

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2567  
July 28, 2009

## Priorities for Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO's New Secretary General

*Sally McNamara*

At NATO's 60th anniversary summit in Strasbourg-Kehl this past April, the alliance appointed former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen to succeed Jaap de Hoop Scheffer as secretary general. Although Rasmussen's appointment—facing strong Turkish opposition—was controversial, it is important that he takes office with a clear vision for the future of the alliance.<sup>1</sup>

When Rasmussen formally takes over as secretary general on August 1, he will have multiple agenda items competing for his attention, the most pressing of which will be to rally support for the alliance's mission in Afghanistan. With Afghan presidential elections set for August 20, Rasmussen takes over the alliance at a critical time for the ISAF mission.

The negotiations for a new strategic concept, NATO–EU relations, and further enlargement of the alliance, however, will also be key issues. Overall, Rasmussen needs to dedicate himself to revitalizing NATO and reestablishing a sense of unity within the alliance.

**Afghanistan.** Outgoing Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has used his departure tour to send a strong message to NATO's European allies that they need to assume a greater share of the burden for the mission in Afghanistan. He has also sought to convey that Afghanistan continues to be a mission of necessity, rather than of choice.<sup>2</sup> This message sets the tone for NATO's top priority issue: gaining alliance-wide support for the new comprehensive "surge" strategy for Afghanistan.

Although NATO is an intergovernmental organization and the secretary general cannot demand the deployment of more combat troops from member states or lift their nationally-imposed operational caveats, he can make the public case for the mission and outline exactly what is at stake. Inequitable sharing of the burdens and risks threatens not only operational success in Afghanistan, but also as the House of Commons Defence Committee has pointed out, the viability of the alliance as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Rasmussen is in a position to speak with authority on the issue of Afghanistan. As Danish Prime Minister, he faced down widespread domestic opposition to sending combat troops into Iraq and Afghanistan. Denmark contributes 700 combat troops to ISAF who serve without national caveats limiting their geographical or operational deployment.<sup>4</sup> Denmark has lost 24 servicemen during its campaign in Afghanistan which, per capita, demonstrates the significant commitment of this small nation in comparison to larger countries such as France and Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Rasmussen's goal must now be to build a consensus around the comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan and persuade all members of the alliance to

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2567.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/wm2567.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](http://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.

provide the resources needed for success. In the past six years, NATO has had multiple reviews and plans, but has not followed through by providing the necessary resources, whether they be financial, security, or military.<sup>6</sup> Additional combat troops, trainers, police mentors, reconstruction teams, and other enablers, as well as airlift and economic assistance, will be required across the country.

**NATO Enlargement.** Rasmussen must also build consensus around NATO's Open Door Policy. NATO enlargement has been a success story, both for the alliance and for the accession states. Closing NATO's door to aspiring nations will betray a founding principle of NATO and cancel an important element of the broader Euro-Atlantic integration process.

Eastward enlargement of the alliance remains a particularly contentious issue within NATO: France and Germany are steadfastly opposed to enlargement, the Baltics and Eastern Europeans in favor, and the United States is sitting on the fence. Such division is not good for the alliance and sends a mixed message to prospective members. Undoubtedly, Russian influence is in play, seeking a veto over further NATO enlargement. Denying Georgia and Ukraine Membership Action Plans (MAP) at the Bucharest Summit demonstrated that Moscow can wield influence within NATO when it harnesses Franco-German opposition to enlargement. Continuing to put MAP on the backburner for Georgia and Ukraine will not heal the fissures within NATO over enlargement, but rather encourage Russia to believe that it has a veto over further expansion.

As both a defense and political organization, NATO's Open Door Policy represents the alliance's commitment to a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Rasmussen will formally meet Russia's envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, on August 11.<sup>7</sup> It is important that Rasmussen immediately send Moscow the message that NATO will not be intimidated, and, in seeking better NATO-Russia relations, enlargement is not a bargaining chip which can be played at Russia's behest.

**NATO-EU Relations.** Rasmussen's experience working at the heart of the European Union gives him an inside edge on how best to reshape NATO-EU relations. The reintegration of France into NATO's military command structures, coupled with the Obama Administration's inclination toward a deeply integrated European Union (EU), threatens to hand over the primacy of NATO in Europe's security architecture to the EU.

