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Can NATO Practice Grand Strategy?

An Analysis of NATO's Structures and Doctrine in Light of the Libya Conflict

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Fall 2011, revised June 2014

INTRODUCTION¹

The conflict in Libya has again highlighted the difficulty the West has in making grand strategy before committing national resources and prestige to armed conflicts. After a brief period of US leadership, the military side of the 2011 Libya conflict was quickly handed over to NATO's military command structure, while the political leadership of the coalition was placed in a "Libya Contact Group." As such, NATO was not responsible for making grand strategy for the handling of the conflict; this responsibility lied with the Contact Group. However, NATO's strategic concept from 2010 clearly states ambitions of a leading role in this type of conflict.² Moreover, since NATO is a cornerstone in Danish security policy,³ it is in Denmark's interest that NATO is able to make and execute grand strategy. Therefore, this article asks the counterfactual question: *what if* NATO had taken the full political responsibility of the 2011 Libya conflict?⁴ Did NATO's strategic concept, organizational structure, and strategic planning doctrine adequately prepare NATO for such a role? In relation, the article examines how well NATO has handled the role of military strategic leadership during the 2011 Libya conflict. Finally, the article discusses Denmark's and similar small member states' possibilities for contributing to better grand strategy making in the Libya conflict seen in hindsight, as well as in similar circumstances in the future.

This article argues that NATO – despite ambitions of the kind - was not fully prepared to take a grand strategic leadership role in a conflict like Libya. NATO's strategic concept from 2010 introduces a concept designed to aid in making grand strategy – the comprehensive approach (CA) to crisis management – but it fails to convince due to incomplete and unclear definitions. Furthermore, NATO's organizational structure as well as strategic planning doctrine was not adequately fit for making grand strategy using a comprehensive approach.

Next, the article finds that NATO demonstrated lack of strategic leadership in the role it took in the Libya conflict. Its staffs did not adequately use the strategic planning tools from NATO doctrine, which, combined with lack of robust intelligence gathering capabilities, led to a campaign lacking in strategic guidance and direction.

Finally, the article argues that Denmark came strategically ill prepared as a member of the Libya Contact Group, and that Denmark despite its small size can contribute to better coalition grand strategy making in future conflicts by enhancing its capability to make grand strategy.

NATO's NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

At first glance, NATO seems to be conceptually well prepared for a conflict like Libya, but in reality, a deeper analysis uncovers several challenges. NATO launched a new strategic concept and a planning doctrine to complement it, just months before the Libya conflict started. The new strategic concept, launched in November 2010, consolidates the NATO member nations' commitment from the 2008 Bucharest Summit to a comprehensive approach (CA). Evidently, CA is the new buzz-phrase in NATO, but it could just as well have been called grand strategy; conceptually it is not easy to see difference.⁵ An official NATO definition of CA does not exist; the member states still have different views on what a CA exactly means. This reflects that while some nations want to maintain NATO's historical role as a primarily military alliance, others desire an alliance that can handle all of 21st century's security threats – the handling of which requires the use of a mixture of instruments of power rather than a purely military one. The common understanding, as expressed in the new strategic concept, is “that a comprehensive *political, civilian and military* approach is necessary for effective crisis management. The Alliance will engage actively with other international actors before, during and after crises to encourage collaborative analysis, planning and conduct of activities on the ground, in order to maximise coherence and effectiveness of the overall international effort” [emphasis added].⁶

However, while this wording seemingly expresses an agreement on the basic premises for CA, critical controversies are present. Historically, military and academic writing on grand strategy has operated with three instruments of power - military, political/diplomatic, and economic - while the civilian instrument is a new concept invented by NATO. First, the civilian instrument is not readily at NATO's disposal; it is largely held and controlled by the member-states and non-NATO actors. NATO doctrine defines the civilian instrument as “the use of powers contained within such areas as judiciary, constabulary, education, public information and civilian administration and support infrastructure, which can lead to access to medical care, food, power and water. It also includes the administrative capacities of international, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO).”⁷ Second, the economic instrument of power has been ignored in the new strategic concept. Similar to the civilian instrument, the economic instrument is not at NATO's direct disposal, but this does not explain why it is left out in the text, when the civilian is not. The explanation might be found in the 2010 Lisbon Summit decision to “form an appropriate but modest civilian crisis management capability to interface more effectively with civilian partners, building on the lessons learned from NATO-led operations. This capability may also be used to plan,

employ and coordinate civilian activities until conditions allow for the transfer of those responsibilities and tasks to other actors.”⁸ In other words, NATO has some sort of solution to the lack of an organic civilian instrument, while NATO apparently has been unable to agree on how to orchestrate the combined economic instruments of the member states and/or how to establish a formal collaborative relationship with an international government organization (IGO) such as EU that holds and controls organic economic instruments to some degree. This is unfortunate, as those who donate money normally wants influence in how it is spent, influence which needs to be worked into a common comprehensive strategy from the beginning in order for a CA to be effective, rather than 27 nations’ and numerous IGO/NGO’s individual strategies,.

