which in essence also covers the subjects of many of the other disciplines such as armaments, C3, air defence and logistics, in which specialised bodies deal with their respective subjects in greater detail. For the rest of my essay, I shall therefore focus mainly on NATO force planning as *pars pro toto*.

I have already mentioned that there is no agreed definition of NATO force planning. By way of conclusion of this rather lengthy definitional part of my essay (which has however allowed us to look at a number of substantial issues as well), and as lead-in to the next part, the historical review, I offer you my personal definition of NATO force planning, as I also offered it to the NATO Defence Planning Symposium at Oberammergau at the beginning of 2007. According to that definition, NATO force planning is the process through which representatives of member countries, of the NATO Military Authorities and of the International Staff try to determine the force posture that should be at the disposal of the Alliance in order to enable it to carry out the tasks the Allies have agreed it should be able to carry out, and to influence national force plans in order to enable nations to contribute in a fair and reasonable way towards meeting the requirements of this force posture.

In presenting this definition to the Symposium, I drew their attention to three aspects which seemed to me to merit special attention. The first concerned the differences implied by this definition between NATO and national force planning, which I have already addressed. With the second, I emphasised that force planning is a truly joint and combined exercise. It is not something which the international staffs of the Alliance, military and civilian, do separately from, let alone in confrontation with, national staffs. Although much of the spadework, the drafting of documents, the initial formulation of proposals, is done by international staffs, all the key conditions are imposed, and all the key decisions taken collectively by national representatives. This should translate into a collective sense of ownership, which however is occasionally missing, or at least underdeveloped.

The third point which I highlighted is the deliberate use of the verb “try” in this definition. Its purpose is not only to signal that we may fail in what we try, for example with regard to influencing national force plans, which are the only ones that ultimately can deliver the required capabilities. It is also important to realise that force planning, and in particular its core element, the identification or definition of what is required, is not an exact science. We are in the business of making reasonable assumptions, assessments, estimates which, if we are good at it, may come close to being just about right. But we can never be sure about that. On the contrary, we can be pretty sure that we shall never be precisely right in anticipating what the Alliance may have to do, and in calculating what the Alliance may require in order to be able to do it. The precise terms of a number of our decisions, and the methods we apply in arriving at them (computer simulations, mathematical calculations) occasionally obscure that reality. It is worth recalling this, as a guard against unreasonable and unrealistic demands and expectations.

2. Historical evolution

Having established what is meant when we talk about NATO defence planning and force planning, let me offer you some observations on the development of this process over time. Since it so happens that I joined the Division of Defence Planning and Policy in NATO’s International Staff on September 1st, 1979, or 28 years ago, I shall rely essentially on my personal recollections. This may have the disadvantage of not being encyclopaedically complete, but it should have the advantage of being authentic, and perhaps also livelier and easier to follow than an academic historical overview. And, unless otherwise mentioned, I shall focus on force planning, since that is what I was mainly responsible for.

2.1 Factors of change

Even when presenting from a personal perspective, it is quite challenging to try to extract from the confusing multitude of day-to-day events the main threads which actually represent the evolution of defence and force planning. I thought therefore that, as a first step and as a structural device, it might be best if we reflected for a moment on what kind of changes we could expect and might be looking for, and what might be the factors which cause or drive the changes.

Beginning with the factors, the most obvious one concerns changes in the threat, or the risks and challenges our forces have to face. Over the last quarter of a century we have, of course, seen quite a number of changes in this respect. Another factor is the evolution of technology, which defence planning has to take into account. Yet others, which partly overlap with and embrace, but go beyond the previous two, are changes in the security environment, or even broader, in the general political environment which governs defence planning, such as economic developments and the attitudes towards, and relationships between, different international organisations. And, lastly, occasionally, change is brought about for its own sake, usually under an attractive name such as reform or transformation, to meet a political requirement, or desire, for action.

What kind of changes in defence planning might be caused by these factors? Basically, there are two types: changes in the subject, or objects of defence planning, i.e. in the size, structure, equipment etc. of the armed forces, and changes in the process, in the way in which the different planning disciplines, and in particular force planning are conducted. So these are the factors, and types of changes, which I shall try to trace as I present you with my personal reminiscences of the last 27 or 28 years.

