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**The Prague Summit: Crunch time for the Alliance**

Iraq will no doubt be heatedly discussed among leaders behind closed doors, but there will be little NATO as an organisation can contribute to the debate or in practical terms. However, three issue areas do deserve attention, which could potentially serve as a litmus test of NATO's ability to transform: terrorism and WMD proliferation, capabilities and reorganising its decision-making structures.

**Counterterrorism: An endeavour without end**

Despite juicy reports in the press that 'NATO is about to adopt an aggressive counterterrorist role'<sup>1</sup>, the reality is much different. According to one insider, 'a military concept will be presented which will include the *possibility* of NATO being more active against terrorism and asymmetric threats'[emphasis added]. However, the same source maintains that the limits of NATO's 'activism' is a divisive issue among Allies. The US and Turkey seem to be keen for NATO to take up these activities, while France and others are loath to transform the Alliance into the world's counterterrorism organisation. The Summit communiqué will be intentionally 'generic'.

Will the US proposal to set up a rapid Response Force be adopted, and will counterterrorism be part of its mandate? The answer is most decidedly No. Although the US would like to create a 21 000-strong NATO Response Force (equipped with high-tech weapons and defences against WMD) to be rapidly deployable in 7 to 30 days in a hostile environment, Prague will not adopt the concept, but more likely create a group to study the matter further. Whether this force would ever be involved in pre-emptive or counterterrorism activities is another matter altogether. At a maximum, one official points out that the Allies will not go beyond acknowledging the lack of a rapidly deployable force and urging its creation to better carry out the *whole* range of the Alliance's missions.

If NATO does decide to take on the complex and multi-faceted tasks counterterrorism entails, it should: 1) clearly define what is its particular definition of 'counterterrorism' is, and 2) outline what specific actions can be carried out under that mandate.

**Not more capabilities, more *focused* capabilities**

In May, the Alliance tried to get members to actually fulfil their capabilities pledges by narrowing down the list from 58 areas to just eight. This has worked to a certain degree, and a package of new initiatives regarding defences against WMD will also be presented in Prague<sup>2</sup>. However, supporting commonly-funded projects such as the jointly-owned AWACS aircraft and 'role specialisation' will be increasingly urgent. Larger NATO members cannot raise their defence budgets significantly, so maintaining do-it-all militaries will become unsustainable in the long-term. Incoming members, even more strapped for resources, obviously will be unable to cover the whole spectrum of capabilities. They could, however, offer special support in particular areas of national strength—like Slovakia with its de-mining units and Latvia with its military police and medical units.

If it were to work, role specialisation could reinforce the Alliance as a whole by giving each member a real role to play, as opposed to the smaller or poorer countries tagging along behind the others. It could also lead European members from dependence on the US towards interdependence amongst the nations. This would be a radical shift in political weight, as a plan to rely on the other's capabilities requires an enormous amount of trust, but is arguably a constructive step on NATO's road to transformation.

**New members and new threats: Streamlining NATO**

Seven new members (Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) are expected to receive an invitation to join NATO in Prague, amidst concerns that an enlarged organisation might become even more unwieldy for swift decision-making. In the Kosovo War, for example, 'war by committee' was unsatisfactory to most of those involved and is not something to which most members aspire. So what will happen with seven more capitals involved? More effective decision-making procedures will be vital for making NATO a meaningful tool for solving international crises, most especially if they decide to build the aforementioned Response Force.

The Summit will also consider recommendations aimed at streamlining NATO's command structure. One analyst reckons that the Alliance is aiming to be 'able to deploy NATO headquarters, if necessary, to the theatres where threats to our security now live'<sup>3</sup>. NATO's current command structure consists of two strategic commands (one in the US and one in Europe), two regional commands, four component commands and seven sub-regional commands. NATO has been considering, *inter alia*, how to redefine the functions of SACEUR and SACLANT and how to combine the sub-regional commands, the latter of which are jealously guarded by the countries in which they are located.

There is a broad consensus among the Allies that NATO needs to undertake a process of adaptation. Transformation is certainly the buzzword around Headquarters and will have to be acted on in order to save the Alliance from being relegated to the sidelines. Streamlining the decision-making process, like paring down the 400 committees, will be a prerequisite for avoiding NATO becoming all talk and no action.

### **NATO has no role in Iraq**

NATO has already fought Iraq. Although it was in the fictitious environment of a crisis management exercise in early 2002, the Alliance was put through a realistic one-week test of its ability to act, and largely failed. As reported exclusively in *NATO Notes* ([www.cesd.org/natonotes/notes42.htm](http://www.cesd.org/natonotes/notes42.htm)), the scenario was based upon Iraq (Amberland) imminently using its chemical and biological weapons on a NATO state (Turkey) over a disputed territory. An excerpt follows:

'The threat is credible, an attack likely. Amberland has also been suspected of sponsoring the hijacking of a Turkish ferry, as well as carrying out other terrorist actions in several Allied countries, for example a bio-warfare attack in The Netherlands. All Allies agree that NATO is facing a potential Article V crisis'.

Although the Allies were facing a very clear, impending threat, not only could they not agree on a response, but they could not even draw up a list of options to consider:

'The Military Committee is tasked with providing a list of recommendations for military options, but eventually is unable to do so. Capitals cannot agree on what the priorities should be and demand that political considerations be taken into account'.

In the end, over the choice of whether or not to carry out pre-emptive strikes, the Allies split:

'The US and Turkey take a more hardline stance in support of pre-emptive strikes, while Germany, France and Spain prefer to defuse the crisis through more political means'.

By the end of the week-long exercise, the US and Turkey declared themselves ready for pre-emptive air-strikes. The exercise ended before any attack was carried out or Article V officially declared. That demonstrated NATO's ability to act, or lack thereof, in a realistic situation that was far more serious than the present one involving Iraq. Despite evidence that Saddam Hussein has stocked an arsenal of biological and chemical weapons, it is at least debatable whether there is an imminent threat against the Allies.

No role can be foreseen for NATO under current conditions. As NATO insiders repeatedly point out, if there is going to be a war against Iraq, NATO will not be involved as the issue would be far too controversial. Instead, there will be co-operation on a bilateral basis between the US and some European Allies'.

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<sup>1</sup> 'NATO to Have New Anti-Terror Role', *The Times*, 8 Nov 2002, [www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-473208,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-473208,00.html).

<sup>2</sup> They include: a prototype deployable NBC analytical laboratory; a prototype NBC event response team; a virtual centre of excellence for NBC weapons defence; a NATO biological and chemical defence stockpile; and a disease surveillance system.

<sup>3</sup> 'NATO Minister May Reorganise Commands', *Defense News*, 23-29 Sept 2002.

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