NATO’s COMMAND STRUCTURE

This leads to the next point of discussion, the requirement for an organizational structure in NATO (in military jargon called “command structure”) tailored to a CA to crisis management. Experience from numerous crises and conflicts shows that “unity of command”⁹ is a basic requirement to produce and execute an effective strategy. The more divided, the less synergy among the instruments of influence, and the best achievable often becomes “deconfliction” rather than “integration” of the instruments of power. The goal for a CA is to produce a grand strategy that integrates the four instruments of power/influence – the means – in a way that effectively creates synergic effects, which together achieve the desired political ends. In order to achieve unity of effort, there must be a set of common agreed upon overall objectives/goals, which are clear and unambiguous, as well as feasible and realistic. If NATO and its partners do not agree upon the objectives, there is no basis for a common strategy and planning (nevertheless, alliance consensus might sometimes require ambiguous official objectives, for international political reasons or for domestic political reasons in the member states. Such objectives should be clarified internally, for instance by attaching clear and explicit “Criteria for Success” to each objective).¹⁰ Furthermore, in order to produce a strategy that effectively integrates the four instruments of power, all actors contributing to the strategy must have a common appreciation of the strategic situation. These two requirements are best achieved by forming a common crisis response planning group with planning experts from all four instruments of power, subject matter experts, regional experts, analysts, and liaison teams to partner IGOs and NGOs etc. When a common appreciation has been achieved, the same crisis response group, with all four instruments of power present, then develops the grand strategy, by assessing what needs to be done in order to achieve the overall objectives and what each instrument of power can contribute with in that respect.

This is not how NATO is organized. Instead of having one crisis response planning group with all four instruments of power, working under the authority of the North Atlantic Council (NATO's highest political authority), the crisis response planning is spread out on several groups. The list is long – in 2011 there was the SHAPE Strategic Operations Planning Group (SOPG), the Military Committee's (MC) Strategic Analysis Element (SAE), the NATO HQ Crisis Management Task Force (CMTF) (if activated by the Secretary General), the NATO Strategic Communications Policy Board (SCPB), the Civil Emergency Planning Committee (CEPC), the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), the Civil-Military Fusion Centre (CFC), and more. While the SAE or the CMTF in theory could be the basis for a grand strategic assessment and planning effort, in practice it is not so. These groups cannot be pro-active in the crisis assessment process, since they are not permanent bodies, but need to be activated. In addition, there needs to be one – not two, and it must have well established and practiced CA assessment and planning procedures – doctrine – that include all four instruments of power. Finally, assessment and planning experts must all be present at the same place – at the NATO HQ. With the decision to stand up a civilian planning capacity, there is a chance that political as well as civilian planning capacity will be present at NATO HQ. With the military planning expertise, the situation is different. The International Military Staff (IMS) at NATO HQ, serving NATO's highest military authority, the Military Council (MC), is not manned to perform this task. While some assessment expertise is present, the core military strategic planning expertise is located at SHAPE, the head quarter of Allied Command Operations (ACO).¹¹ The last instrument, the economic, is left hanging. In conclusion, there exists no single organization and no grand strategic procedures for collaborative comprehensive planning and the available expertise is spread out on different organizations and physical locations.

NATO's NEW PLANNING DOCTRINE

ACO's new military planning doctrine from December 2010 – the Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COP-D)¹² - tries to remedy this challenge by having a Strategic Operations Planning Group (SOPG)¹³ aid in making the grand strategic assessment, in close collaboration with the groups/organizations mentioned above, and feeding it through the Military Council to the North Atlantic Council – in other words a bottom-up strategic process. While the planning doctrine implicitly acknowledges that grand strategy should be developed above the level of ACO, it acknowledges that this is not likely to happen. The quote below illustrates that the

doctrine anticipates that no strategic analysis and strategy development likely takes places at the NATO HQ / NAC levels and that SHAPE therefore must be prepared to do it:

... *If the NAC desired end state and strategic objectives are not provided, the SOPG will determine the proposed NATO desired end state and strategic objectives based on the analysis of the system and problem definition [emphasis added].*

... At this point the SOPG ... should consider:

- (1) What essential conditions must be attained to end the crisis or conflict on acceptable terms? (Ends)
- (2) How can military, political (diplomatic), civil, and economic instruments be used to create coherent effects that will achieve the conditions required to reach the desired end state? (Ways)
- (3) What political (diplomatic), military, civil, and economic instruments of power are available to NATO and cooperating partners to create the desired effects? (Means) ¹⁴

This is clearly a description of a grand strategic assessment process – not just a military strategic assessment. The next quote, which originates from a page later in the doctrine, illustrates how the doctrine struggles with the problem that grand strategy really should take places at the NATO HQ level, since ACO is a *military strategic command* whose expertise is military strategic assessment and planning:

... The SOPG will primarily develop *military* lines of engagement; however, it will recognise logically that some NATO strategic objectives and desired effects can be achieved using military, political, economic or civil means, or some combination of these. Therefore, it may be possible to determine strategic lines of engagement that may help to coordinate and synchronise the application of different sources of power toward a common purpose [emphasis added].¹⁵

