



# BULLETIN

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## NATO Before Strasbourg/Kehl Anniversary Summit— Main Challenges

by Marek Madej

*The approaching NATO summit (April 3–4) to be held in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany, will be an occasion not only to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty, but also to provide the Alliance with a new impulse for development. NATO must soon take a number of decisions important for its future. What needs redefining first of all are NATO's priorities. Also, the Allies must address the future of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and the nature of relations with Russia. Poland as an active NATO member of ten years' standing should significantly contribute to this debate.*

**NATO Tasks.** At the anniversary summit, a declaration on Alliance security will be adopted. While this document is mainly meant to affirm transatlantic unity, its announcement is likely to start off an official debate on a new strategic concept of NATO. Today, no member questions the need to adopt the concept. The key issue will be to define relationships between the Alliance's traditional functions (deterrence, defense of member states, maintaining transatlantic links) and tasks arising from NATO's role as a "global stabilizing force" (missions conducted outside the Treaty area, cooperation with international partners and international organizations). While in recent years expeditionary tasks have dominated in the Alliance's practice, this trend could now be reversed. A shift like that would be prompted by the assertive character of Russia's policy towards some NATO members and partners and by the growing difficulties of conducting out-of-area operations—a circumstance pointedly illustrating both limitations of the Alliance's ability to perform global functions and the dependence of the efficiency of its performance in this role on cooperation with other states and organizations (e.g. Russia, the European Union). Another important premise is that military transformation, which so far has been focused on the development of expeditionary capabilities, has been losing momentum, slowed down partially by the current economic crisis. Under the circumstances, restoring the priority of the traditional tasks—a change for which Poland and a number of other states have been pushing—is now possible. This is not to say that NATO would give up its global activities. Rather, this change would be about establishing such proportions between the traditional and new tasks as would be better suited to the needs of the Allies (in particular the members admitted in the recent decade) and their present and future potentials. A revised order of priority of NATO's tasks should constitute the basis for operational planning decisions—for instance, on updating contingency planning, which is what a majority of the Allies want, albeit for different reasons. On the other hand, it does not necessarily need to spur the development of the Alliance's infrastructure (including in new member states) or transformation programs, particularly in the prevailing conditions of the economic crisis.

A determination of the extent of NATO involvement on non-military security levels will be another relevant dimension of the debate. In particular, it is in the interests of all members that NATO's tasks in the areas of energy security and control of cyberspace should be precisely defined. Having said that, it should be borne in mind that the real scope for effective NATO actions is relatively modest, limited, for instance, to protecting sea routes for transportation of energy resources or, with regard to cybersecurity, to acting as a coordination-cum-training centre. Moreover, inherent in an expanded catalogue of threats to be addressed by NATO is the risk of scattering resources and impairing

NATO's ability to fulfill commitments arising under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (assistance in the event of armed aggression).

**Afghanistan.** Given a deteriorating situation in that country, the ISAF mission remains the most important of NATO's current tasks. The Allies are in agreement that the resources, military or otherwise, allocated to ISAF are inadequate and the strategies for the involvement of and cooperation with other interested parties are ineffectual. Even so, a debate on changes in this regard could well fail to produce an accord on the future of NATO's activities and on the division of tasks among NATO and the other partners, unless it is accompanied by reflection on two general issues.

First, there are the objectives of the ISAF mission as such. The Allies must decide whether the mission is to be continued until its original targets (to set up a stable democratic Afghan state and to eliminate armed resistance to the government in Kabul) are attained in full, or whether it should be aimed only at making Afghanistan relatively stable, with the central government efficient enough to keep internal order—which would enable, in a several years' perspective, the withdrawal of a majority or all international forces from that country. A choice between these options should take into account the probability and timeframe of each, as well as the Alliance's limited present resources and its ability to raise more resources and to maintain public support for the mission. Due consideration should also be given to external factors (including the growing instability of Pakistan), to the likelihood that other institutions and states (e.g. the EU) will increase their involvement in Afghanistan and to an impact a failure of the ISAF mission would have on the credibility and cohesion of the Alliance. Latest U.S. decisions on Afghanistan—on sending out 17,000 extra troops and on announced talks with "moderate" Taliban—suggest that the new administration wants to repeat the strategy used in Iraq in 2007. This would imply preference for an option closer to the second of the two presented above—less ambitious, but more realistic.

The second important issue is the assessment of the Alliance's involvement in Afghanistan in the context of a future order of priorities of NATO's tasks. The Allies should determine whether they really want to regard the ISAF mission as a test of how effective NATO is as the foremost instrument of its members' security policy, or how capable it is of acting as a "global stabilizer"—or whether they prefer to treat ISAF as a *sui generis* case which determines neither the direction of development for the organization nor a future rank of its expeditionary missions. On this choice depends how serious an impact a failure of ISAF forces—a possibility which cannot be ruled out, however the objectives of the mission are defined—would have on the Alliance.

**Relations with Russia.** The North Atlantic Council resolved on March 5, three months after the Allies had agreed to resume informal cooperation with Russia (suspended after the war in Georgia), to re-establish official relations with the Russian Federation. This decision was taken even though Russia had not revised in any significant way either its attitude towards NATO or its position on controversial issues (keeping the terms of truce in Georgia, enlargement, the missile defense, the CFE treaty) and, indeed, it induced the government of Kyrgyzstan to cancel agreements on making the airport in Manas available for the ISAF mission. The rationale for resuming cooperation included Russia's potential contribution to the reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals and to preventing the nuclearization of Iran (which is the United States' special concern), and its position as a convenient transit country for supplying NATO forces in Afghanistan. Yet the re-establishment of cooperation with Russia in the full scope could give rise to concern about the Alliance's determination to have relations with Russia based on respect for the law and for undertaken commitments and on the rejection of the concept of zones of influence. It is important, therefore, that NATO should not, as the price of further cooperation, refrain in practice from taking up controversial issues and from expecting Russia to show genuine willingness to solve them. This would encourage the Russian authorities to come up with new claims and would damage the credibility of NATO's policy.

**France.** At the anniversary summit the return of France to NATO military structures will be announced. As a manifestation of the Allies' unity this development will have high political and symbolic value. On the other hand, in the military dimension it represents no meaningful change, as France already ranks among most active members of the Alliance. Its decision to rejoin the military NATO structures, the rationale for which is still debated in France, will be advantageous in the short term, in particular for France itself, because it will increase its participation in the planning and conduct of operations and in the shaping of military transformation of NATO. Also, it will reinforce France's influence on decision-making, largely due to prominent positions allotted to France in Alliance structures. For NATO as a whole, the benefits should consist in improved chances for the long-requested boosting up of the NATO–EU cooperation.