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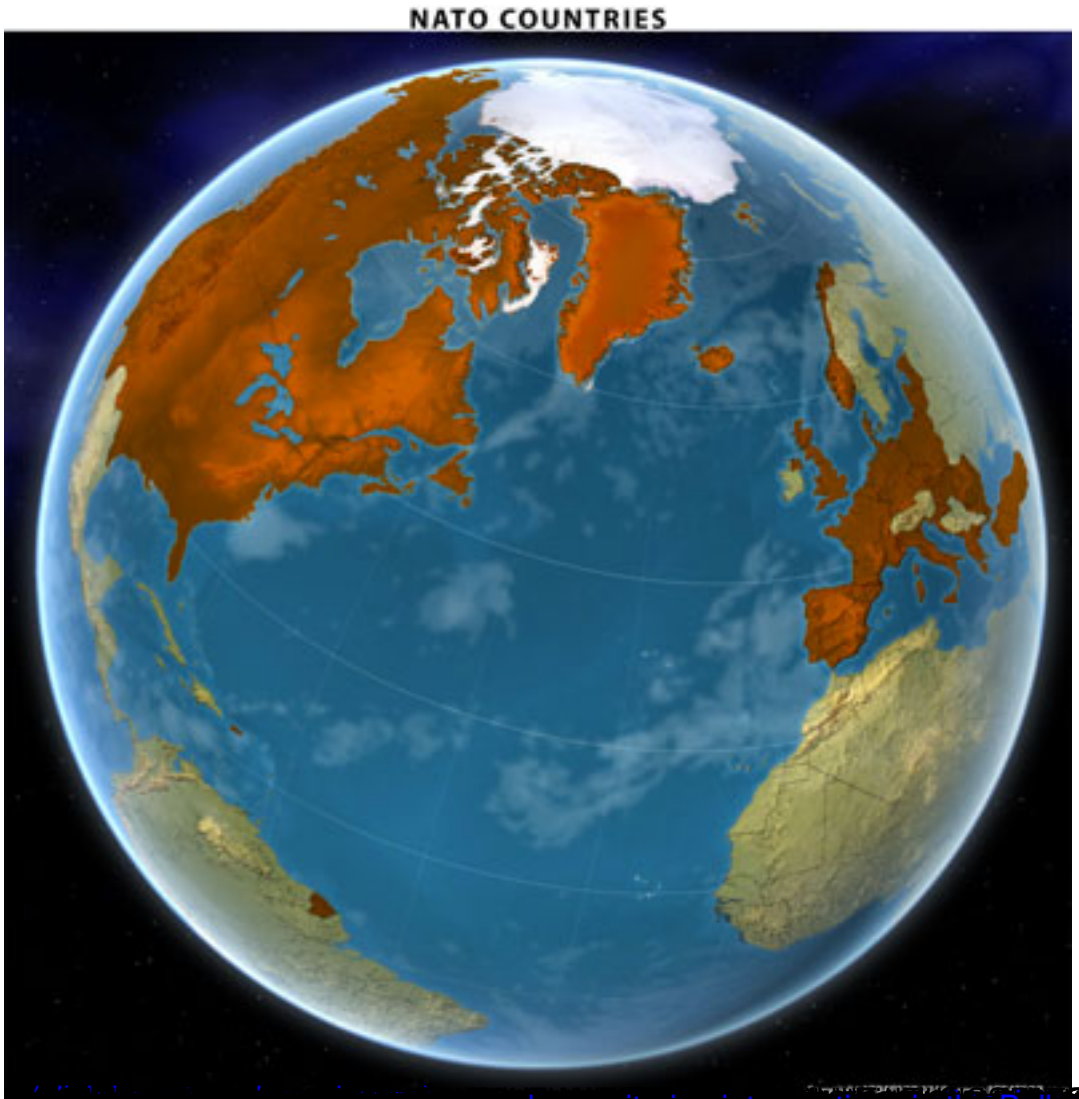
Twenty-eight heads of state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will meet in Lisbon on Nov. 20 to approve a new “Strategic Concept,” the alliance’s mission statement for the next decade. This will be NATO’s third Strategic Concept since the Cold War ended. The last two came in 1991 — as the Soviet Union was collapsing — and 1999 — as NATO intervened in Yugoslavia, undertaking its first serious military engagement.

During the Cold War, the presence of 50 Soviet and Warsaw Pact armored divisions and nearly 2 million troops west of the Urals spoke far louder than mission statements. While Strategic Concepts were put out in 1949, 1952, 1957 and 1968, they merely served to reinforce NATO’s mission, namely, to keep the Soviets at bay. Today, the debate surrounding NATO’s Strategic Concept itself highlights the alliance’s existential crisis.

The Evolution of NATO’s Threat Environment



humanitarian interventions in the Balkans

NATO & THE WARSAW PACT: COLD WAR ERA
Founding NATO states
Later NATO states
Warsaw Pact states*
*East Germany joined in 1956; Albania left in 1961
Arctic Ocean
ICELAND
SWEDEN
FINLAND
NORWAY
Atlantic Ocean
SOVIET UNION
IRELAND
UNITED KINGDOM
DENMARK
North Sea
THE NETHERLANDS
EAST GERMANY
POLAND
BELGIUM
LUXEMBOURG
WEST GERMANY
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
FRANCE
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
SWITZERLAND
Black Sea
YUGOSLAVIA
BULGARIA
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
ITALY
ALBANIA
TURKEY
GREECE
Mediterranean Sea
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NATO IN 2010
Current NATO states
Russia
Arctic Ocean
ICELAND
SWEDEN
FINLAND
NORWAY
Atlantic Ocean
RUSSIA
ESTONIA
LATVIA
IRELAND
UNITED KINGDOM
DENMARK
LITHUANIA
North Sea
KALININGRAD (RUSSIA)
BELARUS
THE NETHERLANDS
GERMANY
POLAND
BELGIUM
UKRAINE
LUXEMBOURG
CZECH REPUBLIC
SLOVAKIA
FRANCE
AUSTRIA
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
SWITZERLAND
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
Black Sea
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
SERBIA
BULGARIA
PORTUGAL
ITALY
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
MACEDONIA
SPAIN
ALBANIA
TURKEY
GREECE

NATO's Lack of a Strategic Concept
NATO 2020: A Strategic Security, Dynamic Engagement