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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND NATO[1]

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International Security: state of the art

After the 2nd World War many transformations have been occurring in the world which have a direct impact on the organization of the international system, on the distribution of power, and on the understandings of security and threats.



From the optimistic perspective of the “End of history” political leaders and the military were confronted with a diffusion of power, with “new wars”, and the need to develop mechanisms to face a new security context in which traditional conceptions of “threat”, “enemy”; or even “war” were replaced by more complex and diffuse threats which required the transformation and adaptation of the existing mechanisms of prevention and maintenance of international security.

Globalization, Regionalization; expansion of the concept of security; and new types of threats are some of the examples which enhanced, and still enhance, the need of the actors of the international system to constantly review their strategic postures in relation to a constant and quick change of the strategic environment.

This is so since both actors’ objectives and the risks and constraints they face are multidimensional and constantly changing.

The evolution of the security paradigm

The main paradigm through which relationships between states was organized throughout the centuries considers states as the units of the international relations system, and reserves for them the right to decide on how to deal with threats in a very realistic way according to which «(s)tates set up powerful military systems to defend themselves»[2] and «(p)eople were considered to be assured of their security through the protection extended by the state»[3].

Particularly after the end of the Cold War there was an expansion of this understanding both horizontally and vertically[4].

Horizontally, as security went beyond the reduced framework of military affairs and included others, as economy, environment, culture, gender, health «to include welfare and identity»[5].

Vertically the idea of security was no longer state centered as new actors such as International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations, for example, grew in number and importance.

Consequently, the expansion of the notion of security included a two direction movement: «upward to encompass regional and global identities and downward to society and to distinct groups within it and, ultimately the individual human being»[6].

The increase of international awareness about problems such as environmental degradation, poverty and underdevelopment that arose since the end of the Second World War had its peak in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the spirit of The End of History of Fukuyama, when “wars”, according to a International Humanitarian Law classical definition of armed conflicts opposing two states (internal versus external), were thought to be over. As a result, a new way of conceiving security emerged, as well as a new approach to global community, as for instance leading to the notion of Human Security and theories which started to be conceptualized in the early 1990s.

The emerging of new kind of perils lead to the widening of the interpretation of what is a security issue, to the extent that the UN Charter expression of “threat to peace” has been recently interpreted as to include for example mass human rights violations, which do not necessarily entail an international conflict. On the contrary threats to peace and security became more diverse in nature and effects. In fact due to globalization, the spread of the consequences (direct and indirect) of internal crisis and conflicts ignore the states’ borders, «one can now see that many conflicts are within nations rather than between nations»[7]. Nonetheless there is a «myriad of transnational connections (...) involved, including political, economic, military and cultural links»[8] which lead to the conclusion that «(t)here is a global presence in these wars»[9].

“New Wars”

In fact nowadays there is a clear dominance of internal armed conflicts which albeit taking place in the territory of a single state have direct and indirect consequences in other states, and affect a great number of civilians, threatening their security.

The changing nature of war, or “new wars”, are defined by Mary Kaldor as involving “a blurring of the distinctions between war (usually defined as violence between states or organized political groups for political motives), organized crime (violence undertaken by privately organized groups for private purposes, usually financial gain), and large-scale violations of human rights (violence undertaken by states or politically organized groups against individuals)”[10].

Kaldor highlights the need for a new approach to conflicts as they now have a different nature; involve more and new actors; have different purposes; make use of new tools and instruments (new types of warfare; technology); and are often low intensity conflicts, within the territory of one state. One can affirm that ‘new wars’ are a result of the combination between globalization and underdevelopment, in an unstable global order.

In view of that Kaldor argues for a “cosmopolitan political response – one that put individual rights and the rule of law as centerpieces of any international intervention (political, military, civil or economic)”[11].

International Security and NATO

The distinct feature of today’s international security state of the art is its multidimensional character and the urge to combine efforts, wills, and capabilities in order to respond to complex and diffuse threats.