In conclusion, since NATO HQ is neither organized nor manned with the required strategic assessment and planning expertise, NATO doctrine prescribes that it is a strategic operations planning group (SOPG) at the military strategic level head quarter (SHAPE) , which through a bottom-up process may provide NAC with a *grand strategy* – and quite possibly even the NATO political objectives.¹⁶ The problem, obviously, is that all the political and civilian expertise is located in the NATO HQ, leaving the SOPG at SHAPE with civilian liaison elements at best. Worst case, the SOPG will be second-guessing or ignoring potential use of the non-military instruments.¹⁷

SOLUTIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

An ideal solution would be to establish a permanent crisis management element under the leadership of the Secretary General.¹⁸ This element should include strategic analysis and planning expertise from all instruments of power, with liaison elements present at the appropriate places such as SHAPE's SOPG (when established) and the newly established civilian crisis management capability etc.¹⁹ This permanent crisis management element would form the core of a conflict specific Crisis Management Task Force when established by the Secretary General.

Another solution could be to increase the size and presence of liaison elements of the non-military instruments of power at SHAPE. This might be the political easiest solution (however difficult), since it does not require the establishment of a new organization at NATO HQ, but it is less likely to achieve the same level of effectiveness. First, it will be dominated by military planners and as such be biased towards military options. Second, it will have to coordinate with all the earlier mentioned strategic elements at NATO HQ, which is difficult due to both the physical separation, as well as the fact that all these elements are situated above SHAPE in the NATO organizational hierarchy.²⁰

DOCTRINAL CONFUSION ON LEVELS OF WAR

While trying to solve the problem of a NATO HQ incapable of making grand strategy in a comprehensive manner, the ACO produced COP-D manages to mix up completely the natural task for a military strategic HQ – making military strategy – with making grand strategy. After a well described grand strategic analysis process (called phase 2), the COP-D completely mixes up grand strategy and military strategy in what it calls phase 3 & 4.²¹ The phase 2 description includes how to identify and analyze (grand) strategic center of gravities (COGs), in order to help establish appropriate strategic effects that could lead to fulfillment of the NATO (grand) strategic objectives.²² These strategic effects are achieved by strategic actions done by the different the instruments of power available to NATO and its partners – the ends/ways/means chain of strategy. Some of these strategic actions will be military; these are tasked to the military and become the military strategic objectives.²³ What should naturally follow is a description of a similar analysis at the military strategic level, leading to a military strategy and the assignment of operational objectives to subordinate commanders.²⁴ Instead, what follows is a complete mix-up of the military strategic level with the grand strategic level. As a result, COP-D fails to describe how to identify and analyze COGs at the military strategic level, leaving the process of establishing operational

objectives in complete darkness.²⁵ When combined with the analysis of NATO organizational structure, a strong suspicion surfaces that this confusion stems from the fact that SHAPE is trying to do two jobs at the same time.

An additional possible explanation of the fused grand strategic and military strategic level is the concept of an operational level of war. While Western military thinking, inspired by the Prussian military thinker Carl Von Clausewitz, for a long time only operated with strategy and tactics, the operational level of war was originally a Soviet concept that was adopted in NATO and US military doctrinal thinking in the 1980s.²⁶ The concept originated from a requirement during WWI and WWII to coordinate the effort of multiple military armies and army groups in multiple theatres/fronts towards common military strategic goals – the size of the armies had simply become too big for only two conceptual levels of strategy and tactics. However, today western militaries seldom employ multiple army size military forces and seldom simultaneously in multiple theatres; rather, the operational level now has come to mean employing divisions or even just brigades, normally integrated with air and maritime forces – often called the joint force level. Consequently, it is arguable that there is *always* a requirement of both a military strategic level and an operational level of war.²⁷ Either way, the joint force level often shifts back and forth between the military strategic level and the operational level depending on the context.²⁸ This makes it rather problematic – or at least confusing - to have NATO doctrine equate the operational level with the Joint Force Command level. In the event NATO is engaged in a single smaller conflict like Libya or Kosovo, with no need to make strategic priorities between several theatres or to coordinate those theaters in support of a common grand strategy, there really is no need for both a strategic commander and operational level joint force commander. Rather, they should be the same, in effect combining the two levels. The danger of maintaining both levels is that you end up having two commanders fighting for the same job, at the risk of none of them actually doing it.²⁹ Often, it will be the operational level that attracts both commanders' attention, since this is the natural comfort zone for a military officer – far away from politics. Unfortunately, this risks that no-one makes military strategy and ensures the clear linkage between policy and military action.

This confusion makes it explainable why COP-D has such difficulty in differentiating between the grand strategic level and the military strategic level. The reason is likely to be found in the fact that the operational level was well described in COP-D's predecessor from 2005, while the strategic and grand strategic levels were underdeveloped in this first NATO planning doctrine. This explains why the operational level was kept as the constant in the doctrinal formula, while the

military strategic and the grand strategic level – the underdeveloped levels in the former doctrine – were unconsciously merged to reflect the historical needs.

The danger of it all, in the words of Colin Gray, is that “if politician-strategists and soldier strategists are content simply to sponsor strategy that is left to be executed by operational artistry using tactical behavior at an operational level of war, the necessary strategic artistry is likely to be missing from effective guidance of action. When military campaigns are conducted by military virtuosity for unduly military reasons, the tactical-strategic nexus is apt to be thin indeed.”³⁰ This leads us from the conceptual and doctrinal analysis to NATO’s recent endeavor, the Libya conflict, which exactly excelled in lack of strategic guidance of the military operations.

