

## NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda

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On May 20-21, 2012 NATO Heads of State and Government will meet in Chicago. Initially, this NATO event was supposed to be an "implementation summit" – an occasion to review the progress on NATO's so-called Lisbon agenda. At its 2010 Lisbon summit the Alliance had agreed on an ambitious work program in order to speed up NATO's evolution towards the security requirements of the 21st century. New structures, concepts and arrangements were to be developed on a wide spectrum of pressing security issues. Chicago was thus expected to offer NATO's highest political representatives an opportunity to assess progress made in pursuing the directions they had indicated in Lisbon, and to give further political guidance.

Three political developments have strongly modified the international security agenda and are likely to transform the Chicago event into a summit in its own right, regardless of the Lisbon agenda: the revolutions in the Arab world and the civil war in Libya; the international financial crisis, with its incalculable impact on NATO's defense budgets; and the newly emerging debate on transatlantic burden sharing, encapsulated in the speech of the outgoing US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in Brussels in June 2011.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, the Chicago summit will feature not only "old" agenda items handed down from Lisbon but also new topics which have emerged over the past year. None of these questions will be easy to solve. Since Lisbon, it has become apparent that reform in some areas is easier said than done – a summit assignment couched in passionate language by the Alliance's Heads of State and Government does not guarantee NATO consensus when it actually comes to the nuts and bolts of an important issue. More recent developments – albeit with positive outcomes, as in the case of Libya – raise critical questions which go to the very foundations of the Alliance. Another important consideration is that the Chicago summit has gained particular relevance for the current administration in Washington, as it will be the first NATO summit in thirteen years to be held in the United States. It will be held in an election year, with President Obama's chances for re-election looking gloomy. Thus, Washington seems particularly interested in summit "deliverables", i.e. decisions and agreements that can be announced as

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Gates, Reflections on the Status and Future of the Transatlantic Alliance, The Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, June 10, 2011, available at <http://www.securitydefenceagenda.org/Contentnavigation/Activities/Activitiesoverview/tabid/1292/EventType/EventView/EventId/1070/EventDateId/1087/PageId/5141/Reflectionsonthestatusandfutureofthetransatlanticalliance.aspx>



clear successes.<sup>2</sup>

Given these preconditions, what are the topics which are likely to dominate the summit discussions in Chicago? What are the critical issues that have to be surmounted in relation to each of these topics, and where will a true Alliance consensus be difficult to achieve?

## TRANSITION IN AFGHANISTAN

The foremost of the long-standing items on the agenda for the Chicago summit will certainly be the situation in Afghanistan. At the Lisbon summit, NATO emphasized its intention of a transfer of full security responsibility throughout Afghanistan to Afghan forces by the end of 2014. At the same time, US President Obama – surprisingly for many observers but understandable from a domestic point of view – linked this transition of authority to the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Even if the President was vague with regard to whether the “withdrawal” he spoke of meant a complete pulling out of US forces, one can doubt whether it was wise to mention 2014 as a specific date for such an action. This could send the wrong kind of signal to the insurgents in Afghanistan, enabling them to see a clear deadline after which the “infidels” will have left the country. At the same time, advance knowledge of the date could prompt public opinion in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) member states to adopt the false expectation that no military engagement will be needed any more.

In any case, since the date of 2014 has been announced, NATO has to cope with the implications of its decision. Of these, three are particularly striking: the requirements of transition, the need to convey an appropriate assessment of the ISAF mission to the public, and the long-term implications.

### **Requirements of transition**

Transition is a long-term process which can be divided into two phases. The first of these concerns the handover of authority to Afghan security forces. In this respect, though the buildup of Afghan military and police forces was long plagued by problems like illiteracy or shortage of Afghan applicants, the situation has improved significantly in 2011. Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) currently exceed 300,000 in number, and will reach the agreed target line of 352,000 in autumn 2012 (subject to NATO

members providing enough military trainers). The military units in particular have improved their combat efficiency significantly, whereas police units still face significant challenges.<sup>3</sup> Hence, there is at least some optimism among the ISAF contributors that the first phase of transition could be successfully conducted by the end of 2014.

