

Heritage Lectures

No. 1082

Delivered April 7, 2008



Published by The Heritage Foundation

May 6, 2008

The Bucharest Summit: NATO and the Future of the Transatlantic Alliance

Kurt Volker

When we talk about NATO and the future, NATO's mission, to me, still remains very much the same mission that NATO has always had, which is the collective defense of its members. That's what it's there for. What has changed is the environment in which NATO needs to go about doing this. We don't face the Soviet threat in the heart of Europe in the same way that we did back in the 1980s or before. We do face threats like terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, and rogue states, and NATO has to deal with these new kinds of challenges. And in order to assure the security and defense of its members today, it needs to be acting in very different ways.

NATO has gone through a period of remarkable transformation to address this changing security environment. If I give you a snapshot in time from 1995 and a snapshot today, I think we can illustrate where some of these differences are.

In 1995 and before, NATO had 16 members, had no partners anywhere in the world, and had never conducted a military operation. In 2008, NATO has 26 members—over 20 partners in Europe and Eurasia; seven in North Africa in the Mediterranean Dialogue; four in the Persian Gulf through the Istanbul Initiative; others that are with us in Afghanistan; and global partners such as Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

NATO is conducting operations vigorously, running the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan. It remains committed to leading the KFOR (Kosovo Force) operation in Kosovo; has run operations in Bosnia and Macedonia

Talking Points

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) mission still remains very much the same it has always had, which is the collective defense of its members.
- However, we face more diverse threats today, such as terrorism, proliferation, and the consequences of failed states. We need to sharpen our focus on what those threats are and how to respond to them
- Security still depends upon transatlantic cooperation. It is still the United States, Canada, and Europe that together form a single transatlantic, democratic community that is challenged by the same threats in much the same ways.
- Europe must understand that prosperity and democracy are intimately linked to an investment in defense.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/hl1082.cfm

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

in the past; is helping in Darfur to transport African Union troops; and it even delivered humanitarian relief in Pakistan after the earthquake. So NATO has taken on an operational role that enhances the security of its members in very different ways than was the case during the Cold War.

The Bucharest Summit

This is the transformation of NATO that we've seen over the past decades.

If I can turn to the Bucharest Summit, what we've seen there is a furthering of this transformation process. We've seen invitations to new members, Albania and Croatia; a commitment to Macedonia; and enhancement of partnerships, particularly with Ukraine and Georgia.

Ukraine and Georgia. Here, I think, NATO took an extraordinary step by saying that we believe that Ukraine and Georgia will be members of NATO. They will become members of NATO. This is a commitment from NATO to those two countries, a far-reaching statement coming out of NATO. It is more than we've done in past rounds of enlargement to make such a bold assertion at this point in time.

Afghanistan. In addition, NATO issued a statement on Afghanistan that articulated the alliance's shared vision and long-term commitment to security, reconstruction, and development in Afghanistan. It outlined a couple of key pillars or areas where we need to work more effectively: strengthening the military commitments, training the Afghan military and police, working more closely with those Afghan security forces, strengthening reconstruction and development, and tying that more closely as well, so we have better coordination between the military and civilian components; fighting the narcotics problem in Afghanistan; and strengthening governance in Afghanistan. These are all parts of what NATO articulated as a strategy, together with the other members of the ISAF at the summit meeting.

Force Contributions. We did see new contributions announced at Bucharest as well. France announced it would be contributing forces, a battalion into the east of Afghanistan where there is a significant combat role. This will give some flexibility to the commanders to move other forces around, so

we'll also see some strengthening in the south. We've seen other countries announce additional contributions as well, whether that's the Czech Republic, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Poland, or others.

KFOR. There are other contributions that have been made at Bucharest. NATO also reiterated its commitment in Kosovo, so that it will continue to provide leadership to keep KFOR in place, to provide security and stability within Kosovo—and in doing so, to contribute to freedom of movement and the protection of minorities and religious sites in Kosovo, and to create the conditions whereby a Kosovo government can succeed in the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan so that the protections for the minorities in Kosovo can go forward.

Missile Defense. NATO also took an important decision on missile defense, where in the past we've talked about feasibility studies and looking at what the potential threats are and what the potential responses are. NATO took this a bit further at Bucharest and recognized that there are growing ballistic missile threats out there.

