



Executive Memorandum

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NATO REFORM: WHAT WASHINGTON SHOULD ACCOMPLISH IN PRAGUE

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The November 21–22 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Prague is the last, best chance for the United States and its European allies to adapt the alliance to fit the needs of the post-9/11 era. Specifically, two goals should be at the center of the Bush Administration's reform proposals: increasing the alliance's strategic and political flexibility and pressing the Europeans to improve their capabilities within NATO.

Probably the most important underreported story in the wake of the September 11 attacks was the non-use of NATO in the counter-terrorist response. Washington decided it was simply not worth going through the cumbersome NATO decision-making process to secure the limited military help the European allies could provide for fighting in Afghanistan.

Ironically, however, the non-use of NATO since September 11 has actually facilitated a number of positive steps toward reform to meet the needs of the new era. American decision-makers have begun to ask the most important question about the alliance: What does the United States want from NATO in this new era? This involves two fundamental considerations. First, NATO's decision-making structure must meet the needs of a time when U.S. and European interests are similar but not identical. Therefore, political flexibility becomes imperative. Second, alliance members are losing their ability to operate together. Some 85 percent of the total NATO capability now rests on the Ameri-

can pillar. This situation cannot be sustained; American geopolitical interests are changing, while European spending habits are not.

The Pre-Summit Completed Agenda. The Bush Administration has accomplished two of the four objectives it has consistently raised regarding NATO reform. These four objectives are creating a vehicle for a strategic dialogue with Russia, ensuring a robust second round of enlargement, promoting the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) as a vehicle for out-of-area action, and pushing for technological modernization of the European militaries.

First, the NATO–Russia Council, established in May, allows NATO and Russia to work much more closely together in areas such as counter-terrorism and anti-proliferation efforts. To make it possible to engage Russia while making NATO more flexible, the council includes the crucial right of any NATO member to take an issue off the council's agenda if that country decides Russia is trying to slow the NATO process. In such a case, the alliance

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would meet in its usual format without Russian participation. This has safeguarded the decision-making process while allowing NATO to further the strategic dialogue with Russia.

Second, the Bush Administration's push for a robust enlargement has emerged as the preferred course for the alliance as a whole. It is increasingly clear that NATO will proceed on two tracks. The first preserves the sacrosanct Article V commitment of each NATO member to the collective self-defense of all members within the alliance. The second enables NATO countries to act together out-of-area, in a "coalition of the willing."

Which countries are actually committed to supporting the U.S. militarily around the world through bases, military participation, or peacekeeping initiatives? In Europe, with the honorable exception of Great Britain, the general rule of thumb is that the farther east one moves across the continent, the more pro-American the leaders are. For example, Poland is more likely than Germany to join with the U.S. in fighting Iraq. Given this political reality, a substantial enlargement makes sense from an American point of view. There is little doubt that Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria will all be invited to join NATO at Prague.

Finishing the Job in Prague. Two other points must be advanced at the Prague summit if NATO is to retain its usefulness in the future. First, the Combined Joint Task Force should be explicitly recognized as the tool that will allow NATO to have greater alliance flexibility in both decision-making and crisis-response. Initially endorsed at the Brussels NATO summit in January 1994, the CJTF enables coalitions of the willing to meet security challenges that do not threaten the primary security interests of all alliance members. Before the CJTF, NATO's ossified structure allowed members only two political responses: fully engage in a military mission or prevent one from occurring. The CJTF put a third option on the political table. For instance, the Bush Administration wisely decided it had no serious security interests in Macedonia; yet the CJTF allowed the use of NATO assets by other alliance members, such as Germany and Italy, that felt they had significant interests in preventing a conflict in Macedonia.

In an era when American and European interests are not always identical—and often, at best, only complementary—the CJTF option is imperative. The centrality of the CJTF process to NATO's future viability must be clearly articulated in Prague.

Finally, the Europeans must take advantage of this last chance to re-engage in the shared technological modernization of the alliance. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has proposed the idea of a multinational rapid deployment force of approximately 21,000 troops that could be deployed on a week's notice anywhere in the world. NATO members, particularly the Europeans, should be expected to announce commitments to acquire new aircraft and equipment that would make this force effective. The force should be based on niche contributions from member states, including some of the weakest and least technologically advanced, allowing all to possess common interoperability within the force.

Given the demonstrated lack of enthusiasm for greater European defense spending, this is the last hope for reducing the gap in capabilities between the United States and Europe. The Administration must come away from Prague with a firm commitment from Europe to sign onto the NATO rapid deployment force.

Conclusion. Privately, the Bush White House must make it crystal-clear to the allies that, although progress has been made on its ambitious reform agenda for NATO in the wake of September 11, this progress must continue if the alliance is to remain relevant in American eyes. Only a firm European commitment to the NATO rapid reaction force can stop the decline of NATO's relevance in the new era.

Europe must be made aware that its continued relevance lies in accepting the four-pronged Bush reform agenda for NATO. Anything less will lead to a repetition of the post-9/11 American response to European efforts to help America: Thanks, but no thanks.

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