NATO’s LEADERSHIP IN THE LIBYA CONFLICT

The West’s ability to make and execute effective strategy in the Libya conflict was hampered by the division of political and military strategic leadership. At the political-strategic level, the international coalition engaged in the Libya conflict was led by the Libya Contact Group. The Libya Contact Group included members from the Arab league, the African Union, USA, Canada, Turkey, as well as western European states like Denmark. NATO provided the military leadership through a Joint Task Force (JTF). See the Operation Unified Protector diagram below.

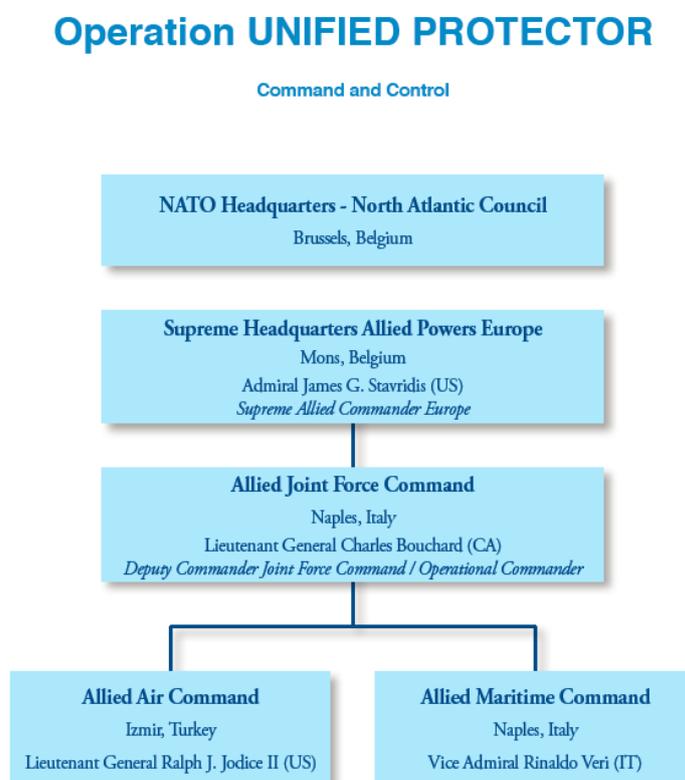


Diagram 1: Operation Unified Protector³¹

Due to the limited scope of this article, this analysis will focus on the air operations only. It will not be possible at this early stage to perform an in depth analysis, since much of the information still is classified.³² In addition, the analysis will not include the transition from the US-led military operations that began March 19, 2011, to NATO-led operations that began on March 23, 2011, and encompassed all international military operations in Libya by March 31, as this would be an article in itself.³³

As described above, the NATO commander in charge of the military operations (Operation Unified Protector) was situated at the Joint Force Command level, which, as discussed earlier, in NATO doctrine is equivalent to the operational level of war. As such, the Joint Task Force commander is responsible for an overall military campaign plan that has operational objectives. Those operational objectives should in theory support the military strategy, which then should support the overall political – or grand – strategy in the Libya conflict. In this case, however, a grand strategy and a military strategy did not exist. The North Atlantic Council (NAC) provided the political leadership for Operation Unified Protector, while SACEUR at SHAPE provided the military strategic leadership. However, since Operation Unified Protector was a purely military operation tasked with enforcing UN resolution 1970 and 1973, NAC did not provide any additional (grand) strategic guidance. Thus, while President Obama declared that “Qadhafi has lost all legitimacy to rule and must step down”³⁴ and the Libya Contact Group likewise,³⁵ NATO did not support this political objective with Operation Unified Protector. Instead, in the words of NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Our goal is to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas under threat of attack from the Gaddafi regime. NATO will implement all aspects of the UN Resolution. Nothing more, nothing less.”³⁶ Consequently, NATO renounced any official role in making grand strategy for the Libyan conflict and its military operations supported only part of the coalition’s political objectives.

With no real grand strategic role for the NAC to play, where does this leave the military strategy? At the time, the military strategic head quarter, SHAPE, had two conflicts to manage: Afghanistan and Libya. However, there was no common military strategy for those two conflicts, since they were not connected in any way. Likewise, SHAPE had only few resource allocation decisions to make between the two conflicts³⁷ – the large majority were made by the individual member states. Consequently, SHAPE did not make the military strategy for either conflict. ISAF HQ in Kabul made and still makes the military strategy for Afghanistan,³⁸ while Operation Unified

Protector (OUP) Joint Task Force (at JFC HQ, Naples) made it for Libya – or at least they were supposed to. However, in reality there was no military strategy for OUP – no campaign plan – just the objectives stated by Rasmussen above, as given by UN resolution 1970 and 1973. One month into the operation, there existed no strategic analysis of Qadhafi and his regime. As discussed earlier, the COP-D prescribes how strategic centers of gravity analyses should be made and provide the basis for a strategy. None of the kind existed one month into the war. According to COP-D, SHAPE should perform this analysis. It did not, and the JTF did not either. This can easily be perceived as lack of military leadership.