However, it is important to note that there is the need for a second phase of long-term transition after 2014 (what NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral Stavridis, calls “the deep transition”). The consequent requirement for long-term engagement of the international community – in terms of financial commitment and also of physical presence on the ground – has to be made clear to the public in all NATO countries, since there seems to be the widespread belief that after 2014 the question of Afghanistan will need no further attention. The Chicago summit offers an important opportunity to debunk this myth. At least two arguments could be brought forward to justify an enduring engagement. The first is based on history, emphasizing that the Taliban emerged as a force to be reckoned with only after Soviet forces had left Afghanistan. Leaving the country to its own devices after 2014 would once again make it a breeding ground for international terrorist groups. The second argument is that even a successful first phase of transition would culminate in failure after 2014 if it were not accompanied by long-term efforts to build up the security sector. For instance, the education of police forces – even if successful – would ultimately prove meaningless after 2014 without a lasting effort to create the judiciary and legal structures (courts, judges, prisons) which are currently lacking.

### **Emphasizing the success achieved**

As the international military presence in Afghanistan is increasingly cut back in the lead-up to 2014, it will be crucial to communicate the right narrative regarding the ISAF mission in order to have public support for a further engagement in the region. Unfortunately, many NATO members put no particular effort into the “strategic communication” of the Afghanistan operation and this omission has made public opinion either critical or disinterested. It is therefore essential for NATO to convey the key message clarifying that the military engagement in Afghanistan – despite all the hardships – was not only a mandatory choice but also in the final analysis a success.

This positive assessment could be founded on three arguments.

<sup>2</sup> Looking for those kinds of deliverables, government officials even rediscovered a pet project of the George W. Bush administration and started lobbying again for rapid NATO membership of Georgia to be announced in Chicago. This, however, would give a heavy blow to the NATO-Russia relationship, which is also a core issue of the summit.

<sup>3</sup> The NATO Mission to Afghanistan: Transition to Afghan Control”, *NDC Conference Report*, Rome, July 2011.



First, one of the ultimate goals, namely destroying Al Qaeda as a strategically active terrorist group operating from Afghanistan, has been achieved. This does not mean an end of the terrorist threat and does not exclude any resurgence of terrorism, but for the time being Al Qaeda is only a fraction of what it was in 2001.

Second, despite the difficulties and drawbacks in Afghanistan, much has been achieved with regard to the buildup of state structures – the figures regarding numbers of children in school, women in jobs, medical care or newly built infrastructure have been widely commented on. It is increasingly important, though, not only to make a quantitative assessment but also to emphasize the results in terms of how well the Afghan state functions in comparison to 2001. NATO has to place a greater premium on the outcome than the output.

Third, Afghanistan has been a success for the cohesion of the Alliance. When NATO took over the ISAF command in August 2003, hardly anyone had assumed that the Alliance would be able to remain fully engaged in the region for more than eight years (and still committed to stay until an acceptable level of stability has been achieved). Despite the sacrifices in blood and treasury, NATO has successfully maintained the unity of all members in Afghanistan. This shows NATO's astounding internal stability, despite the concerns about an alleged lack of Alliance solidarity. What is more, it gives lie to the view that "post-heroic" societies are unable to accept casualties in order to pursue their vital interests. NATO members have actually paid a heavy toll in human lives, but nevertheless maintained their engagement in Afghanistan.

Weaving these three elements of success together into a cohesive narrative is of the utmost importance for the strategic communication of the undertaking by NATO and by the member states' capitals. Chicago will be an opportunity to give this narrative a prominent place.

### **Long-Term Implications after 2014**

NATO's step-by-step termination of its combat operations in Afghanistan will not only raise the question of Afghanistan's future after 2014, but will also highlight the question of the Alliance's internal evolution. Is Afghanistan a model for NATO's future, or was it a one-off task for the Alliance? What will the post-2014 force structure look like? How will NATO organize its relations with members and partners who formed the coalition in Afghanistan? Even if there are no quick answers, these issues might be debated at the summit and beyond.