We recognize the substantial contribution that the U.S. is making through its missile defense program to the protection of alliance territories and populations. We tasked the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's decision-making body, to do further work, to look at how we can add on to this U.S. missile defense program for further protection of all alliance territory.

Russia. We reiterated our desire to work together with Russia, because missile defense is not targeted *against* Russia, but rather *for* enhancing the security of NATO against stray missile threats—and we'd very much like to work together with Russia to protect against these missile threats.

Macedonia. I should say one more word about enlargement. I touched on Georgia and Ukraine, and I touched on Albania and Croatia. We were disappointed that we were not able to extend an invitation to Macedonia at the Bucharest Summit. The issue of the name of Macedonia has been a subject of some international disagreement for some time. Greece and Macedonia have different views on this. We have tried to facilitate the negotiating process led by the U.N. We believe that's very important.

We do not think that this issue should have prevented Macedonia from getting an invitation, and NATO did make clear that it believes Macedonia is ready. As soon as the name issue is resolved, the NAC can go forward with a decision to issue an invitation. Therefore, in the wake of Bucharest, we hope that negotiations resume quickly and that a solution is found quickly so that we can proceed with an invitation to Macedonia as well.

NATO Transformation

When you think about the transformation of NATO that I described—enlargement, partnerships, the operational roles, the diversity of the operational roles, the geographic spread of the operational roles that NATO has taken on—then, clearly, there's a lot of capability development that needs to take place. It has already taken place to some degree, but it needs to continue. I'll mention a few things that NATO has done, but there's much more that's needed, and I'll come to some of the challenges in just a moment.

One thing we did at the 2006 Riga Summit was to launch an initiative where a consortium of countries could buy strategic airlift C-17s. This is critical because it's a gap that NATO has faced until now—how to get forces and equipment to the places where they're needed.

A current gap that we face within NATO is tactical airlift—helicopters that have the right equipment, and that are able to deploy, sustain themselves in the field, and contribute to the operations. So doing further work on helicopters is something that we also worked on at Bucharest.

NATO Response Force

NATO Response Force was a creation launched at the Prague Summit in 2002. We're looking at ways in which we can sustain the contributions to the Response Force and actually use them, and if we can break it into deployable pieces or find other ways that the Response Force can contribute to the effectiveness of NATO's operations today. It's important to have a reserve capability. For contingencies that arise, NATO has the ability to respond, but we can't just be tying up the resources in something that stays on the shelf. We've got to make it useable as well.

We've created a coordination mechanism for special operations forces, something that NATO had never done before the efforts in Afghanistan. Having worked together with allies, including special operations forces, we discovered a lot of potential for synergy, for joint training, and for working together. NATO is developing this special operations initiative, including on the ground in Afghanistan with the coordination center in theater.

Challenges Ahead

Now there are challenges ahead. There are serious challenges facing NATO, and this is what I think is going to be occupying us for the years ahead.

Principally, I think a major challenge is that European publics do not currently see the well-being, prosperity, and the political development and democracy enjoyed within Europe as intimately linked to the investment and security in defense. I believe that it is intimately linked. I don't think you can sustain the kind of prosperity and well-being that's enjoyed in Europe or in North America without the investment in security. So we have to come back to that.

I think part of the reason is because the nature of the threats has changed. When it was the Soviet Union, when it was the Cold War, certainly we argued over defense spending then, too. But it was a clear rationale and a clear threat. We face a much more diverse nature of threats today when we talk about terrorism, proliferation, and the consequences of failed states. I think we need to sharpen our focus on what those threats are—and how we respond to them—and continue the investment.

A second element that I think is critical is the reinforcement of the idea that security still depends upon transatlantic cooperation. It is still the United States, Canada, and Europe that together form a single transatlantic, democratic community that is challenged by the same threats in much the same ways. We'll only really be effective in addressing them if we are addressing them together. So reinforcing the investment in security and reinforcing the commitment to a transatlantic partnership, I think, are two of the critical challenges ahead.

Then we face a lot of other specific challenges as we go through. We need an ESDP (European Secu-

urity and Defense Policy) that works. We need one that is both effective for contributing capabilities for NATO operations (where NATO is taking the lead); and able to be used by the European Union if NATO is not involved—but with no competition or duplication of leadership, no pulling apart into separation between Europe and the rest of NATO. We

need a closer integration, and we need an ESDP that can become a supportive part of an effective NATO and a transatlantic link.

—Kurt Volker is Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.