Consequently, at the operational/tactical level things were chaotic. With no analysis made of the regime, its command structure and its military forces, targets for the air operations were selected randomly rather than in the framework of a campaign plan. Lack of sufficient NATO organic intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities (or access to US capabilities) partly explains this, but with no strategic analysis, there was no guidance to what intelligence was required – what to focus on. At one point, NATO warned the Libyan navy to stay in port or they would be bombed. They complied – but were later bombed in the harbor anyway. Likewise, many targets were bombed several times due to lack of post-strike operational assessment, and with no campaign plan to follow, there was no procedures in place for tracking progress, i.e. targets destroyed. One could argue that the lack of a military strategy did not matter. Like a robot lawn mower cutting the grass in a random pattern and eventually covering the whole lawn this way, NATO eventually destroyed all valuable military targets anyway. Qadhafi's military power was weak enough that the lack of a campaign plan became less important – but arguably more costly.

What is more worrisome is the lack of political guidance to and control of the Joint Task Force (JTF). While NATO's official goal was just to protect civilians, the JTF started to target facilities where Qadhafi and his family might have been. They were officially called command and control (C2) facilities, thus legitimating that they were military targets part of Qadhafi's ability to attack civilians.³⁹ In reality, it was mission creep. Qadhafi and his closest allies unofficially became potential targets. This might make sense in light of the statements from the Contact Group, but it was a wide interpretation of the mission given to the JTF, and it carried with it the risk of losing support from the international community; China and Russia were very critical of this development, and certain members of the Arab League were very uneasy.⁴⁰ It also risked killing allies to Qadhafi, people that might be part of a post-conflict solution to stability in Libya and potentially in secret diplomatic contact with members of the coalition. With the military operations disintegrated from any grand strategic effort by the individual members of the Contact Group, there was no way to be sure. If this had been part of a politically approved, well thought-out strategy this would have been a calculated risk. It is, however, a completely

different story to let the military commander interpret his mission freely, without any political probing and questioning. It is a classic case of objective control of the military as recommended by Samuel Huntington in his classical work “The Soldier and the State,” and it is certainly far from the active and involving political leadership recommended by Eliot Cohen in his historical study “Supreme Command.”⁴¹

DENMARK’S STRATEGIC ROLE IN LIBYA

With this worrisome analysis of NATO’s handling of the Libya conflict in mind, what could Denmark have done differently, and what may Denmark do in similar circumstances in the future to improve strategic leadership and political-military integration in grand strategy? First, Denmark must come better prepared strategically; this requires an improved capability for making and executing national security strategy. Second, Denmark must be prepared to fulfill the role of asking tough questions to NATO and to the military commander, despite being a small country in a large coalition.

If Denmark wants to harvest the full potential of the activist foreign policy Denmark has been carrying out the last two decades, Denmark requires an improved capability to make and execute a national security strategy.⁴² Denmark is in a historic unique position with no military threat against its territory.⁴³ That gives Denmark wide possibilities for an activist security policy that provides international influence and prestige; it has the luxury that it can decide which conflicts it wants to engage in. However, with literally unlimited conflicts to pick from and limited resources, Denmark needs to prioritize. A national security strategy (or rather: a grand strategy) provides the basis for prioritizing. Moreover, a national security strategy would help towards the integration of Danish foreign policy, development policy, defense policy, etc., towards common goals. Nevertheless, having a strategy is not enough; one must also have the capability to carry it out – to orchestrate the individual policies and strategies of the different departments and agencies. In addition, a national security strategy cannot encompass all future crisis and conflicts; therefore, there must be a capability to perform strategic assessment and planning of emerging crises like Libya.

The current Danish national security organization is not geared towards these requirements; consequently, Denmark needs a new or larger organization. Currently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for coordinating Danish foreign- and security policy. However, the security policy office is quite small and does not have the required capacity. The Defense Ministry has no capacity at all for making strategic assessment and security strategy. As an illustration, several months passed before Denmark had prepared an official strategy for the engagement in Libya.⁴⁴ This meant that the strategic basis for making the political decision to contribute with F-16 fighter aircraft was shallow and purely

reactive. Further, it meant that Denmark was ill prepared for contributing to grand strategy development in the Libya Contact Group.

DENMARK'S WAY AHEAD

What Denmark need is a national security policy office that has the capacity to be proactive in strategic assessment and planning, and to orchestra the execution of national security strategy, both broad and longer term strategy as well as conflict specific strategy. There are several options on how this could be done. One option is to expand the current security policy office under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This would probably be the easiest, as it already exists. It would need to get extended responsibilities, though. Thus, it would need the authority to coordinate the activities of all departments and agencies involved in security policy in a comprehensive approach – in theory all of the central administration. It is questionable that this authority would be given to an office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another solution, recommended by Breitenbauch,⁴⁵ is establishing a new staff under the office of the Prime Minister. This would require the Prime Minister to take upon him/her the leadership responsibilities that Cohen argues are important for successful grand strategy. Whether this is likely to happen remains to be seen. There is no modern tradition in Danish politics for the Prime Minister to take personal charge of national security policy. However, one can argue that the new risk society we live in today involves a wide range of risks that require broad (or comprehensive) political strategies – grand strategies – and that this logically would require the involvement of the Prime Minister.⁴⁶

