



“NATO at 60: Bigger, Better, Bolder?”

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Co-hosted by:

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Conference Summary

In early December, over 150 policymakers, experts, and business leaders from the United States convened at the Germany Embassy in Washington to examine NATO missions, capabilities, and partnerships. The following is a short summary of each of the conference panels.

Welcome and Opening Remarks:

NATO’s new Strategic Concept cannot be merely an updated copy of the 1999 document; instead it must revise and redefine NATO missions, partnerships, and capabilities. Today’s global security environment is characterized by both post-9/11 asymmetrical threats and traditional geopolitics: terrorism, energy, cyber-security, peacekeeping, non-state actors, territorial disputes, and failed-states. During the 1990s NATO contributed significantly to international security through its stabilization missions, enlargement agenda, and security sector reform in addition to various military operations in and out of area. Despite NATO’s ongoing evolution, however, additional changes and reform are still needed. The challenges the transatlantic partners face today demand new strategies and new capabilities. In short, “NATO is still an Alliance in transition.”

In addition to launching new strategies and acquiring new capabilities, NATO needs to rebuild its overarching sense of community, particularly after the 2003-2004 transatlantic fallout over the Iraq War, which still overshadows NATO unity at times. Given the current shifts in the international system and the relative decline of the West, it is imperative that the NATO Alliance revisit its core values and reaffirm its commitment to collective security via Article V.

It is also imperative that NATO member states explain the role and relevance of NATO to their publics. The new Strategic Concept cannot simply be an update: it must take into account the need to address declining public support for NATO missions and increasing skepticism about NATO's value in a post-Cold War environment. NATO members need to encourage broader national debates about NATO's purpose and roles.

NATO Missions: Are Territorial Defense and Expeditionary Operations Mutually Exclusive? Can and should NATO multitask?

Since Russia's invasion of Georgia in August of 2008, it has become increasingly obvious that NATO must be able to both defend member states' territory and undertake expeditionary missions. Despite the temptation to focus on the "mission of the day," NATO must strike a balance between its two opposing missions (often categorized as "core" and "global") while simultaneously anticipating future challenges.

Collective defense missions are fundamental on two levels. As one panelist stressed, "If we aren't in area, we are in trouble." But the panelists also agreed that NATO can't solely be an organization that deploys soldiers abroad. Strengthening this basket of missions (collective defense) should be a priority at a time when NATO's credibility is being questioned, accentuated by Russia's brazen actions in Georgia and its apparent disregard for the consequences. Reevaluating NATO's definition of Article V is necessary, but insufficient; revising it could send the wrong signal. On this front, U.S. efforts are critical (i.e., strategic planning and public statements), especially on sensitive issues such as deterrence or missile-defense.

In the long term, NATO must evolve into a security alliance rather than a mere military organization in order to address the new dimensions of territorial defense. But this poses a number of challenges to the Alliance. For example, to what degree should NATO take into account new actors (networks, non-state organizations), new strategies (not only aggression but also intimidation), and new threats (energy, cyber-security)? What kind of a division of labor should NATO pursue when it comes to other international organizations? Should NATO be expected to tackle all these challenges? If not, which ones?

The participants appeared to agree that the Alliance should discuss a wide-array of security issues, but not necessarily act on all of those issues "when it has no clear added value." NATO's role must be delineated and its priorities defined so as to avoid distraction. (As one panelist noted, "NATO's value is not to be a universal Swiss-Army knife.")

While NATO needs to grapple with new challenges closer to home, it was unanimously acknowledged that NATO's expeditionary role should and will continue for two reasons. First, territorial defense could require expeditionary capabilities. Second, NATO members' security interests clearly lie abroad. Of course, NATO's contribution to international peace and security cannot be accomplished through expeditionary missions

alone. The Alliance's contributions to prevention, security sector reform, partnerships, and training are also essential.

NATO Partnerships: Time for New Models?

When discussing partnerships, a wide array of issues inside the Alliance must also be addressed, ranging from enlargement, to partnerships with countries that are unlikely to become future members, to cooperation with other multilateral organizations. Panelists felt that progress was needed in all of these areas even though the Alliance is simultaneously reviewing its own internal procedures and ongoing missions.

In general, participants agreed that NATO members have failed to discuss the value of the Alliance's multiple partnerships in public forums, leading some member states to underestimate their usefulness. Panelists stressed that partnerships are important for a number of reasons: they are critical in tackling transnational or global threats, crafting common security strategies, building trust with non-NATO partners, cooperating with neutral EU members, improving military transformation and interoperability, and accessing civil resources. NATO could maximize these benefits by revitalizing its partnership programs through strategic assessments as well as through additional resources and greater political attention. NATO must also adopt a more practical posture by focusing on issues that lead to concrete outcomes rather than merely theoretical debates.