## **NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS**

Another summit topic which will surely be on the Chicago agenda is Russia. Despite efforts on both sides and occasional re-launches, the NATO-Russia relationship has mostly been a bumpy one – full of inconsistencies and occasional dishonesties on both sides. For instance, NATO publicly denies that Russia is a threat, but some NATO members clearly think otherwise. NATO's new members in the East are quick to point out that their historical concerns are hardly alleviated by Moscow's harsh rhetoric or by military exercises in Russia's north-western territories. On the other hand, Russia always emphasizes how much importance it attaches to cooperation with NATO. In reality, its relations with the Atlantic Alliance rate comparably low on Moscow's foreign policy priority list. Concrete cooperation projects – the heart of the partnerships with other countries – are confined to very few activities. Prime Minister Putin – in addition to his distrust in NATO's reliability – even casts serious doubt on the Alliance's right to exist, given the demise of the Warsaw Pact two decades ago. Further-more, Russia's actions on the international scene – for instance, blocking any consensus in the United Nations regarding the murders committed by the Syrian regime – make a mockery of any assertions of cooperativeness and responsibility.

Though concrete cooperative projects are currently under way in a number of fields, like common efforts to detect explosive devices in airports (STANDEX), the Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund or cooperation in airspace control, there is nothing of outstanding strategic relevance (except missile defense – see below). In a longer-term perspective too, the outlook for substantial improvements in the relationship looks distinctly bleak. Fruitful cooperation with Russia in NATO is based on the premise that the Kremlin is interested in a comprehensive modernization of the country (and is able to put this into practice), so that Russia can credibly underpin its claim of equality to the Alliance. The same is true of Russia-EU cooperation. There is the observation that President Medvedev is about to fail in his modernization efforts and future President Putin seems to have other priorities. As a result, Russia is likely to become progressively weaker (economically and militarily)<sup>4</sup> and could be tempted to compensate for this by becoming increasingly assertive and pushy on the international scene. This holds all the more true since NATO and Russia differ on key issues like a Georgian NATO membership or the "spheres of influence" claimed by Russia. All this is likely to make the NATO-Russia relationship difficult even for those in NATO who still favor a "Russia First" policy.

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<sup>4</sup> See Susan Stewart, A Weaker Russia, SWP Comments, Berlin 2011, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/products/swp-comments-en/swp-aktuelle-details/article/wenn\\_rusland\\_schwaecher\\_wird.html](http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/products/swp-comments-en/swp-aktuelle-details/article/wenn_rusland_schwaecher_wird.html)



## Cooperation on missile defense

NATO-Russia cooperation on missile defense seems to encapsulate all the inconsistencies mentioned above. On the one hand, missile defense cooperation is supposed to be the central element of the NATO-Russia relationship following the famous “reset” in 2010. Indeed, President Medvedev personally attended NATO’s Lisbon summit to highlight Russia’s interest in NATO’s missile defense plans. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand what the intentions of either side with regard to missile defense cooperation are – beyond a very general consensus that something cooperative or even common should be achieved. Moscow initially insisted on a true common missile defense project, where both sides would jointly decide on whether or not to intercept an incoming missile – perfectly knowing that this is far too big a step, particularly for the Eastern European NATO members. Washington promotes the cooperation with Russia on missile defense and gives assurances that it will treat Russia as being on the same eye level – while perfectly knowing that this is not the case, whether in the military field or in technology. Russia might actually hope for a technology transfer, but has nothing to offer which is indispensable for the success of the US missile defense plans.

This is why missile defense cooperation provides nothing like such a hospitable terrain for re-launching the US-Russia or NATO-Russian relationships as the parties concerned claim. Instead, it entails high potential for frictions and disappointments on both sides – given the current state of play in terms of positions and preferences. Despite the assertions from both sides and the summits, it seems unlikely that we will see meaningful NATO-Russia cooperation on missile defense in the near future. It is currently difficult to see what the outcome of the Chicago summit will be with regard to NATO-Russia cooperation. This holds all the more true if one thinks that, by May next year, Russia is likely to have Vladimir Putin as its new President.