Regardless in which ministry it is placed, such a national security (or grand) strategy office will require that the different ministries increase their capability to contribute to grand strategy making and execution. For the Ministry of Defense, this capability exists on paper already: in the previous defense agreement 2010-2014, a joint operational planning capacity was supposed to be created. The plans called for a fusion of the capabilities of the three services' tactical staffs. Those three staffs were already operational as individual staffs, and they had to some extent trained together the last decade. However, the armed services showed lack of enthusiasm for the plans, partly due to the pressure put on the organizations from the employment in Afghanistan; consequently, the fusion plans were not implemented by 2014. The new appendix to defense agreement 2013-2017 from April 2014 reorganized the civilian and military leadership of Danish Defence and created a new Joint Operational Command by merging most of the operations division in the (now former) Defence Command with the former three service operational commands. At the time of updating this article (June 2014), it is still unclear how this influences the previous plans for a joint operational planning capacity.

Clearly, there is a need for such a planning capacity. If it stands up and becomes operational, it will provide the Chief of Defence an operational planning staff capable of assisting him fulfill the role as the supreme operational commander and primary military advisor to the government, hereby providing solid military advice to a National Security Strategy Office in manner the Danish Defence is incapable of today. Such advice should not be made stovepiped, without consideration of the other instruments of power, but in continuous dialogue with and under the direction of the National Security Strategy Office as the coordinator of all the instruments of power. As such, the military advice must be based on a common, inter-agency understanding of the strategic environment; this should be one of the products delivered from the National Security Strategy Office. Such a product would require close collaboration with Danish Defence Intelligence Service (FE) and other intelligence sources, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, etc. Indeed, the strategic analysis of the situation is an iterative process: The initial analysis provided by the National Security Strategy Office is validated, refined, or revised by the analyses performed in each individual Ministry / Department – in the Defence Ministry by the joint operational planning capacity.

With their homework well prepared, the Danish Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs should be in a position to contribute to the timely development of a coalition grand strategy – they would even be in a position to take a lead in the process where larger member states may find this to be useful. Making coalition grand strategy would initially require a fusion and consolidation of each coalition member's strategic analysis. This would provide the basis for establishing coalition political objectives – objectives should always be based on such an analysis, in order to increase the likelihood that one establishes realistic and suitable objectives. When the grand strategy initially is created and afterwards continuously revised as required, part of the process will be to ask tough questions to whatever coalition military organization that is tasked to plan and execute the military part of the grand strategy. These tough questions must challenge the military strategy and disclose military internal disagreements on the strategy to make sure all alternatives have been presented to the political leadership.⁴⁷ The ability to ask these tough questions will be enhanced if Denmark contributes military planners to whatever military organization tasked with the military strategy. In the Libyan case, Denmark did contribute at the Air Component level, but not at the Joint Force level - but there was no political or military strategic interest in asking tough questions.⁴⁸

However, it does not end with strategic analysis and planning. Rather, this is only the beginning. Throughout the execution phase, the National Security Strategy Office must monitor the situation and advise the Ministers involved in the execution of the strategy in such a way that they are prepared to continue to ask tough questions. Strategies seldom survive the first meet with the enemy;

rather, strategy is a continuous, iterative process. This requires continuous political and military strategic leadership and Denmark must do *its* part.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS ARE REQUIRED

This article has examined whether NATO's strategic concept, organizational structure, and strategic planning doctrine adequately prepared NATO for grand strategic leadership in a conflict like Libya. The conclusion is that NATO was not well prepared. NATO's strategic concept from 2010 introduced a concept designed to aid in making strategy – the comprehensive approach to crisis management - but it fails to convince due to incomplete and unclear definitions. Furthermore, NATO requires structural reforms that enhance its capability to provide strategic leadership and unity of effort. In addition, NATO's new strategic planning doctrine must be revised to remove confusion of roles and responsibilities in making strategy using a comprehensive approach. While NATO since the 2011 Libya intervention has improved its organization and planning doctrine at the ACO level, the article's critique points essentially remain valid.

Next, the article finds that NATO's operation in Libya lacked both political leadership and military strategic leadership. Part of the blame falls on the separation of the coalition political leadership from the military strategic leadership. Fighting in coalitions makes it difficult to make a common grand strategy that can give guidance to the military. However, the military leadership in Allied Command Operations and the Libya Joint Task Force failed on their part to perform a strategic analysis and filling out the grand strategic vacuum. Worse, they initially failed to provide a military strategy that could guide the selection of air targets. NATO's command structure and planning doctrine did not aid in preventing these deficiencies.

Finally, the article argues that Denmark came strategically ill prepared as a member of the Libya Contact Group, and that Denmark despite its small size may contribute to better coalition grand strategy making in future conflicts if it enhances its capability to make grand strategy. This requires a National Security Strategy Office, aided by planning capabilities in the individual ministries that can analyze, plan, orchestrate and monitor strategy, as well as advise the Danish political leaders. The political leaders, on their part, must be prepared to involve themselves in the process of making and executing strategy, to *lead* the process and to ask tough questions. Only this way can Denmark harvest the full potential of its activist foreign policy.

