First
Allied Foresight Conference
Helsinki, Finland
10-12 June

NATO — OTAN

ALLIED FORESIGHT CONFERENCE

HELSINKI, FINLAND
10-12 JUNE 2024

Table of Contents

Background

In an increasingly complex, congested, commercialized and contested environment, dialogue on future trajectories, challenges and opportunities amongst Allies and Partners is more important than ever before. The re-vitalized strategic foresight process signals the intent of the Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation (SACT) to address future challenges in a systemic manner, and as a collective research community, to assist the Alliance in exploring, analyzing and most importantly, embracing changes as the security environment evolves.

The Strategic Foresight Analysis 2023 (SFA23), published last year, represents a significant milestone for ACT. Based on this context, the Future Operating Environment 2024 (FOE24) is addressing the military problem sets for Allied Warfare Development and will also serve as a baseline for further conceptual and strategic thinking. The renewed foresight cycle, consisting of SFA23, FOE24 combined with ACT's deployable foresight analytics capacities, will facilitate collective futures thinking within the Alliance, as well as augment an individual Ally's foresight capabilities

The Allied foresight community is growing, and an increasing number of Allied states as well as stakeholders within the NATO enterprise are choosing to allocate resources into long-term futures thinking. It is paramount that NATO ACT continues to provide a platform for the Allied foresight and futures experts to share their views and establish common understanding on long-term trends, threats and challenges.

Conference Summary

On 10-12 June 2024, Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (ACT) and the Finnish Ministry of Defence in Helsinki hosted the inaugural Allied Foresight Conference. The conference served as a meeting venue for Allied and Partner futures experts, including policy, defence planning and warfare development communities, as well as academia and industry.

The conference concept and delivery underscored the critical need to systematically integrate foresight into policy and planning processes within NATO and its member nations. Experts emphasized the importance of foresight in navigating an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment, where state adversaries are aligning more closely, non-state actors are gaining power, and technological advancements are rapidly transforming warfare. Discussions highlighted the necessity of adopting innovative technologies such as AI, robotics, and quantum computing, while also addressing the challenges of cybersecurity, space threats, and hybrid warfare. The role of collaboration and inclusivity was repeatedly stressed, advocating for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, particularly from the Global South, and the fostering of partnerships across different

sectors to build a more resilient and adaptable defense framework.

The community emphasized the need to overcome institutional inertia and foster a culture that values foresight and innovation. Participants stressed the need for continuous dialogue between the military, industry, and academia to stay ahead of technological trends and to ensure that foresight activities lead to concrete, actionable recommendations. The event also highlighted the challenges of maintaining internal cohesion within the Alliance, addressing demographic and retention issues within armed forces, and preparing for both immediate and long-term threats. Overall, the conference called for a holistic, whole-of-society approach to defense planning that balances short-term needs with long-term strategic goals.

This report offers a reflection on the two core concepts behind the conference; first, the methodology behind foresight and how it can be utilized to create a creative culture around collaboration to inform decision making; second, the future challenges we face as an Alliance, how they may manifest and how NATO can best adapt to rapid change and the risks to Alliance cohesion.

Part I
Methodology of Foresight

The right methodology underlying the foresight process is critical as it ensures that strategic planning is informed by accurate, actionable insights, enabling organizations to anticipate and effectively respond to emerging threats and opportunities. Below are five key takeaways on the methodology of foresight which emphasize the importance of integrating foresight into decision-making processes, fostering creativity, enhancing collaboration, investing in education, and leveraging advanced technologies.

Integrate Foresight Systematically into Decision-Making

Integrating foresight into policy and planning processes is critical for addressing emerging threats. It ensures that foresight activities lead to actionable insights and concrete recommendations. Overcoming institutional inertia is essential to embed foresight systematically into decision-making.

•**Focus on Practical, Actionable Insights:** Foresight activities should lead to concrete recommendations, regularly reassess and adapt methodologies, and balance immediate needs with long-term planning.
•**Combat Institutional Inertia:** Overcome resistance to integrate foresight systematically into planning processes.
•**Link Foresight to Policy and Planning:** Ensure foresight informs strategic and operational decisions at all levels.

Foster a Culture of Creativity and Inclusivity

Encouraging diverse perspectives and creative thinking is essential for effective foresight. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders ensures that varied viewpoints are considered, leading to more robust outcomes. Promoting creativity within organizations helps challenge assumptions and generate innovative solutions.

•**Encourage Diverse Perspectives:** Involve various stakeholders, including non-traditional actors, in foresight activities to incorporate varied viewpoints.
•**Promote Creative Thinking:** Use divergent thinking and risk-taking to challenge assumptions and generate innovative solutions.
•**Normalize Foresight Practices:** Make foresight a standard practice rather than a niche activity within organizations.

Enhance Communication and Collaboration

Effective foresight relies on clear communication and strong partnerships across sectors. Building a community of practice among foresight analysts helps share methodologies and best practices. Engaging in continuous dialogue with stakeholders ensures that foresight findings are accessible and actionable.

•**Improve Messaging:** Clearly communicate the importance and benefits of foresight to all stakeholders.
•**Build a Community of Practice:** Create networks of foresight analysts to share methodologies and best practices.
•**Engage with Industry and Academia:** Establish continuous dialogue and partnerships to integrate the latest technological advancements.