## MISSILE DEFENSE IN NATO

The third Lisbon-related item which will probably be a topic for discussion in Chicago is NATO’s internal debate (i.e. without taking the NATO-Russia aspect into account) on missile defense. Despite the agreement of all NATO members at Lisbon to build an Alliance missile shield, missile defense is still primarily a US national project. Since Ronald Reagan, various US presidents have pursued the project at different speeds but all have driven the idea forward. President George

W. Bush foresaw a system with ground-based interceptors and radar sites based in Eastern Europe. It would have been able to destroy long-range missiles flying over Europe to reach North America. As a side effect, the Bush system would have protected large parts of the European NATO territory as well. Thus, this architecture contained a natural incentive for transatlantic cooperation: conceptually, the European allies could focus on the medium-range missile threats and could take care of those regions not covered by US protection. The downside of the Bush approach was that Russia was highly alarmed about having radar sites or missile launchers stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic.

President Obama removed this stumbling block for the US-Russian relationship by proposing a new architecture. His “European Phased Adapted Approach” (EPAA) will focus at least initially on medium-range threats for Europe coming from the Middle East (Iran), and only in the longer run on intercontinental missiles threatening the United States. The interceptors will be deployed on ships – the Aegis cruisers – and will be able to cover all European NATO member states. As a result, the EPAA built by the US will provide NATO Europe with a missile defense system almost for free.

Europe currently contributes only in a cost-neutral way. Some allies (Poland, Romania, Spain, Turkey) provide their territory for the deployment of US radars and interceptors, others provide national radars and sensors which they in any case possess. However, this will not suffice for a true Alliance missile defense system. If NATO – which means 27 allies – wants to have an impact on US missile defense, Washington will expect substantial contributions from the other NATO members. They could, for instance, procure additional interceptor missiles and adapt their cruisers accordingly, to provide supplementary capabilities complementing the defense system or to ensure a back-up in case Washington decides to relocate some of the Aegis ships to other regions of immediate importance for the United States. However, given the dramatic budget cuts in almost all member states, such NATO contributions seem destined to remain an illusion.

In sum, European NATO members support a missile defense system built by the United States, with common decision-making structures, but do not specify what they are going to contribute. Some European allies even doubt the urgency of a missile defense system. For them, agreeing to the project was essentially a bargaining chip to get the United States to withdraw its nuclear forces from Europe – following the flawed argument that if there is defense there is no need for deterrence any more.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Even with a functioning missile defense, the highest level of security can be achieved if a potential aggressor is deterred from launching a missile attack at all. Moreover, whether an attacker will tip his missiles with a conventional or a nuclear warhead will depend on a credible deterrence posture and not on an existing missile defense capability.





Despite these discrepancies and contradictions, NATO intends to use the Chicago summit to declare the “Interim Operational Capability” of the NATO missile shield – with the intention of achieving full operational capability by 2018. Whether such a declaration helps to convince some NATO allies paying more than lip service to the common project remains doubtful.<sup>6</sup> For the foreseeable future, a true NATO missile defense system is – despite all the declarations – more an ambition than a realistic prospect.

## THE DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE POSTURE REVIEW

The fourth “old” agenda item in Chicago will be NATO’s attempt to forge a new consensus on the role and relevance of nuclear deterrence. Triggered by earlier debates on the purpose of US nuclear weapons stationed in European NATO countries, it became evident that this question could no longer be papered over by generic statements on the value of nuclear deterrence for peace and security. Instead, a new agreement on how to deter whom with what seemed inevitable. At the same time it became obvious that in the new security environment of the 21st century, which might even witness the emergence of new nuclear powers (Iran), the deterrence equation could not be confined to the nuclear element alone. Instead, it needs to be scrutinized how conventional forces, missile defense capabilities and arms control measures correlate with nuclear weapons and contribute to an overall deterrence posture.