ENDNOTES:

¹ This analysis is based on an earlier paper contributed at the Copenhagen University Summer School “Dansk forsvarspolitik og strategiske studier” in August 2011. The original paper analyzed NATO’s strategic concept, organization, and doctrine as applied during Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR in 2011, and it has been revised to include notes that briefly outline key NATO organizational and doctrinal developments from 2011 to 2013 in areas analyzed in this article.

² “Crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations. NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, manage crises, stabilize post-conflict situations and support.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization - NATO, “Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,” (NATO, 2010). This article uses Colin Gray’s definition of grand strategy, see note 5.

³ Since the end of the cold war, there has been broad agreement in Folketinget that Denmark, as a small nation, is dependent upon collective security provided by organizations such as NATO, EU and UN. While the parties have placed different weight on these three organizations, NATO is broadly recognized as the cornerstone of Danish security policy when military means are being considered.

⁴ The article does not discuss the WHY: why did NATO not take political leadership?

⁵ Using Colin Gray’s definition, “grand strategy is the direction and use made of any or all the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purpose of policy decided by politics.” Colin S. Gray, *The strategy bridge: theory for practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). 28. Liddell Hart adds with insight: “Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy – which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent’s will... Furthermore, while the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should not only combine the various instruments, but regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace – for its security and prosperity.” This clearly shows the conceptual overlap between comprehensive approach and grand strategy. B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, vol. 2. rev. ed. (New York: The New American Library, [1954], [1967], 1991). 322.

⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, (NATO, 2010), <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, BI-Strategic Command Pre-Doctrinal Handbook: Effect-Based Approach to Operations, (NATO, 4 December 2007).

⁸ NATO, *Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*.

⁹ Unity of command: all means required for crisis management are planned for and controlled by one organization, led by one boss. It is a concept framed by Clausewitz.

¹⁰ Criteria for Success (CfS) is defined as “...*measurable or observable requirements with respect to the essential physical, cybernetic or moral conditions or effects that must be achieved, as well as any conditions or effects that cannot exist for the objective to be successfully accomplished*” and must be established for each objective. North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, Allied Joint Publication-5 (AJP-5), (NATO HQ, 27 April 2005). 3-13.

¹¹ SHAPE (Supreme Headquarter Allied Powers Europe) is NATO’s military strategic headquarter.

¹² Allied Command Operations ACO, Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim v1.0, (Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe, 2010). COPD is not actually Alliance doctrine (as the AJP series); rather, it is ACO doctrine, as it is authorized by SACEUR rather than the Alliance member states. After this article has been written, ACO has released a new version of COPD, V.2.0 of 4 October 2013. This article does not analyze COPD V.2.0. Worth mentioning, however, is that it incorporates a new Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre (CCOMC) at SHAPE, which gives NATO a daily operations center that can monitor developing crises and give the SACEUR Strategic Assessment process (SSA) a head start.

¹³ COPD V.2.0 has replaced the term Strategic Operations Planning Group (SOPG) with Response Direction Group (RDG); a footnote (page 4-14) clarifies “The old term Strategic Operations Planning Group (SOPG) will still be found in various documents; where this occurs, it can be thought of as roughly equivalent to the RDG depending on the context.”

¹⁴ ACO, *Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim v1.0*. section 3-19, 3-20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “[the SOPG should consider] different levels of NATO’s ambition in contributing to the international effort to attain the conditions of a desired NATO end state, in terms of urgency and burden sharing with other international and

regional organisations. Considering different levels of ambition may be done in two ways: articulating tiered alternatives of ever-increasing appetite for one end state. Alternatively, this could be done by describing alternatives with different proposed NATO end states for NATO participation in the resolution of the crisis.” Ibid., section 3-20-b-1.

¹⁷ Since this article was written, SHAPE has been expanded with two staff elements in J9 that tries to compensate for this deficiency: the Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) branch and the Civil-Military Assessment (CMA) branch. CMI covers NGO and IGO expertise and (when possible) liaison, while CMA provides regional and thematic expertise. The new Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre (CCOMC) at SHAPE will fusion inputs from the various SHAPE branches and form the core of the SOPG (now RDG) when established by a NAC Initiating Directive.

¹⁸ It should be led by the Secretary General in order to achieve the political strategic leadership that Eliot Cohen argues for convincingly is required for the practice of successful grand strategy. However, a chief of staff or director of the crisis management element would lead it on a daily basis. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme command: soldiers, statesmen, and leadership in wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Liaison elements should also be present at appropriate IGO such as EU, AU, and UN, as well as important NGOs. An exchange of liaison elements would be the optimum solution.

²⁰ As note 16 explains, since the article was written, NATO has ended up choosing this solution.

²¹ Phase 3 is the development of Military Response Options (MRO), while phase 4 is development of a military concept of operations (CONOPS).

²² ACO, *Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim v1.0*. section 3-14-d, 3-19.