2.2 Evolution of NATO defence planning during the 1970s and 1980s

My point of departure is the situation at the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties. Let me recall a few key points which characterised that situation, as it affected force planning. The Cold War was still going on, and indeed was escalating towards what we now know was its last peak, with the controversy and threats over the dual track decision of NATO, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, martial law in Poland, and the massive rearmaments programme of President Reagan. The latter drove the Soviet Union into an arms race which it could not win and which therefore was seen by some as putting the Soviet leaders before a dangerous “window of opportunity”, which might tempt them to use force as long as they might still consider themselves as conventionally stronger than the West.

NATO force planning, at that time, was conducted in accordance with a procedure agreed in 1971 which remained in force, unchanged, until 1996. It consisted, as indeed the present system still does, of three main elements

– Ministerial Guidance, Force Goals and a Defence Review. Ministerial Guidance and Force Goals covered six-year periods and were renewed biennially. The Defence review covered five-year periods and was conducted annually. This cycle has recently been changed, and many of the details have also changed, but I shall not go into these details, since they are the subject of a separate paper and in any event do not affect the broad outlines I am focusing on. For now, let me just say that, in Ministerial Guidance, we analyse the factors that determine force planning, the threats and challenges, the financial constraints, and give guidance for the development of new force goals. The force goals establish specific planning targets for each nation, which try to seek from each a reasonable contribution to the overall NATO force posture needed to meet the threat. In the defence reviews we then analyse national plans against the yardstick of the force goals and the overall requirements, taking into account other factors as well.

At about the same time (i.e. the late seventies), the distinction between defence and force planning also took on some practical significance, because, in the course of the seventies, the Alliance had started to devote greater attention to a number of special areas, such as logistics, previously considered as a purely national responsibility, air defence and C3, which led to the creation of new committees and processes. Of particular importance in this context was the agreement, in 1978, of the so-called Long-Term Defence Programme (LTDP), which focused on nine specific planning areas or issues (Readiness, Reinforcement, Reserve Mobilisation, Maritime Posture, Air Defence, C3, Electronic Warfare, Rationalisation and Consumer Logistics). In addition, in 1980, the traditional force planning procedure mentioned above, with its rather limited planning horizon of 6 years, was complemented by the introduction of a new long-term planning procedure, which envisaged the development of concepts and long-term planning guidelines (LTPGs) for a great number of special planning areas. A lot of work was devoted to this new procedure, especially at SHAPE, in identifying the planning areas which should be covered by concepts and LTPGs, but over time it transpired that this was an over-ambitious and too work-intensive process. After agreement of a few concepts and one widely noticed LTPG on Follow-on Forces Attack, it did not produce many tangible results and, with the end of the Cold War, quietly faded away.

One of the effects of the LTDP was the greater involvement of other committees and staff elements, in addition to those traditionally responsible for force planning, in the work of defence planning, and the resulting requirement to coordinate the work of these bodies. Responsibility for overseeing this work and other aspects of the implementation of the LTDP was given to the Executive Working Group (EWG). In the course of the 1980s, it produced a number of reports under the heading of Coordination of Defence Planning which described how the work of the different specialist communities, armaments experts, air defence experts, logisticians etc. contributed to meeting the overall aims of the Alliance as established in force planning and the LTDP and regularly updated in consecutive Ministerial Guidances. With the end of the Cold War, when political attention shifted to other issues, this particular work fell into abeyance and has only fairly recently re-emerged in the context of the Comprehensive Political Guidance (CPG) mandated by the Istanbul Summit of 2004 and its management mechanism.

Another issue which played a big role for defence planners in the eighties was burden sharing. To some extent, burden sharing, as a fundamental principle of any alliance, has, of course, always been an issue for NATO. In the seventies, the focus had been on the financial aspect of burden sharing and on the need for European countries to assume a bigger share of the costs of collective defence, including by financial support for the costs of the stationing of American forces in Europe. At the beginning of the decade, a special programme, the European Defence Improvement Programme (EDIP), had been established, funded exclusively by European countries and in particular Germany, which was used to finance commonly funded infrastructure programmes, in particular the construction of shelters for aircraft. Towards the end of the decade, a new resource guidance was agreed in Ministerial Guidance and endorsed by Heads of State and Government, which called upon nations to increase their defence spending by 3% in real terms annually.

