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NATO Summit 2014: An Opportunity to Support Georgia

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On June 25, outgoing NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that there would be no enlargement at the next NATO summit in September 2014. Furthermore, he announced that Georgia would not receive its long-awaited Membership Action Plan (MAP), which is one mechanism NATO uses to formalize a candidate country's path to full membership. Instead of a MAP, Georgia has been promised a "substantive package" of support that will bring Georgia closer to NATO.

The U.S. should continue to support Georgia's NATO aspirations and ensure that the summit delivers a capabilities package that will enhance the NATO-Georgian relationship while improving Georgia's defensive military capabilities.

A Committed Partner

While few expected Georgia to receive an invitation to join the alliance at the upcoming summit, NATO's decision to not even grant a MAP has come as a huge blow to those in Tbilisi who are pushing for deeper Euro-Atlantic integration away from Moscow.

After the Russian invasion in 2008 and the subsequent Russian occupation of 20 percent of Georgia's territory, Georgia has transformed its military and has been steadfast with its support for overseas

security operations. Georgia has contributed thousands of troops to Iraq and hundreds of peacekeepers to the Balkans and currently has 150 soldiers deployed to the Central African Republic.

Perhaps Georgia's greatest contribution is found in Afghanistan. At the height of the war, Georgia had almost 2,000 soldiers deployed in the dangerous south. Today, it has 1,600 troops in Helmand province, making it the largest per-capita troop-contributing nation. While many NATO countries refuse to say how many troops (if any) they will leave in Afghanistan for the post-combat training mission, Georgia has already publicly committed up to 750 soldiers. Moreover, Georgians will be contributing to the NATO Response Force starting in 2015. In many ways Georgia has been a model for other countries in Europe.

The Long Road to NATO

Georgia was promised eventual membership at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. Since then not all members of the Alliance have been supportive. This is especially true of those countries inside NATO that have an uncomfortably close relationship with Russia. Some NATO members are concerned that Georgia's entry into NATO would trigger an automatic war with Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgian officials say that they are happy to accept a NATO membership arrangement or compromise that excludes the two occupied territories from NATO's Article 5 security guarantee until the matter is resolved peacefully with the Russians. To demonstrate its commitment, Georgia made a "non-use of force" pledge regarding the occupied territories, which Russia has failed to do.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4260>

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Chicago Summit Raised Expectations

To the surprise of many at the time, NATO enlargement was not on the agenda at the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago. As a way of assuaging the concerns of those supporting enlargement of NATO, foreign ministers held a “NATO 28+4” meeting with the four aspirant countries.¹ The fact that the “NATO 28+4” meeting was not held at the heads-of-government level was viewed as a snub. Responding to criticism at the time, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: “I believe [the Chicago summit] should be the last summit that is not an enlargement summit.”² Even so, her successor, John Kerry, showed no enthusiasm for enlargement at the Wales summit, and President Obama is on track for being the first U.S. President since the end of the Cold War not to oversee NATO enlargement on his watch.

Western politicians are paying significant attention to the political situation in Georgia. The Chicago summit declaration highlighted “the importance of conducting free, fair, and inclusive elections [in Georgia] in 2012 and 2013.”³ Thankfully, these elections were peaceful and led to the first peaceful political transition in recent memory in Georgia.

However, the U.S. Senate⁴ and the U.S. State Department⁵ have raised concerns regarding the circumstances under which former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was recently charged by the Georgian prosecutor’s office. The Polish foreign ministry released a statement saying that the charges “could have the nature of a selective application of justice.”⁶ Other NATO members have raised concerns as well.

As the next summit approaches, this issue will be on the minds of NATO’s leaders.

Keeping Georgia on the Right Track

Keeping NATO focused on Georgia’s Euro–Atlantic path will require American leadership. The U.S. needs to ensure that the upcoming summit recognizes the commitment and sacrifices to transatlantic security made by Georgia. The U.S. and NATO should:

- **Publish a separate summit declaration on NATO’s support for Georgia.** NATO leaders often agree on separate declarations, apart from the main declaration, on specific issues of importance. A separate declaration on NATO’s support for eventual Georgian membership into the alliance would send the right message to the Georgian people that their sacrifice and commitment have not gone unnoticed.
- **Ensure the alliance is clear on Georgia’s future membership.** The summit declaration should make it clear that Georgia’s successful completion of subsequent Annual National Programs, along with the NATO–Georgia Commission, will help bring Georgia closer to ultimate membership.
- **Ensure that a “NATO 28+4” meeting takes place at the heads-of-government level.** With enlargement once again off the agenda, NATO heads of government should meet with the leaders of the four aspirant countries. This meeting should not be relegated to the level of foreign minister, as it was at the Chicago summit.

1. The other three are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and the Republic of Macedonia.
2. Karen Parrish, “Clinton Affirms NATO Open-Door Membership Policy,” American Forces Press Service, May 21, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=116433> (accessed August 5, 2014).
3. Press release, “Chicago Summit Declaration,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 20, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm?mode=pressrelease (accessed August 5, 2014).
4. Civil Georgia, “Several U.S. Senators Concerned over Filing Charges Against Saakashvili,” July 29, 2014, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27529> (accessed August 5, 2014).
5. Civil Georgia, “U.S. ‘Concerned’ over Filing Criminal Charges Against Saakashvili,” July 30, 2014, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27531> (accessed August 5, 2014).
6. Civil Georgia, “Polish MFA ‘Concerned over Possible Selective Justice in Georgia,’” August 2, 2014, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27551> (accessed August 4, 2014).

- **Help the Georgians defend themselves.** Every country has the inherent right to self-defense. The U.S. and NATO allies should sell defensive anti-tank and anti-aircraft weaponry to Georgia. So long as the weapons are defensive in nature, there is no reason not to provide them to the Georgian military.
- **Slowly shift NATO training from counterinsurgency (COIN) operations to area defense operations.** For the past several years, NATO training has focused on Georgia's COIN operations in Afghanistan, and rightly so. However, with NATO's combat mission coming to an end, there should be a gradual shift in training to reflect Georgia's security challenges in the region.
- **Increase multilateral and bilateral training inside Georgia.** The more the NATO flag flies in Georgia, the more committed the Georgian people will be to remaining on a path toward Euro-Atlantic integration. Military training exercises are a visible sign of NATO's support.

- **Refer to the Russian military presence as an occupation.** In the summit declaration, NATO should call the presence of several thousand Russian troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia what it is: an occupation. To date, many European countries have failed to use this terminology. Given recent events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, it is more important than ever that NATO sends a united and clear message.

On Track to Membership

Georgians have proven themselves to be gallant in combat. They are also undertaking a defense transformation program that is an example to all of NATO. The next summit offers an opportunity to reaffirm NATO's commitment to Georgian membership, strengthen the NATO-Georgian relationship, and enhance Georgia's defensive capabilities. In the long run, this would bring more stability to the South Caucasus region. The alliance should live up to its 2008 promise and keep Georgia on the track to NATO membership.

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