²³ This is where COP-D starts to be vague. Section 3-15-C-5 states that “Actions are typically directed at some other actor, system or system element to achieve specific effects with the intent that the cumulative effect of these actions will create conditions required to achieve the actor’s objective.” In other words, strategic actions => strategic effects => NATO (grand) strategic objectives. However, the link between *strategic actions* and objectives at the lower level, i.e. the military strategic level, is not written explicit. Thus, the text above represents my deduction. See *ibid.*, section 3-20-c, 3-20-e.

²⁴ “Based on the military strategic objectives assigned by the NAC, SACEUR’s mission and the strategic design, SACEUR will assign missions and operational objectives to subordinate commanders as a basis for their planning.” *Ibid.*, section 3-33-a-1.

²⁵ The examples quickly become rather technical, but see *ibid.*, page 3-48, 3-50, and 3-54. Contributing to the confusion is the use of different terms for the same thing, e.g. using “overarching concept” and “SACEUR concept” followed later by “strategic CONOPS” – leaving the reader to wonder whether this is the overarching or SACEUR’s concept (of operation). In addition, the concept “strategic design” is described, but it never becomes clear whether it is a grand (or overarching) strategic design or a military strategic design.

²⁶ Edward N. Luttwak, “The Operational Level of War,” *International Security* 5, no. 3 (1980).

²⁷ Gray, *The strategy bridge: theory for practice*: 20-21.

²⁸ As an example, during the initial part of the Iraq War in 2003, the *strategic* commander (COMCENTCOM) was also the joint force commander (JFC), the role associated with the operational level in NATO doctrine. This would make the component level the operational level in this part of the conflict. After the invasion in 2003 was completed, however, Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) replaced the CENTCOM land component command (LCC) as the command responsible for the Iraqi occupation, thus making the CJTF-7 commander the new joint force commander for Iraq – an operational level command. Meanwhile, CENTCOM now managed three operational level theaters with individual task forces: Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Horn of Africa.

²⁹ This was what happened during the Kosovo conflict. The strategic commander (SACEUR), General Wesley Clark fought with the Air Component Commander, Lt. Gen Michael Short, over the military strategy, in reality short-circuiting the role of the Joint Force Commander, Admiral Nellis. Removing Nellis from the chain of command and combining the joint force command level with the strategic command level would better have reflected the actual requirements for command levels.

³⁰ Gray, *The strategy bridge: theory for practice*: 21.

³¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO, “Operation Unified Protector Command and Control Structure,” NATO Press Office, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/20110325_110325-unified-protector-command-control.pdf.

³² The analysis is based on interviews with NATO staff officers in June 2011.

³³ In short, NATO’s southern air command structure did not prepare for the transition and were not able to take command of the operations until military planners from CC Air Ramstein and associated CAOCs were brought in.

³⁴ Barack Hussein Obama, United States Activities in Libya, (United States White House, 2011),

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/204680/united-states-activities-in-libya-6-15-11.pdf>.

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/204680/united-states-activities-in-libya-6-15-11.pdf>

³⁵ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Fourth Meeting of the Libya Contact Group Chair's Statement, 15 July 2011, Istanbul," http://www.mfa.gov.tr/fourth-meeting-of-the-libya-contact-group-chair_s-statement_-15-july-2011_-istanbul.en.mfa.

³⁶ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Statement by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Libya, Marts 27," (2011), http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_71808.htm.

³⁷ NATO radar surveillance aircraft (AWACS) are among the few resources to prioritize.

³⁸ Although JFC Brunssum in theory is the operational command leading ISAF.

³⁹ Julian Hale, "NATO Ambassadors Weigh Post-Conflict Libya Role," *Defense News*(2011), <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=7457910&c=EUR&s=TOP>.

⁴⁰ An undesired effect could be to damage the "responsibility to protect" principle. Lecture by Tonny Brems Knudsen at CMS, 2011-08-25.

⁴¹ Objective civilian control means that the politicians set the objectives and allocate resources and leave it to the military to figure out a strategy. Thus, there is a distinct civilian and a distinct military sphere of war. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The soldier and the state: the theory and politics of civil-military relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, [1957], 1985); Cohen, *Supreme command: soldiers, statesmen, and leadership in wartime*.

⁴² Henrik Ø. Breitenbauch, *Kompas og kontrakt* (København: Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier, 2008).

⁴³ Although the Arctic area has potential to be a future conflict area. Moreover if Russia expands its foreign policy against Ukraine to for instance the Baltic member states of NATO, it would activate NATO Article 5 and generate a completely new security situation for Denmark. Still, it would not constitute a threat against the Danish territory.

⁴⁴ Lene Espersen, *Strategi for Danmarks engagement i Libyen*, (København: Udenrigsministeriet, 2011). Likewise, several years passed before Denmark had an official Afghanistan strategy.

⁴⁵ Breitenbauch, *Kompas og kontrakt*; See also Jacob Barfoed, "Styrk Danmarks sikkerhedspolitik," *Berlingske*, 24 juli 2008.

⁴⁶ Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, *The risk society at war: terror, technology and strategy in the twenty-first century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ This is one of Cohen's main arguments. See Cohen, *Supreme command: soldiers, statesmen, and leadership in wartime*.

⁴⁸ Denmark provided approximately seven military planners to the NATO Air Component Command tasked with the Libya operations.

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