Accordingly, the Lisbon summit tasked NATO to execute a so-called Deterrence and Defense Posture Review (DDPR) assessing the deterrence question in a comprehensive manner, and to present results at the Chicago meeting. Unlike the open and transparent debates on the new Strategic Concept, NATO keeps the DDPR deliberations strictly internal – led by the North Atlantic Council and in practice run by a so-called Inter-Staff Group. Support comes from other NATO bodies like the Nuclear Planning Group with regard to nuclear issues, the Defense Policy and Planning Committee on conventional forces, and the Weapons of Mass Destruction and Disarmament Committee for arms control questions. In a first step up to September 2011 (Exploratory Phase), NATO broadly discussed the questions of risks, deterrence requirements and capabilities – supported by four scoping papers on the various sub-topics. The intended output of the second step (the Drafting and Negotiating Phase) is a document to be approved by the Heads of States and Government in Chicago.

The outcome of the DDPR is currently unpredictable. It is definitely positive that NATO has transferred the topic from the restricted debate on the pros and cons of US nuclear bombs in Europe (sub-strategic nuclear weapons) to the broader deterrence agenda. At the same time, the interrelation of conventional and nuclear weapons with missile defense capabilities and arms control measures arguably seems one of the most complex issues to analyze and to find consensus on. The more thoroughly it is debated, the more new implications come up - as one NATO representative involved in the process put it: “We created a Frankenstein”. This holds all the more true since the positions of the various NATO members on the need for nuclear deterrence are still, for historical or geographical reasons, highly disputed.

Moreover, Washington is the key NATO nuclear player but has not yet expressed a clear view, except for some general and uncontroversial statements like the need for a safe, secure and effective nuclear weapons capability or the commonly shared view that the nuclear-related wording found in Lisbon’s Strategic Concept should not be brought into discussion again. Given that the United States will be focusing on the presidential elections from early next year, it is unlikely that the Obama administration will express any fundamentally new ideas. Apparently, not much has remained from the ambitious ideas of a nuclear free world presented by the US president 2009 in Prague.

There are currently four major dividing lines within the Alliance (which can be further subdivided where particular disputes are concerned):

- a fundamental difference between two camps – those who want to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons and those strictly opposing such a step. The core of the latter group consists of the three nuclear NATO states and the new Alliance members from Eastern Europe, whereas the former camp includes Germany, Norway, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands;
- an almost philosophical argument between France and Germany, the traditional positions being that Paris emphasizes its strict nuclear independence and Berlin calls for far-reaching arms control and disarmament measures;
- a split opposing France to the other 27 NATO members in the question of NATO’s declaratory nuclear policy. France opposes the idea of the so-called “Negative

<sup>6</sup> Instead, such a statement is reminiscent of the efforts of the European Union to establish a European Security and Defense Policy: in 2003 the EU declared the operational capability of its 60,000-strong rapid reaction force (Headline Goal) – deployable within 60 days, and sustainable for one year in a war theater far from Europe. These capabilities were actually non-existent – it was a Potemkin village.



Security Assurances”, where nuclear powers give assurance they will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states;

- a distinction between the desirable and the feasible with regard to changing the relationship between nuclear weapons, conventional forces and missile defense within NATO’s deterrence triangle: reductions to one side of the triangle would require improvements on the others to keep deterrence intact. Thus, downgrading the nuclear component would require costly measures to strengthen NATO’s conventional forces or to further improve its missile defense component. This, however, would clash with the current budget constraints in all NATO member states, which would hardly permit any significant improvements at all.

Due to these almost irreconcilable positions in the Alliance, there are currently two potential outcomes of the DDPR. One is to have a document as a lowest common denominator, repeating the established nuclear communiqué language in acknowledging nuclear deterrence as a linchpin of transatlantic security but not solving the core issues of capabilities and concepts. The other option would be to publish only preliminary results of the debates at the Chicago summit and regard DDPR as an ongoing process which might require far more time before all allies will agree to a coherent deterrence posture.

But even if the outcome of the Chicago summit is disappointing to those expecting clear answers to NATO’s nuclear question (how to deter whom with what), the DDPR has a value in itself for two reasons. First, instead of papering matters over, it is significant that NATO dares to discuss the thorny issue of nuclear deterrence at all – something the Alliance had carefully avoided ever since the end of the Cold War. And second, a rather unspecific wording of the DDPR would strengthen the United States’ position in future nuclear arms control talks with Russia. If Washington and Moscow start negotiating about sub-strategic nuclear weapons, the US government might need to have maximum flexibility with regard to numbers or deployments and does not want to be limited by the strict parameters of a NATO defense review.

