

NATO's 2012 Chicago summit: a chance to ignore the issues once again?

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The NATO organization and its members are beginning to gear themselves up for the forthcoming summit in Chicago in May 2012.¹ Such summits are always important, especially when they are held in the United States.² For example, the 1999 Washington summit held to mark the alliance's 50th anniversary occurred against the background of an apparently failing war in Kosovo and a US President fearing impeachment as a result of the Monica Lewinsky scandal.³ Moreover, this summit is happening in a US presidential election year and in a location particularly symbolic for the current incumbent President Obama. It will also follow on from the French presidential elections, thus presenting the first opportunity for either the new French president or a re-elected Nicolas Sarkozy to make a mark on the international scene.⁴

However, the summit is about more than the relative standing of the US and French presidents. The 28 members of NATO have much to disagree over, with four issues standing out. First, the alliance's involvement in wars from Libya to Afghanistan and in potential wars from Syria to Somalia has elicited varying degrees of commitment from its members and differences of view over NATO's geographical focus. To put the question crudely, is it an alliance that focuses purely on the European continent or one that focuses on the wider security challenges to its members which are potentially global? Second, there remains the question of NATO's continuing relationship with Russia and the associated thorny question of the further enlargement of the alliance's membership to include more states of the former Soviet Union. In addition, in the context of NATO's relations with Russia there are the issues of ballistic missile defence and the withdrawal of NATO combat forces from Afghanistan, at least partially, via Central Asia

* The analysis, opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence or any other government agency.

¹ 'NATO and NATO Parliamentary Assembly focus on Chicago summit priorities', NATO online, 13 Feb. 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_84332.htm, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

² David H. Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the highest level: the evolution of international summitry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

³ See Sidney Blumenthal, *The Clinton wars* (New York: Penguin, 2003); Tony Blair, *A journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010), pp. 223–54; Andrew Dorman, 'Kosovo', in Andrew Dorman and Greg Kennedy, eds, *War and diplomacy: from World War 1 to the war on terrorism* (Washington DC: Potomac, 2008).

⁴ Brinton Rowdybush and Patrick Chamorel, 'Aspirations and reality: French foreign policy and the 2012 elections', *Washington Quarterly* 35: 1, 2012, pp. 163–77.

to contend with. Third, as a result of defence reductions and the debates about NATO's future, the question of burden-sharing has re-emerged onto the NATO agenda.⁵ What is the appropriate contribution for the individual members and to what extent can the US be expected to continue to subsidize this? Finally, and perhaps most fundamental of all, the question of NATO's future role(s) remains a matter of dispute among its members. Is NATO still fundamentally about collective defence and the Article 5 mission?⁶ And if so, what constitutes an armed attack, given the cyber-environment? These disagreements raise questions about how NATO should relate to other international organizations, most notably the European Union, how it should be configured and the level of commitment of its members.⁷

With so many potential areas for disagreement, it is easy to predict a troublesome summit in which there is little agreement, resulting in a bland communiqué attempting to paper over the cracks within the organization. There then follows an outpouring from commentators and academics predicting NATO's demise or articulating solutions to NATO's travails. Yet, if history tells us one thing, it is that forecasting the demise of NATO has been a popular yet unsuccessful pastime for academics, journalists and politicians for more than two decades.⁸ As an organization it has survived the demise of the adversary it was designed to deter (the Soviet Union), its engagement in wars (e.g. in Kosovo), enlargement to the east to incorporate countries including the Baltic states formerly part of the Soviet Union, the growth of the EU into a potentially competitor security organization and agreement that the 9/11 attacks on the United States constituted an Article 5 mission. For its members the political significance of the Chicago location and the issues that surround the summit make failure an option that few dare to contemplate. What these commentators need also to remember is that the continuation of NATO, even without apparently managing to resolve issues such as burden-sharing, is itself a success.

So what are the issues that are likely to be most prominent at the Chicago summit? Will they lead to division and the ending of the alliance or will they be finessed? This article aims to address these two questions by considering the various issues in turn under four headings—NATO's wars; NATO membership and Russia; burden-sharing; and divergent agendas—before drawing some general conclusions.

⁵ For previous examples see Malcolm Chalmers, 'The Atlantic burden-sharing debate—widening or fragmenting?', *International Affairs* 77: 3, 2001, p. 573.

⁶ Philip Hammond, 'NATO: the most successful tool for collective defence ever invented', *Desider*, no. 45, Feb. 2012, pp. 24–5.

⁷ See also Jolyon Howorth, *Security and defence policy in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); David S. Yost, 'NATO's evolving purposes and the next strategic concept', *International Affairs* 86: 2, March 2010, pp. 489–522; Anand Menon, 'Empowering paradise? ESDP at ten', *International Affairs* 85: 2, March 2009, pp. 227–46; Timo Noetzel and Benjamin Schreier, 'Does a multi-tier NATO matter? The Atlantic alliance and the process of strategic change', *International Affairs* 85: 2, March 2009, pp. 211–26.