If NATO's primacy in European security affairs is lost, so is the security bargain and indivisibility of U.S.-European security. Creating a second defense alliance in Europe, with its own operational headquarters, security strategy, and military staff will inevitably come at NATO's expense. Therefore, in seeking strong European partners to bear a greater share of the global security burden, Rasmussen must underscore the primacy of NATO and define a working relationship with the European Union that delivers better complementarity for missions such as Afghanistan.

1. Ian Traynor, "Bitter Turkey Finally Lifts Veto on Danish PM as Nato Chief," *The Guardian*, April 5, 2009, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/05/nato-eu-denmark-turkey> (July 23, 2009).
2. Jennifer Glasse, "NATO Chief Says Alliance Is Essential to World Peace," VOA, July 21, 2009, at <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-07-21-voa62.cfm> (July 27, 2009).
3. House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Future of NATO and European Defence*, Ninth Report of Session 2007-08, March 20, 2008, at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmsselect/cmdfence/111/111.pdf> (July 23 2009).
4. NATO, "International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army Strength & Laydown," June 2009, at <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf> (July 23, 2009).
5. "iCasualties.org: Operation Enduring Freedom," iCasualties, at <http://icasualties.org/oef/byNationality.aspx?hndQry=Denmark> (July 23, 2009).
6. See General John Craddock, "NATO and Afghanistan: Equitable Burden Sharing," remarks made to The Reserve Officers Association of the United States, July 9, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/press/events/ev070909a.cfm>
7. "Russia to NATO: Indivisible Security for All," Russia Today, July 22, 2009, at <http://www.russiatoday.com/Politics/2009-07-22/Russia-to-NATO--indivisible-security-for-all.html> (July 27, 2009).

Specifically, the NATO–EU partnership must be redefined along the following principles:

- NATO's primacy in the transatlantic security alliance is supreme;
- The EU should be a civilian complement to NATO;
- There should be no duplication of NATO assets, including any separate EU operational planning and command capabilities;
- NATO must maintain at least one supreme command in the United States;
- NATO must reserve all resources exclusively for NATO missions; and
- The assets and resources for exclusively ESDP missions must be provided in addition to—not instead of—the members' contributions to NATO.

**Strategic Concept.** Whether Rasmussen's handling of the negotiations for a new strategic concept is successful will be largely measured by the final outcome document—which will guide the alliance for at least the next decade. Since the completion of the last strategic concept in 1999, the alliance has witnessed the 9/11 terrorist attacks, NATO's only invocation of Article V on September 12, 2001, and its ensuing experiences in Afghanistan. There is already a temptation to preclude future expeditionary operations and produce a strategic concept that looks like a shopping list for EU interests. Instead, however, this process needs to draw out members' commitment to the alliance and stress the central importance of transatlantic security, including the durability of Article V. Further, it must also accept that expeditionary operations are necessary to confront the challenges of the modern security environment.

If the new strategic concept is unfocused and filled with EU priorities, such as climate change and international development, Rasmussen will have failed to sufficiently concentrate the negotiations on NATO's core purpose and vision. Instead, the strategic concept must address the new threat environment, as well as the willingness and ability of all alliance members to confront these challenges. A separate internal net assessment may, therefore, be needed to address the capabilities gap and members' capacity and willingness for action, as well as an external net assessment to better understand emerging threats, such as cyber terrorism, ballistic missile proliferation, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

**Ensuring NATO Relevancy.** Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has had to confront complex security challenges and undertake military missions, including the deployment of a large multi-national force far beyond the European arena. With the mission in Afghanistan entering a critical phase, the NATO secretary general must be much more than a mere manager-in-chief. Anders Fogh Rasmussen must be a dynamic leader who can rebuild NATO's unity on a number of issues, beginning with the mission in Afghanistan. He must restore confidence in the alliance's long-standing Open Door Policy and find a working relationship with the EU which complements NATO, rather than duplicate its functions. Revitalizing NATO will not be an easy task for Rasmussen, but, if NATO is to remain relevant, it is an essential one.

—Sally McNamara is a Senior Policy Analyst in European Affairs at The Heritage Foundation's Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom. She would like to thank Nicholas Connor, intern at the Thatcher Center, for his assistance in preparing this paper.