

Interview

## US Mission to NATO Political Counselor Kelly Degnan: Bulgaria Exemplifies Approaches for NATO's New Strategic Concept

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Kelly Degnan presented the basics of the future new strategic concept of NATO before journalists in Sofia.

*Interview of Novinite.com (Sofia News Agency) with **Kelly Degnan**, a political counselor at the **US Mission to NATO**. Degnan gave a presentation in Sofia on **NATO's new strategic concept "NATO 2020"** at a briefing organized by the US Embassy and the Atlantic Club in Bulgaria.*

**According to the position of the Group of Experts led by its Chair Madeleine Alright, the new strategic concept of NATO (2020), will be largely about "dynamic engagement". What is this approach going to look like? Could you provide examples?**

I think the **strategic concept** is an important part of **NATO's** effort to revitalize the Alliance by restating in many ways why the Alliance exists, and what its role is as we move forward.

An example of the dynamic aspect is **missile defense** where you have an increasingly sophisticated threat, and it's something that the Alliance is perhaps best suited to respond to by joining together capabilities and assets that the different members have in order to form an Alliance-wide protective measure.

Missile defense is not just the capacity to respond to a ballistic missile threat or an attack, it's also the deterrence value that having a capable **missile defense**

program provides. It might deter an adversary from launching an attack, it offers the opportunity for cooperation within the Alliance but also, more importantly, with partners such as **Russia**, if they choose to participate.

In that case, I think it's an example of the dynamic outreach that is going to be the future of **NATO**. Many countries don't want to become members of **NATO** but the more we work together in concrete ways as partners, the broader stability we have, and I think this is particularly important with **Russia**.

**In your presentation of the new strategic concept of NATO, you mentioned that enlargement of the Alliance was good for Europe, and that partnerships are good for the relations of the Alliance in the rest of the world. In this context, Bulgarian government officials recently called for incorporating the use of "soft power" in the new strategic concept of NATO. How exactly is soft power going to play out in the new strategic concept and the future initiatives of the Alliance?**

Soft power will be a focus of the new **strategic concept** because it will be a focus of promoting peace and stability in the future.

Maybe this region and Bulgaria's role in this region is a particularly good example of it. The **Western Balkans** and their integration into the Euro-Atlantic security realm is a high priority for **NATO** and for all of the allied members, particularly important for the countries in the region who set an example for countries that have not yet become members of **NATO** or in some cases the **EU**.

I think Bulgaria – with its experience in the years since it's been in **NATO**, and before becoming a member – can help these countries understand what's involved in becoming a member, what kinds of reforms they need to undertake, and some of them are going to be quite challenging for some of these areas - but with the recognition – and, again, a message that Bulgaria and other countries can promote – that this is the way to bring stability to the **Western Balkans** area. All countries in the **Western Balkans** benefit and then all countries in Europe benefit from that.

So that kind of engagement with partners, with aspiring members through dialogue, through consultation, through cooperative efforts, that kind of partnership I think is what **NATO**'s increasingly about.

**There has been a lot of talk and debate about the globalization of NATO and how exactly this is going to work out. Isn't there a possibility that this "globalization" might be detrimental to the unity of the Alliance because the US as a global power might be involved in conflicts – for example, with rogue states, or with China, or somebody else in the future – that the European allies might want to stay out of?**

That's where consensus decision-making comes into play. No action is taken in the Alliance without all 28 members agreeing to it. There is in Article 5 the commitment to one another that if one ally is attacked, the allies, through consultation in Article 4, can decide to invoke Article 5. But it has only been invoked twice. Once is September 11, as everyone knows.

It is a very serious and a very high bar to invoke Article 5. Article 4 consultation is something that is more easily engaged in so I think that there is always the opportunity for allies to discuss not only the threats but also the responses.

For instance, when Estonia had a very serious cyber attack, which was perhaps the first red flag for the allies that cyber defense is an important capacity to develop, that was something that was discussed among the allies, the response was discussed, and the decision was taken not to invoke Article 5 in that case. So the

consensus in the decision-making and the consultation that are the core strength of **NATO** are very important.

**How will the development of the Common EU Security and Defense Policy be reconciled with NATO in the new strategic concept of the Alliance? Isn't that development seen as "stealing" or duplicating some of the responsibilities of NATO?**

Actually, I think that this is now viewed as a real opportunity. We now have the **Lisbon Treaty**, and the **EU** is deciding on how to restructure in light of the **Lisbon Treaty**.

At the same time, we have the new **strategic concept** where **NATO** is looking at how to better organize itself for future threats and challenges. So there is a real recognition in both organizations that we need to work together on all this.

There are 21 countries that are in the **EU** that are also **NATO** members. That's 21 out of 28 allies, or 21 out of 27 in the **EU**. Those countries see that there is much to be gained by doing this together, by not duplicating effort, by finding the areas where **NATO** may be the lead, or where the **EU** may be the lead.

I think the stabilization and reconstruction is one area in particular where we can work this out. There remain some serious political obstacles to the two organizations working more closely together on the formal level but what we have seen in **Afghanistan** and Kosovo is that on a practical level, on the ground, on a tactical level, the organizations recognize that they have to work together, and they have found ways to do that.

