



# IPRIS Viewpoints

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## The Strategic Concept that couldn't

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Often small medium-sized countries serve to underpin the universality but not necessarily the inclusiveness of large organizations. While common sense argues that not having Portugal in NATO is a paradox, skepticism tells us the country's position in the North Atlantic organization is barely significant. Despite there being an obvious balance between dogma and skepticism on this issue, skeptics were right about NATO decision makers' political perception with regard to Portugal's argument of monitoring geopolitics in the Mediterranean and South Atlantic.

When the strategic concept was negotiated, Portuguese diplomacy defended that NATO should remain a regional organization but that its partnerships with countries and organizations around the world should go "across and beyond existing frameworks". This piece of text, included in Article 30 of the Strategic Concept, originated from Portuguese diplomacy. Although this was the final version of Portugal's wishes, in fact its diplomacy attempted to uphold much more specific references, by identifying several regions with potential for intervention and cooperation, namely Russia, Europe, the Southern Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa, the African Union and the South Atlantic. Yet, all the country got was an abstract and empty "across and beyond existing frameworks" reference.

Four months after the Strategic Concept was signed, NATO is now looking for ways to stabilize and possibly even intervene in the Libyan crisis, by potentially instituting a 'no-fly zone' in the country, an action to take place in the 'across and beyond space'. But a 'no-fly zone' would bring little or no benefits while carrying massive costs. Since the opposition is not well armed, the Libyan military does not need aircraft to suppress it, as regular infantry and tanks are able to do the job without much inconvenience. Moreover, "the opposition asked for a no-fly zone but also asked that there be no introduction of weapons or radar systems inside Libya's borders and no soldiers", Steven Clemons states.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there can't be 'no-fly zones' in Libya without radar systems or soldiers to set them up. However, the institution of such a radar system in Libya could have been attempted when Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was a friend of the West. Although there was no apparent reason for such an endeavor at the time, it would nevertheless integrate perfectly with the idea that "the promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe. These

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Clemons comments on "Viewpoint: Libya intervention brings 'huge risks'" (*BBC News*, 12 March 2011).



partnerships make a concrete and valued contribution to the success of NATO's fundamental tasks".<sup>2</sup> If the organization's decision makers had followed Portugal's bid and included specific regional references, perhaps some kind of cooperation could have been possible with Libya, Egypt or any other country in the area, which would make the current situation fairly different and leave NATO better prepared to respond to any eventuality. This is not to suppose that Portugal was already aware of the upcoming social unrest in the Maghreb in November 2010. But since the idea of an overarching, all-seeing NATO system still reigns in Portugal's imagination and perception, it would not be surprising in the eyes of Portuguese diplomacy if NATO had indeed conjugated its spaces of interest and concern – such as the Maghreb – even without an evident reason.

According to NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO is willing to institute a 'no-fly zone' in Libya should the United Nations issue the political pathway to do so. Yet, for all the "dialogue and cooperation with partners can make a concrete contribution to enhance international security" stated in Article 29 of the Strategic Concept, Article 30's "across and beyond existing frameworks" – by not providing a concrete definition of the new areas of intervention and cooperation – has set NATO adrift and left it politically blind to negotiate or even to have a relevant say on the civil war in Libya. Indeed, 'across and beyond' left NATO unprepared to intervene or have important allies in the Maghreb, in sub-Saharan Africa or in the South Atlantic. NATO was paying lip service when it spoke about new areas of intervention, civilian capabilities and new and enhanced partnerships. While these concepts appear to reveal some factual truth in Afghanistan or even in Russia, despite expectations, the Strategic Concept was unable to create a proper platform for the organization to assume a proponent security position in the world. Areas of action were not decentralized even further nor were Portugal's attempts to look beyond what is perceptible

taken into account, even when the country simply pointed to regions where conflict is more likely to occur. This is why not only the most powerful, but all countries, should have an equal word and role to play in deciding the future of common organizations. Although all NATO countries share specific values, each of them possesses unique and particular ways of understanding the world and its perils. NATO should not have been so shortsighted as to concentrate only on the most prominent short-term issues, while disregarding the preoccupations and opinions of some of its members. Because of this carelessness, NATO lost political influence in its backyard and in other places of the world, the perception of the US's geopolitical decline and retreat was reinforced, Europe's position as a relevant security actor was weakened and the Strategic Concept became a blunt instrument whose masters dare not sharpen its teeth.

This is indeed a gloomy sight, especially since NATO is a very important organization and contributor to world security. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, deterrence has lost its strength. Lesser authoritarian leaders feel threaten by words of order hailing from NATO's western capitals. Long are the days of the Cold War or the Balkans War. When al-Qaeda is able to resist longer than the Axis powers did in World War II, perhaps it is time for NATO to roll up its sleeves and again demonstrate exactly why democratic Europe has experienced peace in the last 70 years.

Ironically enough, it is in NATO's Strategic Concept that one finds the answers for an appropriate 21<sup>st</sup> century military intervention, focused on achieving peace as quickly as possible while injecting a profound civilian component, capable of identifying and taking on the issues the military lacks the capability and credibility to deal with. Nevertheless, since NATO did not enhance cooperation with Libya or even Cote d'Ivoire's military, to name a few, authoritarian leaders are still able to direct their country's armed forces against civilians. In the end, for all its dialogue and pompous words, NATO's 'state of the art' security doctrine has still not taken root.

2 Article 28 of the NATO Strategic Concept.

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