The World in 2030 and Beyond
Themes, Drivers, and Challenges

Strategic Foresight Analysis Workshop #1
FINAL REPORT
I. Executive Summary

The world has been changing in ways that will have profound effects on the security of NATO members and its citizens. Thus, to think more broadly and over a longer-timeframe has a pivotal importance in understanding these changes and in being able to react to the potential impacts those challenges might generate for the security of the Euro-Atlantic Community. As NATO forces prepare to operate in a future environment that they anticipate will be different than the one they face today, it is important to maintain synergy across the Alliance. Such synergy requires a shared perspective of the future that focuses on a core of the most likely themes, trends, and drivers with an awareness of the most dangerous outliers.

The aim of the first Strategic Foresight Analysis Workshop was to identify the main themes influencing the world in 2030, create a shared perspective, a general framework to prevent strategic surprise and identify most probable – most likely scenarios and describe them in a common language. Current efforts to look over the horizon to 2030 and beyond will enable the Alliance to meet those challenges of the future and provide security to members and peoples of NATO and allows adapting to remain viable and relevant. The workshop that took place in La Hulpe, Belgium 24-25 October, 2012 identified four major themes: (1) Political Arena; (2) Human Domain; (3) Physical Domain; and (4) Resources, Economy and Climate Change.

II. Analysis Report

1) Introduction

The first Foresight Analysis Workshop in Brussels, Belgium 24 -25 October, 2012 identified the common themes and some drivers, which will likely contribute to transforming the future of Alliance stretching up to 2030 and beyond. 78 participants from 21 nations, as well as NATO HQ (IS, IMS), ACO (CCOMC), ACT, think tanks, academia, MODs, Delegations to NATO, and representative COEs attended the event. The discussion departed from the initial findings of a meta-analysis executed during the initiation phase of the Strategic Foresight Analysis by exploiting the findings of 186 analyses of governments, think tanks, academia, IOs and NGOs. In addition to the plenary presentations, three inquiry discussions, a panel discussion, survey and quick poll were used as an interactive tool to gather data from the participants. The workshop concluded that:

A. There is a requirement to do persistent and continuous futures work. The emphasis of this effort should be on the “Product” as well as on the “Process.” The purpose of this future work has to be to help NATO act as a “Proactive” versus “Reactive” organization in preparing for the future. The idea of ACT developing a foresight database that collects, categorises, and codes foresight data for ease of use by others throughout NATO is an added value to NATO initiatives. Additionally, ACT would add to this database an analysis that provides a shared perspective of the future for use in concept development and requirements determination. The general consensus of participants is that the foresight effort needs to approach future work with modesty by keeping an open mind and including all views and not discounting drivers that seem dubious. The outcomes from this workshop laid the groundwork for the next workshop to be held in Budapest 13-14 November.
B. The outcome of the discussions and data gathering resulted in a diverse view of the future, but enabled the group to identify four major themes: (1) Political Arena; (2) Human Domain; (3) Physical Domain/Technology; and (4) Resources and Economy.

C. The main themes embrace the following drivers influencing future landscape:
   1. Political Changes – power shift, regional interests, hard power vs. soft power, threat perception, concepts of power and security, role of institutions.
   2. Human Domain – ideology, young generation, nationalism, democratization, social change, demography, wealth distribution, culture and religion.
   3. Physical Domain/Technology – industry, technological advancement, digital age, means of communication, virtual world and innovation.
   4. Resources, Economy and Climate Change – shrinking budget, scarce resources, energy as a power tool, climate, deteriorating economic performance.

2) The Discussion of the Themes and Drivers Identified
   A. Political Changes
      The plenary session highlighted the necessity to think about potential power shifts both from the West to the East as well as from the North to the South. In addition, this might be further complicated as the global system shifts from a unipolar towards a multi-polar distribution of power. An equally important driver might be the changing role of regions influencing global power balance – some regions will fade away, others might emerge as more potential power houses. While soft power seems to be a viable option to tackle 21st century conflicts, the existence of hard power has pivotal importance in providing security to the Alliance. However, there is a rapid change in understanding the conceptions of threat, security, and power that demands detailed scrutiny. The competing dichotomy of hegemonic state(s) and the role of institutions demand additional attention. Not only states but non-state actors, institutions, groups, and individuals are expected to play a larger role in the provision of security.

   B. Human Domain
      Demographic changes in the Middle East and North Africa, such as youth bulge combined with economic changes such as high unemployment, compounded by corrupt regimes could result in wide-spread demonstrations and violence. These volatile situations could be triggered by an individual act as seen in Tunisia in the Arab Spring. There were other issues identified like the general gap between those leading change today and the new leaders of tomorrow raising the question on demographic changes and how this will impact policy. Some said no change, but others said the personal background frame of reference plays a role. Demographics are radically remaking political norms and the migration of cheap labor is shifting political emphasis e.g. Mexicans migrating to the United States Law and the impact of changes in the legal rules and conventions will likely change as the world becomes more transparent while demographic changes drive population movement.

