

NATO SUMMIT
From Karl-Heinz Kamp in Berlin

Waiting For Another Day

NATO faces some challenging choices. Who should it allow as partner countries and, even more important, which will get the ultimate accolade of membership? And then there is the cost. It is deeply involved in an Afghan campaign where the possibility of failure has to be faced, and about to launch a rapid response force, but the Organisation's expenses and risks fall unevenly.

AN OMINOUS CLOUD HANGS OVER THE meeting of NATO heads of state and government in Riga. From the start, a number of difficulties have complicated preparations for this high-level meeting.

The date for the summit was chosen at the end of last year without any apparently-compelling reason for such a top-level meeting. For a NATO gathering this is rather unusual, given they typically confirm decisions of great consequence, or mark significant occasions.

At the same time, an additional NATO summit was scheduled for 2008 as part of a farewell tour for departing United States President George Bush. This undoubtedly reduces the pressure on members to agree political decisions before Riga, since another date is already in the diary which could deal with especially controversial points.

But even here there is confusion. NATO's fiftieth anniversary was celebrated in style to welcome three new



members, the sixtieth year requires a similar celebration in 2009. But a summit a year is probably too much for an organisation preferring less frequent but significant events.

This month's summit has been conceived as a pure family reunion of the 26 NATO member states. There will be neither a meeting with NATO partner countries, nor a discussion with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Finland, currently holding the European Union (EU) presidency, is not invited either.

There is no lack of pressing questions for discussion. Four are particularly critical: NATO's military performance in Afghanistan, inadequate funding, new partners and enlargement.

Losing in Afghanistan?

The NATO military operation in

Afghanistan most starkly symbolises the changes the alliance has undergone. The once-sacred principle of not intervening 'out of area' – beyond countries that are not alliance members, has been waived; in Afghanistan NATO troops are now operating near the Chinese border. A global stability provider for the twenty-first century has evolved from the geographically-limited defence alliance of the Cold War.

Meanwhile the situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly difficult and dangerous. Attacks on NATO troops by newly reinforced Taliban militants are multiplying. Growing tribal feuds and violent drug lords are making reconstruction arduous. The elected government in Kabul remains as weak as ever and is only respected in some parts of the country. The economy is hardly improving, causing Afghans to question the value of toppling the Taliban regime just five years ago. A complete failure of the Afghanistan project can no longer be ruled out.

At the same time, there are serious questions about the willingness of NATO members to allow deeds to flow from their frequent 'commitments' to Afghanistan. Although NATO decided to broaden its area of command to the entire country, many alliance partners are refusing to contribute the necessary forces.

In addition, the risks are unevenly distributed. Countries such as Britain, Canada or the Netherlands complain that their operations in the dangerous south are causing high casualties. Other states, such as Germany, station most of their troops in the more peaceful north. Individual NATO members are even failing to fulfil prior commitments. This means that the NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has to go begging for individual helicopters or combat battalions.

If NATO is unsuccessful in changing the mentality of its members, the risk will not be limited to individual missions, but extend to the entire aim of stabilising Afghanistan. A collapse of the reconstruction effort would spell disaster, first of all for the international security situation, as the region would once again become a breeding ground for Islamist terrorism. It would also be a devastating blow for NATO, since the alliance would lose any prospect of continuing to be the core of transatlantic security policy. Unity is essential over progress of the mission.

Short of Cash

The problem of insufficient commitments by individual NATO members does not just apply to

Afghanistan, but to the improvement of the military capability of the Atlantic alliance as a whole. Ambitious declarations about increasing military capability only rarely turn into corresponding action. The so-called 'two percent rule' – the self-imposed obligation to spend at least two percent of the Gross National Product on defence – is only being achieved by eight of NATO's member states.

Among European NATO partners, only two, Britain and France, have sufficient expeditionary forces to allow the option of global power projection. In the remaining countries there is a particular lack of so-called 'force multipliers', including air and sealift capabilities, strategic intelligence, command and communication facilities, and more. This is a special problem given that the international security situation is likely to demand a greater number of NATO international military operations, involving open ended commitments.

The question of how the costs should be divided among members is also difficult. Until now the principle of 'costs lie where they fall' has applied, meaning that the countries that made troops available paid for them. Nations with internationally-deployable armed forces are therefore disproportionately burdened. Smaller member states that do not participate in common operations also avoid bearing the costs. They continually reject suggestions of a common funding system. Since NATO must approve decisions unanimously, agreement is difficult to achieve.

The absurdity of the NATO cost-distribution system is especially evident in the NATO Response Force (NRF) which is about to go into service. It is a rapid intervention force of up to twenty-five thousand soldiers, able to be deployed within days to any crisis area in the world. Members will provide the soldiers for six months at a time on a rotating basis. Should the force be deployed, the costs would fall on the country supplying the troops. The consequence of this costly lottery was felt by Spain when the force was sent to Pakistan to assist with emergency aid following the devastating earthquake. The bill for the Spanish government was \$25.4 million.

If NATO is unable to find a solution, it will still have a first-rate rapid intervention force. However, the country or countries that happen to be providing the soldiers will always block its use. This also applies to all other missions unless some mechanism of common funding can be found.