During the eighties and against the background of the increasing East-West tension in the early eighties and the enormous military build-up by the United States under the Reagan administration, the pressure for financial burden sharing was maintained, but complemented by very ambitious efforts to come to grips with the output side of burden sharing. For some time, the European countries had argued that the exclusive focus on

defence spending figures was misleading, because it did not take properly into account that much of the U.S. defence expenditure was needed to support its role as a global superpower with world-wide roles and interests, and that within NATO actually the Europeans provided the large majority of men and tanks and a number of other capabilities. The United States accepted the argument that spending money for defence was, of course, not an aim in itself and that what really mattered were the capabilities provided through this spending. This has been an undisputed line of reasoning all through the thirty-odd years of more or less acute burden sharing debate which I have followed. Unfortunately, it is much more difficult to measure output in terms of capabilities than input in money value. This was and still is the dilemma of the burden sharing debate in NATO.

To address this aspect of burden sharing, in the eighties, the U.S. Congress had tasked the government to produce regular burden sharing reports measuring the efforts of the United States and its Allies in output terms. These were enormous volumes, listing every man and tank and rifle and the associated stocks of ammunition, etc., etc., and trying to indicate the different capability values of different weapons or equipment pieces, i.e. giving different values to Leopard I and Leopard II, to M-60 and Abrams tanks, etc. It goes without saying that the underlying judgements were far from uncontroversial. To complement these U.S. reports, the EWG also prepared a number of major burden sharing reports, which were not as ambitious and elaborate as the American reports but tried to put together what collectively the Allies considered as necessary and relevant information on each Ally's contribution.

If one wanted to sum up the defence planning developments of the eighties in a simple formula it would be: more of the same. Within generally stable force structures, conventional defence capabilities were significantly enhanced. The force planning procedure remained unchanged, but there was a greater emphasis on the coordination of the different planning disciplines and on burden sharing. The call for 3% real increases was not fully met, but there were increases for most countries not just in spending, but also in output, and the general momentum was reflected in a special initiative, the Conventional Defence Improvement Initiative (CDI), agreed in the latter half of the decade, when the tide however began to turn.

2.3 Evolution of NATO defence planning during the 1990s and beyond

With the end of the Cold War, the call for defence improvements, burden sharing and the need to measure output did not go away altogether, but became less prominent. Other, more pressing issues needed to be addressed, such as the role of NATO without a declared threat or enemy. This was an issue affecting not only defence planning, but the questions which were raised in this context were certainly also of great importance for defence planning. And the answers which were given were, to a considerable extent, provided by defence planning and defence planners.

The first and most fundamental of these answers was the development of a new Strategic Concept, initiated in 1990 and agreed by Heads of State and Government at their Rome Summit in November 1991. In the hierarchy of documents and agreements that determine the direction and contents of NATO defence planning, the Strategic Concept came, at that time, just under the North Atlantic Treaty itself and above Ministerial Guidance. Since last year, we have the CPG in addition, below the Strategic Concept and above Ministerial Guidance.

The Strategic Concept 1991, while affecting all aspects of the Alliance's activities, was, in structure and content, in many ways a super Ministerial Guidance, approved by Heads of State and Government. It summed up and analysed the new strategic environment, redefined the Alliance's objectives and fundamental security functions and described its broad approach to security, encompassing political, economic and other elements besides the defence dimension and including a new emphasis on crisis management and the commitment to cooperation with all countries in Europe, including previous adversaries. In its part IV, it contained very detailed guidelines for defence. Amongst the key statements was the recognition that the single massive and global threat, which had been the main concern of the Alliance during the first 40 years of its existence, had given way to diverse and multi-directional risks which were difficult to predict and assess. I will not go into further details here, but the whole document is worth reading, because it really determined the direction of NATO defence planning (and not only defence planning) for the rest of the nineties and indeed until now. In 1999, at the Washington Summit, a new Strategic Concept was agreed, but that was really no more than an

update of the 1991 Concept which had marked the decisive watershed in the development of the Alliance.