Invest in Education and Training

Building organizational capacity for foresight requires continuous education and professional development. Training leaders and decision-makers on the value and application of foresight is crucial. Developing specialized teams who can lead foresight initiatives within their organizations ensures sustainability and effectiveness.

•**Educate Leaders and Decision-Makers:** Provide training on the value and application of foresight.
•**Develop Specialized Teams:** Train a small cadre of experts who can lead foresight initiatives within their organizations.
•**Institutionalize Foresight Skills:** Build organizational capacity for foresight through ongoing education and professional development.

Utilize Advanced Technologies

Leveraging technological advancements can enhance foresight capabilities and provide deeper insights. Integrating AI, data analytics, and other advanced tools improves the accuracy and effectiveness of foresight. Balancing traditional methods with advanced technologies ensures comprehensive foresight analysis.

•**Adopt New Technologies:** Integrate AI, data analytics, and other advanced tools to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of foresight.
•**Balance Mass and Technology:** Combine traditional methods with advanced technologies for more comprehensive foresight analysis.
•**Implement Red Team Analysis:** Incorporate dissenting views and challenge assumptions to ensure comprehensive and robust foresight.

Part II
Future Challenges

Anticipating future challenges is crucial in foresight because only by understanding a variety of potential scenarios can organizations prepare and adapt effectively, ensuring resilience and strategic advantage in an uncertain and rapidly changing environment. Below are five key takeaways from the conference that highlight the major future challenges NATO and its allies must address, including adapting to technological changes, managing geopolitical shifts, addressing ecological risks, enhancing cyber and space capabilities, and ensuring alliance cohesion and readiness.

Adapting to Rapid Technological Change

The rapid pace of technological advancements poses new challenges for defense and security. Monitoring trends in AI, robotics, and quantum computing is essential to anticipate their impacts. Developing strategies to manage dual-use technologies is crucial for balancing risks and opportunities.

•**Monitor Technological Advancements:** Stay ahead of trends in AI, robotics, and quantum computing to anticipate their impacts on security and defense.
•**Address the Dual-Use Nature of Technologies:** Develop strategies to manage the risks and opportunities presented by technologies used both for civilian and military purposes.
•**Integrate Emerging Technologies:** Incorporate new technologies into military operations strategically to maintain a competitive edge.

Managing Geopolitical Shifts

The alignment of state adversaries and the empowerment of non-state actors requires adaptive and strategic responses. Assessing the implications of emerging powers like China and Russia is critical. Preparing for increased competition and conflict through scenario planning helps mitigate potential impacts.

•**Assess the Implications of Emerging Powers:** Understand the strategic goals and actions of countries like China and Russia in the evolving global order.
•**Prepare for Increased Competition and Conflict:** Develop scenarios that consider potential flashpoints and prepare strategies to mitigate their impacts.
•**Enhance Strategic Cooperation:** Strengthen alliances and partnerships to address shared challenges effectively.

Addressing Ecological and Environmental Risks

Integrating environmental security into planning recognizes the links between ecological disruption and security challenges. Developing strategies for resilience helps prepare for the impacts of climate change and resource scarcity. Understanding these risks is essential for global stability.

•**Integrate Environmental Security into Planning:** Recognize the links between ecological disruption and security challenges.
•**Develop Strategies for Resilience:** Prepare for the impacts of climate change, resource scarcity, and biodiversity loss on global stability.
•**Incorporate Ecological Considerations:** Ensure that defense planning includes environmental factors to enhance overall security.

Enhancing Cyber and Space Capabilities

Strengthening cyber defenses and protecting critical infrastructure in space are vital for security. Improving resilience against cyber attacks and integrating cyber operations into broader military strategies are essential steps. Securing space assets ensures the ability to operate effectively in this domain.

•**Strengthen Cyber Defenses:** Improve resilience against cyber attacks and integrate cyber operations into broader military strategies.
•**Secure Space Assets:** Protect critical infrastructure in space and ensure the ability to operate effectively in this domain.
•**Develop Comprehensive Cyber Strategies:** Address the full spectrum of cyber threats through coordinated efforts.

Ensuring Alliance Cohesion and Readiness

Promoting shared values and objectives strengthens the unity of NATO and other alliances. Addressing resource and capability gaps is crucial for maintaining readiness. Enhancing recruitment and retention strategies helps build a robust and capable military force.

•**Promote Shared Values and Objectives:** Strengthen the unity of NATO and other alliances through common goals and mutual support.
•**Address Resource and Capability Gaps:** Identify and fill critical shortages in personnel, equipment, and funding to maintain readiness.
•**Enhance Recruitment and Retention:** Develop strategies to attract and retain military personnel, addressing demographic challenges.

A Thank You

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Finland for graciously hosting this important conference, providing a platform for invaluable discussions on strategic foresight. We deeply appreciate the insightful contributions of all our esteemed speakers, whose expertise and perspectives have greatly enriched our understanding of future challenges and opportunities. Additionally, we thank all the participants for their active engagement and collaboration, which have been instrumental in fostering a productive and dynamic exchange of ideas. Your commitment to advancing foresight and strategic planning is commendable, and we look forward to continuing this vital work together and the continued strengthening of our Alliance.

NATO ACT Strategic Foresight Team
SACTSPPSFBranch@act.nato.int