Global Partnership

For many months, NATO has been wrangling over a new 'Global Partnership' intended to provide closer relations with western-oriented nations. At the end of the Cold War, NATO established formal partnerships with a large number of countries, primarily in eastern Europe and Central Asia. The main goal of most of these was to stabilise the former Warsaw Pact region and offer concrete assistance on the path to democracy.

Partnerships were an effective vehicle for NATO to promote the political and military transformation of Eastern Europe and outlying regions. Ten of these partnership countries have become fully-fledged NATO members, and the remaining nations have at least a long-term prospect for accession.

The most urgent challenge for NATO is no longer in restructuring Europe. Instead, the future of the alliance depends primarily on the successful conclusion of military operations, mostly beyond European borders. Aside from the stabilisation of Afghanistan, it is protecting the peace in Kosovo, providing airlift for African Union peacekeeping troops in Darfur, monitoring marine traffic in the Mediterranean and training security forces in Iraq.

Security Providers

Given the worldwide military tasks, it is in NATO's interest to win partners that not only share its goals but also have military capabilities that can be used in its current missions. Countries such as New Zealand and Australia already have significant contingents in NATO operations. Japan, South Korea, Brazil and

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South Africa also have forces of some size and are thus of particular importance for the Organisation.

If these countries do support NATO missions and risk the lives of their soldiers, they must be included in NATO consultations. Washington's idea of creating a Security Provider's Forum, in which global partners would meet to discuss and influence the concepts and decisions of NATO, rests on this logic. Such a Forum would allow the previous partnership concept to be extended into a Global Partnership, the goal of which would be importing support for NATO.

There has been significant protest against the Global Partnership. The word 'global' produces allergic reactions among certain members. Some see NATO forced into the role of world policeman or as a toolbox for worldwide American interests. Others fear that through a 'partnership of the rich', the previous partnerships in eastern Europe will be devalued. There is also a worry that overly close contacts in Asia could lead to the Atlantic alliance being drawn into conflicts there.

Supporters of the Global Partnership point to the contradictions that would become apparent should it be impossible to agree on new partners. Japan, for example, is one of the principle actors in the United Nations-sanctioned fight against drug production in Afghanistan. When NATO debates the drug problem however, Japan's experiences cannot be shared, since its representatives are not formal participants in committee consultations.

The question of enlargement is closely connected to the partnership problem. After taking in first three, and then an extra seven, new members, the readiness to admit more is rather limited. The integration of the ten extra countries has been more difficult than expected, while their military contribution to the overall performance of NATO has been close to zero.

On the other hand, NATO is committed to an open-door policy. Three countries - Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia - have had their applications in for many years. The long-term question remains, of what sort of NATO prospects should be offered to countries like Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Montenegro.

The enlargement question was further complicated by Washington's sudden suggestion that Georgia and Ukraine should join. According to the US, both would be of strategic importance for NATO, and have already completed a

successful democratisation process.

The majority of European members rejected these suggestions. Neither country is regarded as ripe for accession. Ukraine in particular is seen as a daunting challenge because of its size. It would add problems into the alliance rather than value.

NATO must consider enlargement possibilities, not only with an eye to the interests of the countries joining, but also calculating what strategic capabilities can be expected from the new members. Enlargement will no longer be understood as democracy aid or social policy, but rather as a possibility for enrichment of the Organisation. Hardly any accession candidate meets these requirements, so in the near future no invitations can be extended in good conscience. Croatia alone might possibly be considered. This is especially frustrating for countries such as Albania, which has now been working towards membership for nine years.

Putting off the Issues

There is no consensus on any of these questions. Just weeks ahead of the Riga summit, there is little beyond formulaic compromises to patch over the painful lack of agreement.

The differences in opinion on individual issues continue to reflect persistent disagreements between Atlanticists and Europeans. The majority of NATO members sees the alliance as the core of Euro-Atlantic security and give it primary importance. German Chancellor Angela Merkel summarised this position at the beginning of her term with the principle 'NATO first'. However, a minority within NATO, led by France, would like to reduce the alliance to its classical role of military defence, and sees the EU as the proper institution for further tasks. France is fully militarily involved with the alliance, but rejects any steps that would - from the French perspective - increase the Organisation's political weight. Nearly all issues the alliance faces are likely to involve the danger of the French 'non'.

Riga will hardly be able to tackle the problems on the agenda, let alone the ongoing dispute between the 'French fraction' and the rest. It will neither be a 'transformation' nor a 'consolidation' summit as NATO's spin doctors have called it. Instead it will become a 'postponement summit', leaving most of the relevant questions for 2008. The question, however, is whether NATO can really afford to put urgent problems into the hold-file for two years.

International Events November

NOVEMBER 5

Presidential and parliamentary elections in Nicaragua

NOVEMBER 7

US mid-term elections

NOVEMBER 17

Apec summit in Hanoi, Vietnam

NOVEMBER 28

NATO summit in Riga, Latvia

NOVEMBER 28

Pope Benedict visits Turkey

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