**Isn't the situation in Afghanistan a good example in which the whole is much smaller than the sum of its parts? I.e. there are a lot of countries involved but at the end of the day the United States is doing 80% of the job, and almost all of the fighting.**

I don't look at it that way. My perspective is more on the fact that what we've seen is an alliance, an ambitious operation not only in what we are trying to help the Afghans achieve, but in bringing together 46 countries

A little more than half of these are in the Alliance but there are many that are not in the Alliance. We have gotten them to bring different capabilities and resources together to the fight in order to respond to this request from the UN and the Afghan government to help them. We've learned a lot, we've made mistakes, and we've gotten a lot better at how we do this.

There are a lot of ways that countries have contributed. We don't all need to be with combat forces in **Afghanistan**. In fact, that isn't the thrust now. The thrust is much more towards trainers. What we really need, and what Bulgaria has been among those who have helped is in providing the trainers to help the Afghans have the capability to defend their own country and their own interest.

**Is Bulgaria really an asset for NATO or is it a liability? Given the not really greatly adequate capacities of the Bulgarian army and authorities, Bulgaria seems more like a consumer of security rather than a useful contributor.**

That's not how it's regarded in **NATO**. There are 600 Bulgarian soldiers in **Afghanistan**, there is a medical team, the forces that are provided are very well regarded, and the contribution and commitment that Bulgaria has shown to the **NATO** mission, the **ISAF** mission, is very important.

It sets an example, it shows that Bulgaria is in fact a contributor to security, rather than a consumer.

That, beyond what it does to help the **ISAF** mission, is an important sign to aspiring members that this is what is involved, this is part of the responsibility of joining the Alliance. I was referring earlier to your influence in the Western Balkan region – this is very important, I don't think anyone underestimates the value that the example Bulgaria sets has for these aspiring members.

**A lot of people in Bulgaria are longing for the days when we actually had a large field army with a lot of tanks, armored vehicles etc. How can one convince such a society in a new member states that NATO and the American commitment to their security is what really matters for them?**

I think we've all seen – and certainly that's the focus of the **strategic concept** – that those kinds of wars or conflicts are a thing of the past. We are not really going to be fighting these kinds of traditional wars, and we in the United States have undergone a pretty serious force posture review to modernize, to streamline, and have a more agile force.

That's also what we are doing in **NATO**, and that's what you're doing here in Bulgaria as well. Many, many countries are having to re-look and re-organize their military forces.

It doesn't matter what we would like to fight. There are new kinds of threats that we are going to encounter, and those include things as amorphous and intangible as cyber attacks or diversifying energy supplies so that you don't have that vulnerability, climate change, drought.

All those things are a whole new kind of challenge that in many cases the military may be involved involved in responding to. They may not be the primary responder but stabilizing situations so that others can move in and do their job will always be the role of the military. I think **NATO** is in the process of modernizing itself, and that can have a trickle down effect to national militaries as well.

**How likely or certain is that the US missile defense in Europe will be adopted as a NATO-wide project at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010?**

The US of course would very much like to see that decision be taken by the heads of state and government, and I think many of the concerns that the allies had, the questions about how much it will cost, how it will work, have been addressed.

**NATO** itself investigated in 2002 at the Prague Summit a feasibility study was launched. The outcome of that produced cost estimates of 83 million to 147 million euro over a nine-year period divided by 28 allies for the cost of expanding the existing **NATO** program to protect territory as well as population.

That is not a lot of money for a huge dividend in terms of protection that the **missile defense** will provide. So I think in an effort to be sure that the allies have full information about the program, what we have seen is that there is a better understanding of why this is a good and useful thing for **NATO**.

**Is it too early to say with some degree of certainty what Bulgaria's role is most likely going to be in the missile defense? Is it really going to host the radar of the US/NATO missile shield in Europe?**

I don't think that has been determined yet. There are many aspects of the program that are still being finalized. You saw the shift, the development. Some of it depends on what decision will be made by the leaders in November. Those kinds of decisions haven't been finalized.

**In the 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev joked that he will file an application to join NATO. What is the situation 50 years later – would a Russian application for NATO make sense for both NATO and Russia?**

Fifty years later we are still waiting (laughs). Well, of course **NATO** is an organization that a country has to want to join. And Secretary Clinton said that if **Russia** wants to join, and meets the qualifications for joining, **NATO's** door is opened. I don't think there's been much response from **Russia**.

As you say, 50 years on we are still waiting to see that application but in the meantime what I think has been promising is the kind of dialogue that has been happening in the context of the **NATO Russia** Council, which started in 1997, really formed in 2002.

There were five areas that **Russia** and the allies agreed to focus on for concrete cooperation – **Afghanistan**, counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy, a range of issues where it looked like we could really do something together.

Our experience has shown that it's when you actually work together on something concrete that you develop that kind of partnership and better understanding. So we will start there, the door is opened but there are certain qualifications that have to be met.