NATO is an element of this very same system. As such its role is constantly questioned and the path it will follow is not a given. On the contrary NATO’s existence and potential and real contributions to international security are issues which do not lead to a unique answer, even between Allies.

As we’ve heard from former speakers at this seminar there are several security challenges which defy NATO as a cohesive alliance of states, and question its dimension; capabilities, and scope of action.

Strategy and the strategic concept

In its 60 years NATO has had three strategic concepts. There is little chance that in the next 60 years the strategic concepts approved will last that long.

Strategy, and more specifically a strategic concept, is the basis which will allow to plan and decide on objectives and on the way to fulfill them.

In the case of NATO, as an alliance of states with a political military vocation the controversial and difficulty is already on an internal level, on the moment of the definition of common goals.

However, and after defining the objectives, one will be confronted with an adverse environment, or to say the least, with obstacles to its accomplishment. These obstacles can become threats, which have to be predicted (to a certain extent) beforehand, when drafting the strategic concept. In fact, one will only identify threats after it has clearly defined its goals as a collective defense organization. Only after setting up an objective can one face opposition to that same objective.

The cornerstone of NATO and the reason of its existence (and maintenance) is collective defense, i.e., states prefer to work together and cooperate as a way to attain peace, security and stability.

The fact that after the Cold War did not entail the end of war and conflict, and that competition and antagonism are still one of the main characteristics of the international system.

Collective Defense

The main article that embodies NATO’s nature is Washington Treaty’s Article 5.

This core article also became very broad and part of the controversy since it defines the defensive vocation of NATO. Yet, there are several dimensions of the article that need to be discussed.

Article 5

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack

occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

Firstly, the type and origins of threats have changed; secondly armed attack (as a trigger for self defense) is still highly controversial and subjective; thirdly states changed their views on when to act, and the paradigm of self defense has been challenged by preventive interventions.

Which consequently defies the UN Charter (and article 51), for example the NATO 'Operation Allied Force' in Kosovo stands out particularly, since it did not receive an a priori authorization of the SC, adding another dimension to role NATO plays as a regional power[12].

The main argument for intervention was based on humanitarian reasons: "In the current circumstances, military intervention is justified as an exceptional measure to prevent an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe." [13] It was, thus, argued that the risks of action but inaction bring even greater dangers.

One other dimension which has been emphasized by the former NATO's SG has been the shift from territory to populations. This means that article five is aimed to defend people more than territory, and that might be dangerous depending on its interpretation, specially if it entails preventive actions.

These are just some examples of the blurring of the concepts of internal and external threats, as well as of the why, how, when and where to act!! Accordingly, and recognizing interdependence, NATO has embraced the so-called comprehensive approach.

So the alliance has been enlarged over the years and its openness to other actors as regional organizations has been increasing, especially with the UN and the EU.

This is certainly a reflex of the interdependence, of the existence of common threats, but also of the need to coordinate international system's actors in order to obtain better results in what concerns peace and security.

However enlargement and multilateralism do not entail only advantages...

Budget – Burden Sharing

One other question that can be raised related to the alliance and its actual performance and capabilities is related with its financial resources.

Defense planning and the definition of the type of operations NATO will prepare for and perform is highly constrained by the current financial crisis. As said before, defense expenditure is decreasing, which will obviously affect the Alliance's capabilities.

The budgetary issue is not only important in terms of quantity but also of quality. This means that it is important who contributes with what!

The answer on this question, based on GDP's expenditure on defense, (as there is no official data on the financial contributions of the member states), is that there is a clear gap between the financial input by the USA and the European NATO member states.

This brings us to the "solidarity" issue. How can the USA not have a predominant role in NATO if they are the ones who most invest in it? This is so, not only because of budgetary constraints but also on the importance public opinion has now on the member-states decision-making processes, which strongly influences the legitimacy of a government's decision, and therefore, the legitimacy of NATO to act.

Security Challenges

One can divide NATO's security challenges in two basic dimensions, bearing in mind that there is a strong relation between the two.

