

NATO turns 60. How can it stay healthy?

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>>> On 3 and 4 April NATO will celebrate its 60th birthday at a summit that will take place in France (Strasbourg) and Germany (Kehl/Baden Baden). This will not only involve celebrations and looking back on NATO's history; NATO will also need to be decisive about its future and send a clear message as to the relevance and urgency of the tasks that lie ahead.

The good news is that NATO is faring relatively well compared to other European-oriented security organisations. The EU is struggling with internal reforms and has put enlargement on the back-burner, while the OSCE has lost relevance due to disagreement between eastern and western members over its values and purpose. Meanwhile, NATO is welcoming France back into its military structures and members are largely united on NATO's key roles: offering security guarantees; fostering transatlantic relations; and undertaking more effective operations. Albania and Croatia will join the Alliance during the summit; but on a less positive note, Macedonia and NATO member Greece have not come to terms over the long-running name issue, which blocks the former's membership.

Further bad news concerns the war in Afghanistan, where the continued fighting is severely complicating and delaying development and reconstruction efforts. It is now acknowledged that NATO will need to stay in Afghanistan for the long haul, but not all members are willing to become involved by sending troops and taking casualties. Waning contributions and political divisions have now also affected the less high-profile mission in Kosovo. Spain recently stated unilaterally that it would withdraw its troops from Kosovo, increasing the impression among its partners that it is a free rider in NATO. Bad news also comes from Russia, which persists

HIGHLIGHTS

- NATO needs to develop a compact and realistic new Strategic Concept.
- The ISAF Afghanistan mission is not a test of survival but rather of being able to run large-scale, distant and long-lasting operations with a range of 'civilian' partners.
- NATO should not rush to rebuild relations with a Russia that needs time to find its place in and position towards the Alliance.
- The Alliance should continue its open door policy and contribution to the democratisation of defence in partner countries; those that want to join and are ready should be welcome.

2

»»»»» in seeing NATO as an enemy bloc instead of a partner; Georgia and Ukraine remain victimised by this prolonged situation.

NATO will also have to find a new Secretary-General as De Hoop Scheffer's second term draws to an end. This might prove difficult, as candidates that have voiced harsh criticism of Russia or are viewed negatively by the Islamic world are ruled out. A new SG should represent internal unity and promote partnership with all of NATO's partners; the anniversary summit will aim to convey this general message.

As NATO reaches the age of 60, no member is thinking of the Alliance's retirement. Nonetheless, the Alliance will need to adapt further to the current international environment and new security challenges. The following are five good health guidelines to enable NATO to stay fit at 60:

MODESTY IN CONSUMPTION

First, NATO should be careful not to overstretch its capability while member states continue to lower defence budgets and are unenthusiastic about contributing to operations. During the summit NATO plans to start the process of revising its 1999 Strategic Concept. The anniversary meeting will probably produce a Declaration on Atlantic Security in order to reaffirm a joint direction. This, of course, would not replace the Atlantic Charter but serve as the starting point for drafting a new Strategic Concept that should be ready before 2011.

The Strategic Concept is the overarching policy framework that explains the purpose of NATO and outlines its strategic perspectives. The 1999 Concept needs updating to take into account 9/11, the subsequent war on terror, the admission of seven new NATO members and the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). It needs to relate much more closely to the 2003 European Security Strategy, including its update report that appeared in December 2008. The new Concept also offers an

opportunity for a fresh start after the divisions of the two Bush administrations.

An overambitious agenda would be counterproductive and could intrude onto the territory of other institutions such as the EU, OSCE and OECD. A clear example of this is energy security. NATO has been debating for years what its role should be on this issue: some have argued that a role in energy security would further aggravate relations with Russia, while others have proposed an 'energy NATO'. The Strategic Concept should help to define a realistic contribution here, with NATO's role limited to guarding vulnerable energy-related infrastructure and crucial transport routes. This also applies to a variety of other topics such as environmental security or further 'out of area' missions. NATO should not exclude involvement, but it should not commit simply to doing ever more if it wants to stay effective.