As far as enlargement is concerned, several participants suggested that NATO must become "better and bolder" before it can consider getting "bigger." That being said, there was widespread agreement that Georgia and Ukraine's future relationship with NATO must be addressed in light of the commitments made at the Bucharest Summit, although several different strategies of how to proceed were suggested. A few participants advocated either maintaining the *status quo* or pushing for immediate MAP membership. Most, however, felt that some new "middle ground" option must be identified – a MAP lite.

On the issue of cooperation with other institutions, specifically in operations, strengthening relations with the United Nations was mentioned as a top priority. There was general consensus that NATO and the EU are complementary organizations, but it was also agreed that today's NATO-EU relationship is ailing, even if cooperation on the ground is often more encouraging. Recommendations to improve NATO-EU relations were numerous, ranging from regular consultations between the NAC and the PSC, to transparent and frank discussions regarding the next Strategic Concept and the new European Security Strategy, to consultations on such issues as Russia, Afghanistan or Kosovo. Conference participants also suggested developing a common approach for civil-military coordination, the proliferation of WMDs, and energy security. Several European participants suggested that NATO-EU relations would also benefit from closer EU-US ties, taking advantage of a wider transatlantic cooperation framework and a broad agenda (which spans the Middle East and South Asia). The EU-Turkish relationship was also discussed as another route to enhanced NATO-EU ties.

On NATO-UN ties specifically, some thought NATO should give more slack to the UN with regard to coordination. A short debate ensued, pitting those who felt that NATO shouldn't seek UNSC approval on all its military interventions against those who felt that UNSC legitimacy would help forge consensus, even within NATO. Other regional organizations (African Union, Gulf Cooperation Council) and NGOs were also mentioned as potentially helpful stakeholders; obviously, it is important to help develop regional capabilities in areas of concern for NATO (piracy, anti-terrorism, etc).

Panelists asked whether or not a division of labor should be defined *a priori*? Some participants stressed certain regional strengths (ESDP in Africa) while others suggested that tasks be divided along functional criteria, with NATO focusing on stability operations and the EU focusing on political missions. Still others pointed out that there was often plenty of work for both organizations to operate in the same environment. The real question is which organization is willing to act and with what added value? Europeans also warned against the misconception that the EU had a great reservoir of available civilian capabilities that could and should be made available to NATO, in the framework of a "Berlin-Plus in reverse."¹

On the whole, many participants mentioned the need for a clearer shared vision of NATO's future. One participant insisted that an ever-expanding alliance was not sustainable either intellectually or politically. Another mentioned the fact that NATO was caught-up in self-reflection and too often forgot to take into account outside perceptions.

Russia's Relationship with NATO: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?

NATO-Russia relations have had a long and tumultuous history. However, the successive waves of frustration and disappointment on both sides, including the worst episode in summer 1999 over the Kosovo War, didn't prevent a return to notable moments of cooperation. Hence the real question before NATO is whether or not the Alliance is simply facing another "déjà vu" moment of its cyclical history or whether this is truly a defining moment" in NATO-Russia relations?²

Most participants agreed that some form of engagement with Russia was necessary given the long list of common challenges the West and Russia face, but NATO member states must be realistic in their approach, recognizing, as one participant mentioned, that "partnership is plausible, but right now, the bitterness runs very deep." To be sure, a significant amount of effort will be needed to strengthen this essential relationship, but simply repeating over and over again that NATO's policies are in Russia's best interest will no longer be enough to convince Moscow.

¹ Berlin Plus agreement is a short title for a comprehensive package of agreements made between NATO and the EU on 16 December 2002, based on the conclusions of NATO's 1999 Washington Summit.

² Julianne Smith, "The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?" CSIS/IFRI, November 14, 2008 (available at http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/081110_smith_natorussia_web.pdf).

Various recommendations were offered for consideration. To begin with, internal NATO divisions, evident at the Bucharest Summit, should be avoided, at least in the public sphere. Rather than dwell on contentious issues such as enlargement, NATO and Russia should first discuss the broader strategic context by conducting threat assessments and sketching out a larger vision for the NATO-Russia relationship a decade from now. They should also focus on more consensual issues like global health, climate change, arms control, counter-terrorism, and piracy as well as areas where there has been successful cooperation in the past, such as in Afghanistan.