⁸ See e.g. John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* 15: 4, Summer 1990, pp. 5–56; Richard K. Betts, 'NATO's mid-life crisis', *Foreign Affairs* 68: 2, Spring 1989, pp. 37–52; Andrew J. Pierre, 'Can Europe's security be "decoupled" from America?', *Foreign Affairs* 51: 4, July 1973, pp. 761–77; Lawrence Freedman, 'The Atlantic crisis', *International Affairs* 58: 3, Summer 1982, pp. 395–412; Stanley Kober, 'Can NATO survive?', *International Affairs* 59: 3, Summer 1983, pp. 339–49.

NATO's wars

NATO's wars can be sub-divided into two kinds—those in which it is currently engaged and those in which it might find itself becoming involved. In terms of the former, the shadow of Afghanistan looms large.⁹ The continuing commitment of NATO's various members to the alliance's operation here has always been a source of contention, dating back to the decision of the Bush administration to ignore the declaration on 12 September 2001 that an Article 5 attack had taken place.¹⁰ Disagreements over what the alliance was collectively trying to achieve have led to big differences in levels of engagement in the operation. This is most visible in the relative size of individual troop contributions, but perhaps most stark in the restrictions placed by individual nations on how their forces will be used.¹¹ This has meant that a small number of NATO nations have borne the financial and human cost of the operation;¹² and the disparity is becoming more pronounced as NATO begins the handover of responsibility to the Afghan national government and starts the withdrawal of its combat forces. At its most recent defence ministers meeting in February 2012, differences of view over the alliance's exit strategy emerged, with the various NATO members—all of which had previously agreed 2014 as the target date—announcing different times for the withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan.¹³

The challenge before the alliance is how it manages its exit strategy, and the Chicago summit will continue this process. The problems for NATO in developing this evolving strategy are threefold. First, as NATO hands over responsibility for individual districts to the Afghan authorities, starting in the north and west of the country, the question emerges whether NATO forces from those districts will be redeployed to the south and east where progress is still to be made. For the military commanders this option might have some appeal—but these forces tend to be from those nations that have imposed the greatest limitations on how they may be used through the process of national caveats.¹⁴ Moreover, for those contributing countries the redeployment of their forces to the more dangerous parts of Afghanistan is not very appealing and is difficult to justify to their domestic constituencies. If such forces are not used, then the already skewed burden of the Afghan mission will simply bear even more heavily on those nations that have already paid the highest price in terms of casualties, further highlighting

⁹ See Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: ten years of intervention* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ 'Statement by the North Atlantic Council', press release (2001) 124, 12 Sept. 2001, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_18553.htm?mode=pressrelease, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

¹¹ For the current composition of ISAF, see <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012; Stephen M. Saideman and David P. Auerswald, 'Comparing caveats: understanding the sources of national restrictions upon NATO's mission in Afghanistan', *International Studies Quarterly* (early view online), 6 Dec. 2011, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2478.2011.00700.x.

¹² See <http://icasualties.org/oef/>, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

¹³ Elisabeth Bumiller, 'U.S. to end combat role in Afghanistan as early as next year, Panetta says', *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/02/world/asia/panetta-moves-up-end-to-us-combat-role-in-afghanistan.html>, accessed 14 Feb. 2012; 'NATO reaffirms commitment to 2014 Lisbon goal in Afghanistan', NATO online, 3 Feb. 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_84105.htm, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

¹⁴ Stephen M. Saideman and David P. Auerswald, 'Comparing caveats: understanding the sources of national restrictions upon NATO's mission in Afghanistan', *International Studies Quarterly* (early view online), 6 Dec. 2011.

the disparities in risks borne. The answer currently appears to be that those nations contributing troops to the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan (principally France, the US and, to a lesser extent, the UK) are seeking to bring forward the handover timetable in these areas to more closely match that of their partners in the north and west of the country irrespective of conditions on the ground. Thus the whole withdrawal timetable is in a state of flux, with individual nations revising their pull-out timescales without necessarily relating their schedules to one another. In practice, all have amended their individual planning assumptions to bring the date for relinquishing the combat role forward from 2014 to 2013 and in some cases 2012.¹⁵

There is also a question-mark over how Afghanistan will be left after NATO to all intents and purposes departs. In order to preserve NATO's credibility on the international stage it needs to be able to claim some form of victory. However, all such wars inevitably end in some form of political accommodation, and it is no surprise that there is a move to bring the Taliban into the negotiating process.¹⁶ The problem will be the potential price to be paid to achieve Taliban compliance. Moreover, as the next point emphasizes, the acquiescence of the Taliban in all this is vital, and they have a choice. Should the Taliban continue to engage in conflict there is a question-mark over what NATO will do.