External Challenges:

- The global shift of power and rise of a multipolar system;

- The financial crisis and its effects on geopolitics;
- Resource and energy scarcity;
- Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Internal Challenges:

- Solidarity/Burden Sharing (EUA vs. European States);
- Perceptions on the Alliance – why is it attractive to be a NATO member?
- Threat Assessment – geography matters?
- Dealing with Russia (cooperation vs. antagonism).

The above mentioned challenges are just some of the obstacles which justify the revision of NATO's current strategic concept.

Global or regional?

One last issue that I want to deal with is the paradox between global and regional dimension of NATO.

NATO has to ask itself how global does it really want to go, and if the organization is truly willing to deal with threats and crisis and conflicts out of area.

How are these threats defined and how legitimate is NATO, as a regional organization with a military vocation, to deal with environmental crisis, or policing operations in South Atlantic, for example?

In my opinion this is one of the most important topics to be discussed now. Indeed, if on the one hand NATO's has been performing an increasingly global role, intervening in many scenarios and regions, even when there was no armed attack, or a UNSC authorization, on the other hand NATO's official speech emphasizes (in a more discrete tone) the fact that NATO is not a universal organization, and it does not have the vocation nor the means to go global.

Conclusion

We can thus conclude that NATO is yet an important actor in the international system, and has a huge potential in terms of playing a key role in what concerns international security.

The core of the discussion is now what type of mission and contribution does NATO want to perform and how will it accommodate the national interests of its members in the new strategic concept.

[1] Paper produzido para apresentação no 14º Seminário da Associação da Juventude Portuguesa do Atlântico, 4 de Agosto de 2009, Base Naval do Alfeite.

[2] Sadako Ogata, State Security – Human Security, Fridtjof Nansen Memorial Lecture 2001, UN House, Tokyo, 12 December 2001, United Nations University, 2001, consulted at <http://www.unu.edu/hq/public-lectures/ogata.pdf>, p.9.

[3] Idem, ibidem.

[4] Or as Roland Paris puts it, “security studies has undergone both a ‘broadening’ and a ‘deepening.’”, in Roland Paris, “Human Security Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?”, International Security, Vol. 26, No. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 87-102, p.97.

[5] S. Neil Macfarlane, Yuen Foong Khong, Human Security and the UN: A Critical History, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2006, p.1.

[6] Idem, ibidem.

[7] New Dimensions of Human Security, Human Development Report, UNDP, 1994, p.22, consulted at http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en_chap2.pdf, 1 April 2009.

[8] Mient Jan Faber, “Human Security from Below: Freedom from Fear and Lifeline Operations”, in Monica den Boer, Jaap de Wilde (eds.), The Viability of Human Security, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2008, pp.150-151; p.149.

[9] Idem, ibidem.

[10] Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007, p.2.

[11] *Idem*, p.3.

[12] See B. Simma, *NATO, UN and the Use of Force: Legal Aspects*, In *European Journal of International Law (EJIL)* 10, (1999) pp. 1 - 22

[13] UN Doc. S/PV.3989, at 7

83 TEXTOS RELACIONADOS:

2012/05/23

AS DECLARAÇÕES FINAIS DA CIMEIRA DE CHICAGO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2012/05/14

“SMART DEFENCE” NA CIMEIRA DE CHICAGO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2012/05/05

A CIMEIRA DE CHICAGO E O RELACIONAMENTO TRANSATLÂNTICO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2012/04/07

A DEFESA ANTIMÍSSIL NA EUROPA, DEPOIS DE LISBOA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2012/03/24

A CIMEIRA DE CHICAGO: RUMO AO FUTURO

Pedro Santos Jorge[1]

2011/10/14

A NATO E A PCSD DA UE, NO PÓS LÍBIA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2011/07/22

DISSUAÇÃO SEM ARMAS NUCLEARES? (II)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2011/05/24

A EXPANSÃO DA OTAN NA ÁSIA E SUAS IMPLICAÇÕES (RÚSSIA, CHINA E ÍNDIA)

Arthur Sá Anunciação[1]

2011/04/25

ESTRATÉGIA DA NATO E SEGURANÇA MARÍTIMA[1]