PLENTY OF EXERCISE

At 60 NATO should remain ready and able to meet military challenges. NATO is both a political and a military organisation and it should remain so. The end of the Cold War forced NATO to look for a new purpose, which resulted not only in the enlargement process and the provision of democracy assistance to partner countries, but also in the need to engage in 'out of area' missions. In the process, NATO has become more politically orientated. The need to find consensus on peace missions in the Balkans and now Afghanistan has taken it into difficult political terrain, but the Alliance should not lose track of its core business, which is essentially military.

The most obvious challenge is the Afghanistan war, where the ISAF mission is not able to move from a full-blown conflict with the Taliban to reconstruction and coordinated action with civilian organisations. Pakistan's instability and inability to counter the Taliban on its territory is increasingly problematic, but other neighbours also pose difficulties for NATO and the US in making progress in Afghanistan. These include

several Central Asian states that have not been cooperative in lending support: Uzbekistan feels it is unable to combine relations with Russia and Western countries and changes its preferences overnight, while Kyrgyzstan chose quick funds from Russia over healthy relations with Washington and has recently closed its US military base.

Internally, NATO has severe problems in gathering practical support among its European members. Whereas the US is planning substantial increases in troop levels over the coming months, it remains to be seen if Europeans will follow suit.

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Some are unwilling to invest funds, troops and material either in low-risk areas or in actual fighting; others simply do not have the experience and qualified forces to contribute to stabilising Afghanistan's southern and eastern provinces. So-called national caveats further complicate the ISAF mission, with troops operating under different mandates on the ground. The summit should avoid measuring success by the extent to which member states offer a few troops here and there, but rather it should be used as a platform to focus on the military transformation needed in order to meet contemporary military challenges.

BENEFIT FROM EXPERIENCE

NATO has accumulated experience that it should make the most of more fully. During the Cold War the focus was eastwards and this remained the case after 1991, albeit then through partnership and enlargement. It has been difficult for NATO to broaden its horizon to other regions, especially North Africa and the Middle East. NATO has its Mediterranean dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation process,

but in practice it continues to work primarily with Balkan countries and former Soviet republics. Since the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war and Moscow's negative position towards the Alliance, it seems legitimate again for NATO to focus on its 'eastern bias', as that is the region where NATO has experience and can contribute to reform and stability.

NATO has signalled that it is willing to start talks again with Russia through the NATO-Russia Council. It has done so before the summit to avoid having Georgia-Russia tensions high on the agenda, but it is unclear if NATO will fully return to 'business as usual'. Russia has not made any concessions or even gestures. Will renewed talks with Russia be about substantial issues like arms control, cooperation on Afghanistan and missile defence (which might be scrapped by the Obama administration)? Or will they simply replay the ongoing row over Georgia and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

NATO should not hurry to comfort Russia without positive signs from Moscow. Russia is stepping up troop levels in Abkhazia and South Ossetia while ignoring Georgian territorial integrity. The Kremlin prefers to fight geopolitical battles in Central Asia over military bases instead of supporting NATO's Afghanistan mission. Russia sees NATO as a military bloc and thus as a threat. It is building its own identity, which has involved turning NATO into an enemy and relying on highly negative rhetoric. The new Obama administration will need to persuade Russia to take a more positive approach, and the economic crisis and dwindling oil prices that have hit Russia hard may push the Kremlin towards a more cooperative stance.

FOCUS ON KEY STRENGTHS

NATO has been largely successful in its efforts to stabilise the Balkans and with the enlargement process, and it should remain focused on both until completion. Albania and Croatia will join



4

»»»»» the Alliance during the summit, but Macedonia, which is equally well prepared, is blocked by Greece.