A number of events during the following years both confirmed the direction given by the 1991 Concept and contributed to its implementation and further development. Amongst the most important were the wars and crises in the former Yugoslavia, the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and Partnership for Peace (PfP), the development of and NATO support for a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and the emerging European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and the continuing and accelerating technological developments, especially in the field of C4I, which created both opportunities and challenges of an extent which led some experts to speak of a revolution in military affairs.

Translated into tasks for defence planners, this meant that, in the coming years and all through the nineties, we had to reconsider what kind of capabilities we needed and how many or how much of them. The GDP, though formally not cancelled for some time, had almost over night lost its meaning as the main yardstick of what and how much we needed. In the political, academic and media world some quick and simple conclusions were drawn, expressed in slogans such as reaping the “peace dividend” or “out of area or out of business”.

In NATO, we tackled these tasks with our traditional force planning tools and with a number of complementary activities such as the development of a new NATO Force Structure, a new Command Structure, new documents on operational planning and some organisational changes at NATO HQ, in the course of which the Division of Defence Planning and Policy became the Division for Defence Planning and Operations and later, in 2003, was split into a Division for Defence Policy and Planning and a separate Operations Division.

In terms of substance, these years brought a significant reduction in the size and readiness of our armed forces and the return of most forward deployed Allied forces, especially from Germany, to their home countries. In that sense, and in the sharp decline of defence expenditure in almost all of our countries, the “peace dividend” was indeed cashed in. Paradoxically, however, in reality the end of the Cold War had not led to more peace in

Europe, but to more violence, and NATO troops had, for the first time in the history of the Alliance, to go into action. This had a profound effect on defence planning.

Initially, there had been a wide-spread assumption that the kind of military crisis management tasks we might be and eventually were facing would be much less demanding than what our forces had prepared for in the past, and that therefore they could easily be managed by the remaining, reduced new force posture. The first part of this assumption was right, but the second part turned out to be wrong. Especially countries with large forces optimised for territorial defence, prepared to fight with a well developed and sophisticated support machinery behind them, found out that sending a relatively small portion of these forces to another country, where all those support arrangements were not in place, required capabilities which they did not have, or at least could not deploy to where they would be needed.

Describing in detail how we coped with these challenges would take another paper. Suffice it to say that most of our forces had not only to reduce in size, but also to change in structure and capabilities, in a way which merited to be called transformation. The emphasis on the new capabilities needed, deployability, sustainability, survivability, information superiority and others, was not only fully reflected in our regular force planning process, but also led to a number of new initiatives, most notably the Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) of the Washington Summit and, a little later, the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) of the Prague Summit in 2002. It also led to a multitude of claims, observations and accusations that NATO defence planning needed to change from a threat-based to a capability-based approach and had not adequately done so.

I would recommend to consider these remarks and in particular the implied criticism, with a healthy dose of scepticism. First of all, it is far from clear what is meant by capability-based planning. Secondly and more importantly, it is misleading to present the two terms as alternatives. It is true that our planning system during the Cold War took the threat as the main yardstick against which the requirement and, consequently, the planning targets had to be measured. In that sense, there is nothing wrong with saying that we had a threat-based system, and it is obviously true that such an approach was no longer feasible. But where the criticism goes wrong is in assuming that a threat-based system cannot, at the same time,

be capability-based. Of course, our system had always aimed at providing the capabilities needed to meet the threat.

Sometimes the capabilities-based versus threat-based argument is explained by claiming that, under the latter, our planning targets were focusing on numbers of units or weapons like tanks and guns and aircraft, instead of the required capabilities in terms of firepower or surveillance or transportation capability. This is largely wrong, too, although it has been and still is a continuing challenge for force planners not to be unduly prescriptive in formulating planning targets. But the argument overlooks the fact that, when numbers of units or specific weapon systems are sought, these are and have always been sought as representing capabilities. When force goals or force tables seek divisions or battalions, they do not seek a specific number of human beings available to appear on parades, but a complex set of capabilities, involving firepower, mobility, survivability, sustainability and many other things. The same goes for frigates, fighter squadrons, etc.. None of this is meant to deny the need to be as precise as possible in defining the capabilities needed, and there is still work to be done in this respect, but this work needs to be done under any system and has nothing to do with the false alternative of threat-based versus capability-based.

