

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The NATO Summit Agenda

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Q1: What is the significance of the NATO summit?

A1: The summit, which will be held April 3–4 in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl and Baden-Baden, Germany, will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the role it has played in fostering the historic reconciliation between the host countries in the aftermath of World War II. NATO has helped make war between France and Germany unthinkable and provided the stability and security essential to development of the European Union and of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. The summit was scheduled to coincide with the date on which the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington, and because the German hosts wanted to have it before their September federal elections. This timing has been challenging for the Obama administration, because its early policy reviews, particularly on Afghanistan, are still underway, and many of the relevant senior officials are still not in office.

This summit, like the one held last April in Bucharest, will be dominated by discussion of the future course of NATO's mission in Afghanistan. NATO has commanded the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since 2003. ISAF, which now includes about 62,000 troops from 42 countries including all 26 NATO members, has reached a critical juncture as the level of violence in the southern and eastern parts of the country continues to escalate, and international efforts to promote stabilization and development of this vast and impoverished country have progressed very slowly. European leaders are anxiously awaiting the Obama administration's proposed new strategy for Afghanistan and expecting requests for additional commitments of military forces and civilian resources to ensure the success of NATO's mission.

The summit will also welcome the return of France to full participation in NATO's integrated military command structures. This bold move by President Nicolas Sarkozy reverses a decision made by Charles de Gaulle 43 years ago to pursue a more independent military strategy and planning process. This action will give France a bigger role in the development and management of future NATO military operations and should advance the transformation of the French armed forces by exposing them more regularly to innovative concepts and technologies that NATO allies have been developing in common. Allies hope that France's decision to deepen its commitment to NATO military activities will also advance the process of building more effective cooperation between NATO and the European Union, which has been stalemated by suspicion that France and other European governments were promoting the union's evolving role in defense as an alternative to NATO and because of lingering disputes between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus.

Allied leaders will also confirm the ministerial decision earlier this month to resume cooperation with Russia on areas of mutual interest, including through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). NATO activities have been suspended since the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 and earlier were strained by differences over Kosovo and NATO enlargement. NATO leaders will also indicate what they plan to do about their commitment, made last year in Bucharest, that Georgia and Ukraine *will* become members. The alliance is also expected to welcome Croatia as the 27th, and possibly Albania as the 28th, member of the alliance, if accession protocols are ratified by all member governments in time.

The summit will launch a process to draft a new strategic concept, in essence a blueprint for NATO's future evolution, replacing the current concept that was adopted at the 50th anniversary summit in Washington. The 1999 concept was focused on the requirements of NATO's then new regional peacekeeping activities in the Balkans, rather than dealing with a diverse range of global challenges to alliance security. The 1999 document predates 9/11 and contains limited mention of such challenges as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and long-range missiles, integrated civil-military efforts to stabilize and reconstruct failed states, and dangers to homeland security. Disagreement over NATO's roles and missions has exposed differences among allies on threat perceptions, use of resources, capabilities, and political will. Many see an alliance adrift, driven more by outside events than by collective interests, and find it harder to explain NATO's purpose and priorities.

Finally, leaders will agree on a successor to the current NATO secretary-general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer of the Netherlands, whose term is expiring. Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen enjoys the support of most

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European governments and is favored to get the post. However, the Turkish government has expressed strong reservations about Rasmussen because of his perceived insensitivity to the Islamic world, outspoken opposition to Turkish membership in the European Union, and the fact that Roj-TV, the mouthpiece of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist group, broadcasts from Denmark. Possible compromise candidates being discussed include Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Store and Canadian defense minister Peter MacKay.

Q2: What does President Obama seek to achieve at the summit?

A2: First and foremost, the summit is a chance for President Obama to introduce himself to all of his fellow NATO heads of state and government and to establish his leadership within the alliance. Obama's new style and commitment to multilateral action is eagerly anticipated as launching a new era in U.S.-European cooperation following the acrimonious state of relations during the Bush administration.

President Obama and his advisers also hope to secure the commitment of some additional European military and civilian resources to the NATO/ISAF mission in Afghanistan. However, few, if any, allies are willing to offer additional combat forces at a time when the United States has just agreed to increase its commitment by an additional 17,000 troops, in addition to the 38,000 already serving in Afghanistan. Many European leaders don't share the president's assessment that ISAF's engagement in counterinsurgency activities in Afghanistan is essential to defense of the alliance from future terrorist strikes. European governments are willing to send additional trainers for the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police and to provide more civilian personnel and resources to strengthen governance, the rule of law, and economic development in Afghanistan. To be able to call the summit even a partial success, Obama will need to secure those additional resources from his European counterparts, along with a strong endorsement of his new Afghan strategy.

On Russia, allies will be looking for Obama's proposals for developing a more cooperative relationship with Russia bilaterally and within NATO. Some are hoping that Obama will reverse, or at least delay, the Bush administration's decision to commence construction of antiballistic missile sites in Poland and the Czech Republic over the next few years. Abandoning the missile defense program would be seen as capitulation to Moscow by some allies, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, so delay due to assessments of the Iranian threat and uncertainty about technical feasibility is more likely. On Georgia and Ukraine, none of the current members feel that now is the right time to push for opening membership discussions with either country, but it will be important for Obama to be seen as not backing away from NATO's commitment, made just last April, to the principle that these two states will one day join the alliance.

The president also needs to be seen as having established effective processes for developing a new NATO strategic concept, internal reform of NATO's cumbersome bureaucracy and military command structures, and reintegration of the French military. He also needs to be seen as having shaped a strong consensus in favor of his candidate for secretary-general.

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