NATO's second biggest operation is still active in Kosovo and remains essential to avoid violence between Kosovar Serbs and Albanians. KFOR troop levels will be reduced over the coming years while the civilian EULEX mission is getting up to speed. Still, a solution needs to be found for Mitrovica, the northern part of Kosovo mostly inhabited by Serbs and largely controlled by Belgrade, where a KFOR presence will remain necessary. NATO countries have not been able to agree on a clear format for partnership between Kosovo and NATO. Meanwhile, NATO relations with Serbia have improved, but the integration of Serbia remains a distant prospect owing to the legacy of the 1999 bombings. The two other PfP members in South-East Europe – Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Montenegro – pose less serious questions to NATO, as both co-operate well with NATO but membership is distant.

NATO's biggest challenge in the enlargement portfolio concerns Georgia and Ukraine. At last year's Bucharest summit, the Alliance made it clear that both will join but was not willing to move from partnership to membership talks. NATO members have different views on these countries' applications, with some believing that NATO would only taunt Russia with the prospect of proceeding, while others prefer to ignore Moscow and benefit from the strategic importance that both countries offer. Some countries argue that quick membership would lead to increased stability and effective democratisation, while others argue for the traditional way of insisting on deeper reforms prior to enlargement.

Public support for membership in Ukraine remains well below half of the population. Georgia was knocked back by the August war, as solving the two 'frozen conflicts' on its territory – Abkhazia and South-Ossetia – has become more difficult now that they have been recognised by Russia as independent states. President Saakashvili's democratic credentials have not improved and the country is

politically unstable. NATO should proceed with giving active support to Georgia's democratic reform process, especially in the defence sector. The longstanding 'open door' policy seems to be the only reasonable and effective policy in this sense.

**MAINTAIN AN INTEREST
IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

NATO should remain keen on further developing its partnerships, which are strong but also overcomplicated and sometimes ineffective. The most essential is the relationship with the EU, which has developed its own defence capabilities and now runs missions through the ESDP. A particularly positive sign of strengthening cooperation and especially coordination will be the reintegration of France into NATO's military structure. Meanwhile, a clearer division of roles, but also the pooling of resources in an effective manner, will be crucial in meeting security challenges.

While EU-NATO relations require further consolidation, the established PfP programme needs reform or risks becoming ineffective. Instead of clinging on to confusing acronyms (IPPs, PAP-DIB, PAP-T, IPAPs, Intensified Dialogues and MAPs) the PfP should be simplified. It should make a clear distinction between countries open to co-operation but averse to democratic defence reform and those willing to engage in the latter. This will prove difficult since both NATO and partners from Europe and Eurasia have become accustomed to the PfP over the years. It would be logical to include Mediterranean and Middle-East partners in the PfP: although the Mediterranean Dialogue and, to a lesser extent, the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative are modelled on the PfP, they currently are not part of deliberations in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). A broad PfP would incorporate countries interested in strategic co-operation, established non-NATO member western democracies, authoritarian regimes that aim at least to open lines of communication and countries with a membership perspective. While all of these nations are brought

together in one transatlantic forum, they should be differentiated according to membership wishes and democratic credentials; NATO can thus stay true to the values it is set up to protect.

CONCLUSION

The anniversary summit's two main topics will be Afghanistan and starting the process of drafting a new Strategic Concept. Although NATO has indicated that it will reopen talks with Russia after the summit, the situation in Georgia will be difficult to ignore. NATO is still relevant, but it should be careful not to take on more tasks or

missions further away from the Euro-Atlantic area. An increase of portfolios would risk losing track of core military and defence objectives and raise the question of 'who next?'. If NATO succeeds in combin-

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ing moderating its consumption and remaining physically fit with exploiting experience, it will stay healthy. The international security scene is an unhealthy working environment with substantial risks on the job. There is certainly no need for retirement, in part because there is no younger post-Cold War generation of institutions that can take over. But too much extra work would risk stress and exhaustion. NATO is reasonably healthy but needs to plan its future carefully. Next check-up: Portugal, at the end of 2010 / early 2011.

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