The fact remains, however, that the disappearance of the threat did, of course, have a profound effect on our planning system and did pose quite a challenge. Because it had removed our key yardstick, not for defining capabilities per se, but for deciding precisely which and, in particular, how much or how many of the capabilities we needed. As I already mentioned, the old GDP could no longer be used for this purpose. So, on what basis could we ask nations to provide what kind and size of forces?

In the beginning of the nineties, while avoiding speaking of a threat and using terms like risks or challenges instead, we did not radically drop the old yardstick. The forces and capabilities of the Soviet Union and then Russia remained an important orientation mark. Over time, however, the importance of this factor declined, and others, such as the demands of actual operations in the former Yugoslavia and conceivable operations in other crisis areas assumed greater weight. But although we had and have a number of relevant factors to be considered, the fact remains that, in the new security environment, answering the question of “how much is

enough” is much more complicated than it was in the Cold War. In the final analysis, regardless of the planning system, the answer cannot be logically deduced from an objective necessity, but involves an element of choice based on what is considered desirable or opportune. On this basis, the threat has been replaced as main yardstick by what we now refer to as our level of ambition, which has been gradually developed from the mid-nineties on through consecutive Ministerial Guidances, the last of which was agreed in June 2006. This level of ambition defines the number and nature of operations which the Alliance has agreed it should be able to conduct if necessary. If I could sum up the eighties with “more of the same”, a similarly brief formula for the nineties would have to be “fundamental change, in substance and approach”.

The new millennium brought us, with the attacks of September 11th, 2001, and with the first ever evocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, another dramatic turning point. Although an initial analysis of the implications for defence planning of the fight against terrorism concluded that these were limited, in the sense that the military capabilities needed for that fight (in which the military have a role, but not the primary role) were essentially available, September 11th and the evocation of Article 5 nevertheless profoundly changed the environment in which defence planning takes place. In the political guidance for the new military concept for the fight against terrorism, which was prepared by the Executive Working Group, the senior working body for defence planning under the Council, a number of principles were established for that fight. Amongst them, in a low-key manner and almost *en passant*, the age-old “out-of-area” controversy was settled by the simple statement that our forces needed to be able to operate where necessary, as decided by the Council. Fairly soon, this abstract agreement was followed by the concrete decision to take over the ISAF in Afghanistan. Since then, and to this date, this operation has become the most important operation of the Alliance which affects almost all aspects of our activities – political, military and, of course, also defence planning.

Our ability to make a success of this operation, or at least to avoid failure (often stated categorically as “failure is not an option”), is widely used as the main yardstick against which the utility and effectiveness of what we are doing is measured. This is understandable but problematic, for example, when it leads to simplistic lines of reasoning such as: we do not

manage to fill the CJSOR; this shows that nations do not have enough of the right capabilities; this shows that our force planning system is not effective; therefore we need to change the system, or we may as well stop it altogether. Such reasoning (which we have encountered; I am not inventing it) disregards two key points. First, that it is not the NATO force planning system, but the national systems which produce the forces and capabilities. NATO can only try to influence this process, as implied in the definition of NATO force planning I gave you earlier. Secondly, and even more important, that there is a fundamental difference between what nations have and what they are prepared to contribute. Our defence reviews show that nations collectively have the forces to meet our level of ambition and that includes the ability to field the forces needed for Afghanistan, even taking into account the demands of other operations like Iraq. But, of course, sending forces to Afghanistan is a heavy burden, in political and psychological as well as financial and military terms, and therefore the temptation is great to let others carry as much as possible of that burden.

This last consideration also suggests that, while the simplistic criticism of force planning just mentioned is unfair, there is nevertheless a grain of truth in it. And that leads me back to what I said at the beginning of my remarks. Establishing the case and a framework for the commitment of national forces to the Alliance is an important aspect of NATO force planning, which was very well covered during the Cold War, but is no longer adequately dealt with under present conditions. We need to work on that, we have started to do so by the fairly recent agreement on new definitions for force categories, but we are not there yet. And making real progress in this respect will, in my view, also require a new commitment to the principle of burden sharing, and new methods of measuring and demonstrating such commitment.

References:

NATO (2007). "NATO Glossary of Standardization Terms and Definitions". *Allied Administrative Publication No. 42* [online]. Available from: <http://www.nato.int/docu/stanag/aap042/2007-aap42.pdf>.