Nuno Sardinha Monteiro[2]

2011/04/16

A INTERVENÇÃO DA NATO NA LÍBIA. FICÇÃO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2011/01/17

A EVOLUÇÃO DA POSTURA ESTRATÉGICA DA NATO[1]

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/12/09

O CONCEITO ESTRATÉGICO DA NATO À ESPERA DA REUNIÃO DE MINISTROS DA DEFESA EM JUNHO[1]

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/11/26

O REGRESSO DO NUCLEAR E A ALIANÇA ATLÂNTICA (II PARTE)

Francisco Proença Garcia[1]

2010/11/25

O REGRESSO DO NUCLEAR E A ALIANÇA ATLÂNTICA (I PARTE)

Francisco Proença Garcia[1]

2010/11/16

A NATO E PORTUGAL. ALINHAMENTOS PARA UM NOVO CONCEITO ESTRATÉGICO DA ALIANÇA

Luís Brás Bernardino[1]

2010/11/07

As “NOVAS MISSÕES” DA NATO[1]

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/10/18

RÚSSIA, PARCEIRO INDISPENSÁVEL?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/10/09

A SEGURANÇA ENERGÉTICA DA EUROPA E A NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/09/24

O NOVO CONCEITO ESTRATÉGICO DA NATO. DUAS QUESTÕES POLÉMICAS[1]

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/09/21

OTAN 2020 – REFORÇO DA DEFESA COLECTIVA E AFIRMAÇÃO DA SEGURANÇA COOPERATIVA – O MODELO POSSÍVEL, NECESSÁRIO OU DE TRANSIÇÃO?

Rui Ribeiro Vieira[1]

2010/09/17

PORTUGAL, A NATO, O ATLÂNTICO SUL E O BRASIL

João Brandão Ferreira

2010/08/19

A DEFESA ANTI-MÍSSIL. PRIORIDADE PARA A NATO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/08/11

O QUE SERÁ VENCER NO AFGANISTÃO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/05/18

O RELATÓRIO ALBRIGHT

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/03/22

AS ARMAS NUCLEARES DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2010/03/15

AS RELAÇÕES NATO/UE

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2009/11/14

COMPROMISSOS BRASILEIROS COM A GLOBALIZAÇÃO: AS OPERAÇÕES DE PAZ?

Oliveiros S. Ferreira (Brasil)

2009/09/14

A «AFEGANIZAÇÃO» DA ESTRATÉGIA DA ISAF

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2009/09/01

AS ARMAS NUCLEARES E A REVISÃO DO CONCEITO ESTRATÉGICO DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2009/07/28

O NOVO CONCEITO ESTRATÉGICO DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2009/05/14

Os GRANDES DESAFIOS DA NATO[1]

Victor Marques dos Santos[2]

2009/05/13

A NATO[2]

Francisco Proença Garcia[1]

2009/04/07

A SOLUÇÃO POLÍTICA PARA O AFGANISTÃO E A UE

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2009/02/01

QUO VADIS NATO? – OS GRANDES REPTOS PARA A ALIANÇA

Luís Falcão [1]

2008/10/24

RÚSSIA - A DOCTRINA MEDVEDEV

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/10/01

A NATO, A UCRAÍNA E A ESQUADRA RUSSA DO MAR NEGRO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/09/06

A TURQUIA E O CONFLITO NA GEÓRGIA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/08/27

ATÉ ONDE IRÁ A RÚSSIA, DEPOIS DA GEÓRGIA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/08/20

A GEÓRGIA E O RELACIONAMENTO DO OCIDENTE COM A RÚSSIA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/08/14

OS ACONTECIMENTOS NO CÁUCASO E OS JOGOS OLÍMPICOS

Luís Falcão

2008/08/11

GEÓRGIA: MAIS LONGE DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/04/26

OS SISTEMAS LOGÍSTICOS NAS ORGANIZAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS

Pereira de Melo[1]

2008/03/07

QUE ESTRATÉGIA SEGUIRÁ A RÚSSIA NA INDEPENDÊNCIA DO KOSOVO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2008/02/01

QUE ESPERAR DA CIMEIRA DE BUCARESTE?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/12/28

PORQUE ESTÁ EM CAUSA O TRATADO CFE

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/12/27

RÚSSIA SUSPENDE PARTICIPAÇÃO NO TRATADO DE FORÇAS CONVENCIONAIS DA EUROPA

Marcelo Rech[1]

2007/12/21

KOSOVO. MAIS UM COMPASSO DE ESPERA!