While new ways to engage Russia must be sought, NATO must also reassure its newer member states that Article V continues to be the core pillar of the Alliance. In fact, some participants encouraged NATO members to plan high-level and public visits to these countries to send a strong signal to the Russians that NATO's commitment to Article V remains firm.

Some participants recommended a more hard-line approach, arguing that "the West has been over-accommodating to Russia's interests" and suggested that Russia and the West do not share compatible visions of global security. From this perspective, Russia's recent actions and policies signal its shift to a more confrontational, nationalist, militaristic, authoritarian and perhaps more "volatile" Russia. Those participants that held this view suggested the following:

- Re-establish confidence in Article V (which might include redeploying NATO assets on new members' territory)
- Build NATO infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe
- Conduct contingency planning at SHAPE
- Aim to strengthen the sovereignty of neighboring states (such as Ukraine and Georgia)

NATO Capabilities: Ready and Able?

Panelists highlighted key capability gaps that NATO must address in order to match its missions to its means. First, there is no question that NATO members' forces (particularly those in Europe) are overstretched, under resourced, and poorly equipped to face today's security challenges. The panelists emphasized the need for force restructuring, especially in the area of rapid response operations, as part of the revitalization of the comprehensive approach. Faced with increasing capability requirements and limited funding, NATO members ought to maximize effectiveness by building on pre-existing capabilities such as those in the fields of police-training and anti-piracy. These types of sustainable programs, which can operate across missions, are a highly effective and inexpensive way to enhance NATO capabilities. Similarly, NATO should invest more in common capabilities, focusing on the development of interoperability since there is significant opportunity for joint operations. Lastly, one panelist urged member nations to make use of NATO's very strong defense planning capability, which has in the past helped direct nations toward a more efficient use of their capabilities funds.

It was largely acknowledged and agreed upon that the need for improved capabilities is largely a European issue. A panelist pointed out that while Europeans are deeply familiar with the shortcomings of their defense spending, there is a gap between the acknowledgement of how they *should be spending* and how they *actually spend* their defense budget. Entrenched in a system lacking any sensible management regime of defense budgets, Europe faces an impossible scenario where “everyone is sitting on top of an overcommitted defense budget that they know is going to be spent on the wrong things, but the contracts have already been signed, and the margin of maneuver to spend money on the right things is missing.” Of course, the U.S. is not entirely immune from this sheer difficulty of moving defense spending in the right direction. The only solution is to keep plugging away with new initiatives while emphasizing strategic communications in order to convey NATO’s importance to our publics. The French EU Presidency actually made great strides in this area of strategic communications, and now, participants urged, Europe and the United States must look to the Swedish Presidency and President Obama to give transatlantic defense a boost, especially on the civilian capabilities side.

Concluding Comments

Even though no specific session was dedicated to the issue of internal reform, this issue came up in virtually every panel during the conference. Some recommendations for internal reform were without controversy. For example, there was wide agreement among participants that NATO needs to close down some of its commands and increase the number of its joint exercises. Other recommendations, such as reforming the consensus-based decision making process or enhancing common funding, triggered heated debates. But, as one participant put it, “the only way we’re really going to effectively reform NATO itself is if Heads of State grant the Secretary General the power to do so. If each member state continues to constantly second guess suggested reforms, things will never change.”

Finally, while several panelists used the term “identity crisis” to describe NATO’s current state and some Europeans expressed disappointment that NATO was rarely, if ever, mentioned in the recent U.S. election, optimism about NATO’s future was far from lacking. Many participants felt that France’s full reintegration into NATO will provide an ideal opportunity to reform while enhancing transatlantic unity. Some also noted the recent Germany Marshall Fund poll that showed that support for NATO on both sides of the Atlantic is on the rise.³ Participants also noted the high levels of enthusiasm in Europe for the next U.S. administration. While expectations need to remain realistic,

³ “Fifty-seven percent of Europeans agreed that NATO is still essential to their country’s security, an increase of four percentage points since 2007. Increases were found in eight of the 12 countries surveyed, with increases of 11 percentage points in Spain, seven percentage points in Germany, and seven percentage points in France. This halted the trend of declining support for NATO in Germany and Poland for the first year since 2002 and brought French support for NATO back to the level of 2002. In the United States, 59% agreed that NATO is still essential for their country’s security, a figure nearly unchanged in recent years.” The German Marshall Fund of the United States, “Transatlantic Trends 2008,” p. 15 http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/2008_English_Key.pdf

there is obvious mutual interest, on both sides of the Atlantic, to strengthen transatlantic ties and recover from the dark shadows of 2003 and 2004.

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