## NATO AND THE “ARAB SPRING”

The most obvious “new” – in the sense of post-Lisbon – item on the agenda for NATO’s Heads of State and Government stems from the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, the so-called MENA region, which started towards the end of 2010. Neither NATO nor “the West” had a role in triggering the uprisings, nor are Western political models seen as the solution by those opposed to the old order. Still, NATO has been an actor in the region for many years, cooperating with a range of countries through its Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) partnership programs. The level of trust generated by these partnership activities, particularly among the military, helped NATO to find regional support when it came to military action against the Gaddafi regime.

The air campaign in Libya marked the culmination of NATO’s engagement in the region.<sup>7</sup> NATO acted on the basis of a clear mandate of the United Nations Security Council and with the support of countries in the region. Fourteen NATO members provided military support, and eight were involved in the combat missions. The operation was a success in two respects: NATO demonstrated its capacity both to decide and to act quickly and efficiently. Moreover, the Alliance proved its ability to end a military engagement when the reason for military action has disappeared.

For the Chicago summit the Alliance plans a major declaration on the political developments in MENA, the spread of freedom and the readiness of NATO to assist whenever asked for. This seems appropriate given NATO’s involvement and its interest in an evolution of the region towards freedom and self-determination of the people. The trouble is that NATO needs to be very careful with regard to ill-judged statements on freedom and democracy. Many of NATO’s partners in MENA (even those who provided support in the Libya operation) are not democracies but monarchies – some of them authoritarian in nature and hardly likely to perceive terms like “freedom” or “democracy” very positively. From this perspective, any summit statement has to be formulated very sensitively so as not to become counterproductive. Terms like “self determination” or “added value” that can be brought by NATO (if desired) might be more appropriate.

In the post-Chicago perspective, it is evident that NATO’s MD and ICI partnership programs need to be fundamentally reformed so as to adapt to new political realities. However,

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<sup>7</sup> NATO’s military action followed the three “Leslie criteria” – named after the British NATO Ambassador Mariot Leslie: an obvious case to be made, a clear mandate by the United Nations, and support from the region. These criteria illustrate the difference by comparison with the situation in Syria, where the UN Security Council cannot agree on a mandate for military action against the Assad regime.



given the still unpredictable outcome of the Arab Spring, it seems too early to define the parameters of such a reform.

## SMART DEFENSE

The second new topic not related to the Lisbon agenda is "Smart Defense". The mismatch between NATO's tasks and ambitions and the funding provided by its members is almost as old as the Alliance itself. The same holds true for US complaints about inadequate financial contributions of the European allies to common security and defense. As a result, throughout NATO's more than six decades of existence, there have been numerous plans and initiatives to cope with its budgetary problems and to ensure sufficient military capabilities – most of them achieving only limited success.

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen launched a new attempt, called "Smart Defense", which focuses strongly on allies coordinating their assets better and avoiding redundancies – in short, "pooling and sharing" of military goods and support elements. This can be achieved by common use of already existing capabilities or through the acquisition of new assets in a shared and cooperative manner. In addition to pooling and sharing, his concept contains two other elements: the need to identify a common set of security priorities, and the requirement of establishing strong synergy between NATO and other institutions like the European Union.

Critics object that "pooling and sharing" is not a new idea but a bumper sticker slogan. The request to spend scarce resources, particularly those of the European NATO allies, more wisely by avoiding overlapping of programs and capabilities has been raised time and again. It is even codified in key NATO political guidance documents. However, the fact that a concept is not new does not render it irrelevant. Moreover, Secretary General Rasmussen's Smart Defense concept differs in two important aspects from its predecessors. First, it has been launched in an almost unique political environment with an international financial crisis putting more pressure on national budgets than ever before. For the first time, even the "big spenders" in NATO, like the United States, France or the United Kingdom, have to significantly reduce their defense expenditures. Second, the Secretary General sought to place considerable emphasis on his Smart Defense idea by naming two (one civilian one military) special envoys for this issue – Deputy Secretary General Bisognero and the Commander Allied Command Transformation, General Abrial. Their task will be

to raise general awareness in member state capitals and thereby to generate political pressure for NATO's member governments.