   C. Physical Domain
      Interconnectedness fueled by technology and media forces leaders to be more responsive to the desires of the population. The example Arab Spring and the change of government in Egypt occurred after the voice and action of the Egyptian people became unstoppable and viewable worldwide. This created bottom up and soft, non-military issues. The role of the internet, an expansion of the CNN factor, has now become the social media factor (Twitter/FaceBook/Youtube). Technology will complicate decision making; we formerly elected people to make decisions, but this is changing because of media access and diffusion; decision makers must now account for views of many more than just the electorate. Globalization is likely to continue, underpinned by the rapid expansion of global telecommunications, and a pervasive information environment in which much of the global population will be capable of being online all the time.
D. Resources, Economy and Climate Change

The panel discussion revealed that many themes and drivers are intertwined and connected, thus complexity and interconnectivity are elements of future challenges. This shift, coupled with the global challenges of climate change, resource scarcity and changes in the human dynamic, are likely to result in a period of instability in international relations, accompanied by the possibility of intense competition between major powers. These changes in the political dimension, coupled by inequality, climate change and technological innovation, will likely affect the lives of everyone on the planet. Sufficient energy, food and freshwater resources are likely to be available to sustain the growing global population and the global economy. However, distribution and access to resources will be uneven, and local and regional shortages will occur, increasing the likelihood of disagreement between states, and providing the triggers that may ignite future conflict. Constant competition for scarce resources and increased tension over assured access to the global commons will be a source of conflict; however, globalisation, interconnectedness, and economic interdependence is expected to increase cooperation and reduce the sense of conflict.

3) Panel Discussion – Society vs. Technology

Politically, globalization is likely to raise the level of interdependence amongst states and individuals within the broader world economy. It is likely to be an engine for accelerating economic growth, but also a source of risk, as local markets become increasingly exposed to destabilizing fluctuations in the wider global economy. Economically, globalization is likely to generate winners and losers, especially in the labor market. As a result, everyday life is likely to be competitive, dynamic and fluid, leading to the possibility that political decisions may limit globalization in order to protect reluctant populations from its negative effects. Looser forms of political, cultural and economic association will multiply as physical dispersion no longer acts as a barrier for those who share common interests. Interconnectedness and empowerment of the people enabled by technology and media make leaders more answerable to the population, for example the aforementioned Arab Spring and the subsequent change of government in Egypt. This led to a bottom-up and soft non-military reaction. Technology will change the rules of engagement and hold leaders accountable on all sides of a conflict as the access to real time information has consequences on the decision making process. Issues of urbanization and the youth bulge tend to make bad regimes more accountable, since the connected youth will need jobs and autocratic regimes will fail to provide ample opportunity and cannot respond rapidly to economic changes and competition.

The Nurnberg error is the tendency to envision technological change in isolation from societal change, e.g. the Jetsons (a Hanna-Barbera animated 1960s era US TV show) depicted a futuristic household with many new labor saving inventions, but still cast women in a domestic role rather than in a liberated one. The error is the assumption that changes in technology alone will cause social changes and other drivers of social change will be manifested in a radically different future. How military forces use technology will change as we may imagine units of soldiers moving through a battle space connected to the cloud, co-developing applications to enhance their ability to execute their mission. This led the conference participants to conclude that the information networks will become even more important tomorrow than today and create a vulnerability that requires shielding. Also, the spread of mobile devices means likely documentation of war crimes and other actions on the battlefield is becoming ubiquitous.

No state, group or individual can meet these challenges in isolation, only collective responses will be sufficient. Hence, the struggle to establish a shared perspective to effectively respond to these challenges is the key to security and stability in the future. The idea of persistent foresight was well received and many participants voiced their support for doing this work on a continuous basis, which led to the idea of a “Futures Base.” The general consensus of participants was that ACT needs to approach futures work with modesty by keeping an open mind and include all views while not discounting drivers that seem less than mainstream.
III. Key Takeaways

1. The Alliance requires a persistent foresight capacity in order to continue to look outward and be prepared to adapt to changes.
2. The general perception of the conference attendees pointed to consistent views of the world in 2030 different from today as reflected in the recurring themes and drivers brought up by the attendees.
3. Interaction of drivers, which crossed thematic lines will have amplifying effect on the future then anyone driver acting individually or within a single theme.
4. The issue of outliers and wild cards remains a key concern because of the unpredictability and indefinite indicators that surround them.
5. The shared perspective will revolve around the four major themes previously identified (1 – Political Changes; 2 – Human Domain; 3 – Physical Domain; 4 – Resources, Economy and Climate Change) and will serve as a point of departure for the second workshop that will take place in Budapest on 13-14 November, 2012.

IV. Conclusion

Transformation of the Alliance remains a shared, continuous and collaborative process. It requires persistent identification and monitoring of common themes, trends and drivers. NATO needs to approach future work with modesty by keeping an open mind and including all views but not discounting drivers that seem dubious or obscure. To conduct this effort, ACT is well positioned to be the vehicle for foresight work and act as a clearing house for those activities that lack the resources to develop their own futures products.

ACT should continue to develop a futures base; a database that collects, categorizes, and codes foresight data for ease of use by others throughout NATO. Additionally, ACT would add to this database an analysis that provides the basis for a shared perspective of the future and for use in concept development and requirements determination. The identification of drivers created a launching point for follow-on conferences and exchanges, and built the base of a broad and inclusive community of interest that will continue to contribute to the foresight conversation. This will be the main effort of Workshop 2 in Budapest.