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/12/12

A MELHOR FORMA DE COMEMORAR OS 60 ANOS DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/10/21

DARFUR: O SILÊNCIO E A ESPERANÇA DA ÚLTIMA FRONTEIRA

Francisco José Leandro

2007/10/11

A GEÓRGIA E A NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/10/04

A RÚSSIA PÓS PUTIN

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/09/17

UCRÂNIA. ELEIÇÕES DENTRO DE DUAS SEMANAS

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/09/17

AFEGANISTÃO FORA DE CONTROLE

Marcelo Rech[1]

2007/08/03

RÚSSIA DECLARA MORATÓRIA AO TRATADO DE REDUÇÃO DAS FORÇAS CONVENCIONAIS NA EUROPA

Marcelo Rech[1]

2007/07/29

A VERTENTE DE MANUTENÇÃO DA PAZ DA NATO: UMA DUPLICAÇÃO DO PAPEL DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS?

Nélia Rosário Ribeiro

2007/06/25

A DEFESA COLECTIVA DA EUROPA. RESPONSABILIDADE DA NATO? (II PARTE)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2007/05/19

A DEFESA COLECTIVA DA EUROPA: RESPONSABILIDADE DA NATO?[1]

Alexandre reis Rodrigues

2007/04/19

THE TALIBAN THREAT IS NOT JUST AMERICA'S BURDEN[1]

Robert Hunter[2]

2007/04/01

A DEFESA ANTIMÍSSIL NA EUROPA. UM PROBLEMA PARA A PRESIDÊNCIA PORTUGUESA DA UE?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2006/10/27

A GEÓRGIA E A NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2006/10/26

A CAMINHO DE RIGA, PELO AFEGANISTÃO[2]

Miguel Moreira Freire[1]

2006/09/11

O IMPASSE AFEGÃO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2006/07/30

LA OTAN Y LA TRANSFORMACION[1]

Miguel Fernández y Fernández (Alm. da Marinha de Espanha)

2006/07/20

AFEGANISTÃO. A HISTÓRIA VAI REPETIR-SE?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2006/07/18

O FUTURO DA NATO

António Borges de Carvalho

2006/07/17

A CIMEIRA DA NATO EM RIGA

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2006/01/22

EXISTEM FORÇAS PARA AS MISSÕES?

João Nuno Barbosa

2005/12/18

É TEMPO DE MUDAR! DIZ AZNAR.

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2005/11/29

NATO OU PESD? OU AMBAS?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2005/11/01

UCRÂNIA. A CAMINHO DA NATO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2005/10/06

O QUE FARIAM OS EUROPEUS SEM A NATO?

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2004/12/13

A NOVA OTAN?

Maria João Militão Ferreira

2004/08/10

A NATO E A CIMEIRA DE ISTAMBUL

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2004/04/08

O ALARGAMENTO DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2004/04/08

O ALARGAMENTO DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2004/03/16

A NATO E O MÉDIO ORIENTE

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2004/01/07

A TRANSFORMATION EN LA OTAN

Almirante SPN Miguel A. Fernández y Fernández (SACLANTREPEUR)

2003/12/03

A FORÇA DE RESPOSTA DA NATO (V)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2003/11/11

A FORÇA DE RESPOSTA DA NATO (IV)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2003/10/27

AS CRISES DA NATO

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2003/10/20

A FORÇA DE RESPOSTA DA NATO (III)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2003/10/09

A FORÇA DE RESPOSTA DA NATO (II)

Alexandre Reis Rodrigues

2003/10/08

A FORÇA DE RESPOSTA DA NATO

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