However, despite these propitious circumstances, Smart Defense faces one crucial political problem: a high level of trust is required among those who pool and share the assured access to the commonly used assets. Allies must be sure that the sharing partners will deliver their part of the military capabilities in case of need. If there are doubts regarding the political will of governments to contribute in time or their ability to execute decisions on military action (for instance, because parliamentary regulations might block political action), pooling and sharing will fail. This has been illustrated by the Libya operation, where some NATO allies not only refused to take part but withdrew their military forces from common operations and even took out their personnel from commonly owned NATO assets like the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), thus dealing a heavy blow to trust in their reliability.<sup>8</sup>

Under these conditions, pooling and sharing will either not work at all or will only be possible between those few nations willing and able to do so. For instance, France and the UK agreed in November 2010 to cooperate intensively in the field of security and defense. Pooling and sharing among the willing and able certainly has a value in itself, but it will not be a cure-all for NATO's severe budgetary problems. Significant gaps between NATO's high ambitions and the low contributions made by many European NATO allies urgently need to be addressed.

## TRANSATLANTIC BURDEN SHARING

The mismatch between NATO's tasks and the financial contributions, particularly of most European NATO members, highlights a topic which is not officially on the Chicago agenda, but will certainly influence the debates before and at the summit – the question of transatlantic burden sharing.

Even if the transatlantic relationship seems uncontested in its basics, it faces a host of challenges to its implementation in today's security environment. US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates mentioned some of these in the speech referred to earlier: insufficient military capabilities on the European side of the Atlantic, no fair sharing of the burdens entailed in common security, and a lack of political will among many NATO partners to contribute to common

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that in June 2011 Canada announced its intention to terminate its participation in the NATO AWACS program. Although the Canadian government did not explicitly link this decision to disappointment regarding how some European allies had acted in the Libyan crisis, some commentators argue that this was the case.



operations. Some European voices might add that there are also doubts over Washington's future willingness to lead, and about whether "leadership from behind" as exercised in the case of Libya is an appropriate model. Even NATO's success in Libya cannot paper over the existing cracks within the Alliance's transatlantic fabric with respect to common goals and common commitments.

Thus, in addition to classic burden-sharing questions concerning how to bring capability requirements in line with scarce resources, three major issues need to be addressed after the satisfaction regarding the Libya operation has subsided:

- Is it NATO's task to engage in civil wars outside the Alliance, and who determines what missions NATO is going to execute? Libya was pushed forward by a very small number of NATO states. Moreover, the above-mentioned three "Leslie criteria" (a clear case, a clear mandate, regional support) might justify NATO's unwillingness to use military force against Syria (because a UN mandate will not be obtained). They do not fully explain to the public, though, why NATO remains inactive vis-à-vis the atrocities in Sudan or Somalia.

- How will the Libyan crisis, which was characterized by the strong NATO engagement of France and by the underperformance of other key NATO allies, change the internal geometry of the Alliance? Which members will in future be in the driver's seat in NATO, and how will the voice of the others be heard?

- Will "leading from behind" become a lasting pattern in US policy vis-à-vis NATO, or was it the short-term reaction of an administration subjected to heavy domestic pressure by isolationist tendencies in the Republican – but also in the Democrat – camp?

The Chicago summit will not be "just" an implementation summit, as it was expected to be. New trends on the international political agenda and a number of tough residual issues from Lisbon will make it a summit in its own right. However, despite the full summit agenda, NATO might find it difficult to deliver results as the member states' positions on many of the agenda items seem too diverse. Hence, NATO would be well advised to carry out some expectation management with regard to the outcome of the meeting. Many of the items sure to be on the agenda might require more time to be solved. They have their value for the evolution of the Alliance, even if they will not result in presentable agreements in Chicago. Not every NATO summit can bring a host of shiny "deliverables".