Third, the individual contributing nations will need to oversee the withdrawal of their combat forces, and no doubt also some of their support forces, in a relatively short space of time. The logistical task is truly herculean, and withdrawing the majority of equipment by air is simply not an option. The task is, therefore, dependent on NATO forces either being able to use Pakistani port facilities safely and/or successfully negotiating with the relevant Central Asian republics (and potentially also Russia) to use their railway networks. Significant risk is attached to both of these options, while the convoys of equipment driving through Afghanistan to their points of embarkation will no doubt prove tempting targets for the Taliban and thus another reason for bringing them into the political process. The option of simply abandoning much equipment by either destroying it in theatre or handing it over to the Afghan security forces is flawed in two respects. First, the sheer scale of equipment held by the NATO nations in Afghanistan, together with the sensitivity attaching to some of it, prevent it all being handed over. Second, there is a fear that equipment handed over will simply be passed on to the Taliban. The image of NATO withdrawal might then become that of Taliban fighters driving around in NATO vehicles, which would severely undermine any narrative about NATO success. In other words, there is the very real danger that we might see a twenty-first-century version of the US evacuation from Saigon, with equipment abandoned as the troops are withdrawn. Such a scenario would severely undermine NATO credibility for some time to come, if not permanently.

¹⁵ Adrian Croft, 'Cameron says Afghan withdrawal must be carefully phased', Reuters, 28 Jan. 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/01/28/uk-afghanistan-britain-idUKTRE8oR0oP20120128?feedType=RSS&feedName=domesticNews>, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

¹⁶ 'NATO and Libya: Operation Unified Protector', http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_71652.htm, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

At the Chicago Summit the key tasks will be to provide an appropriate narrative to sustain the NATO withdrawal based on handing over responsibility to the Afghan government while obtaining Taliban acquiescence to the NATO withdrawal along lines of the British deal to evacuate from Basra. Balancing the dynamics of resolving the conflict, at least in the short term, and maintaining NATO's credibility will be the subject of much discussion at Chicago. Unless the situation throughout Afghanistan becomes more benign from 2013 onwards, NATO may well find itself having to retain significant combat power in Afghanistan simply to protect the logisticians continuing to manage the NATO drawdown.

NATO's war in Libya is dissimilar and at a different stage, with the majority of the alliance's forces committed to the mission having now been withdrawn. Although all of its members acquiesced in NATO's involvement, the war in Libya revealed deep divisions within the alliance with some members, most notably Germany, refusing to take part.¹⁷ In the short term this tension can probably be glossed over, as long as the situation in Libya does not deteriorate and the country is subject to a degree of democratic control. If so, this summit can focus on NATO's support for the emerging government in Libya and accentuate the positives.

However, as the fourth part of this article argues, the Libya episode has called into question the role of NATO and exposed the deep divisions within the alliance, and these are problems for the longer term. Libya has also set a precedent for the use of NATO that could be extended into some of the other areas in which NATO currently finds itself. For example, it is currently assisting the African Union's operation in Somalia (AMISOM) by providing airlift for AMISOM forces deploying to and from Somalia as well as giving specialist advice to the African Union's Strategic Planning and Management Unit and running a counterpiracy operation off the Somali coast.¹⁸ At the same time, some of its members have provided additional military support to AMISOM and to the Somali government.¹⁹ As the AMISOM mission develops, it might make further calls for NATO support, especially if it were to sustain a significant setback, and in this event it will be interesting to see how NATO responds. Perhaps more significantly, there have also been calls from the Arab League for intervention in Syria, with a number of parties looking to NATO to take a lead should the UN Security Council ever reach agreement.²⁰ Such an operation would be far larger and more complex than that conducted over Libya, even if it was initially limited to the provision of a no-fly zone. It would again raise the question of who NATO is fighting for and how it should use its military capabilities. Even without a UN

¹⁷ Stephen Erlanger and Judy Dempsey, 'Germany steps away from European unity', *New York Times* online, 23 March 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/world/europe/24germany.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

¹⁸ NATO, 'Assisting the African Union in Somalia', http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50099.htm?selectedLocale=en, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

¹⁹ Sarah McGregor and Tony Capaccio, 'US Special Forces free hostages in Somalia in pre-dawn raid', *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 26 Jan. 2012, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-01-26/u-s-special-forces-free-hostages-in-somalia-in-pre-dawn-raid.html>, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

²⁰ Richard Spencer, 'Russia and China veto UN resolution on Syria', *Daily Telegraph* online, 4 Feb. 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9061622/Russia-and-China-veto-UN-resolution-on-Syria.html>, accessed 18 Feb. 2012.

Security Council Resolution, NATO might find itself involved if the conflict were to spread across the Syrian border into Turkey. Any incursion of Syrian security forces into Turkey could be deemed to be an Article 5 attack, and NATO members would find themselves deciding whether they wished to be involved. It should not be forgotten that in the period leading up to the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 the Turkish government requested that NATO deploy Patriot air defence missiles to counter threatened Iraqi reprisals—a request that was blocked by several NATO members, notably France and Germany.

Beyond Syria, the Iranian ‘civil’ nuclear programme remains of concern. The threat of trade sanctions by the EU has already led to an Iranian counterembargo and threats to close the Persian Gulf.²¹ A US carrier battle group with accompanying British and French warships has passed through the straits to emphasize that they remain international waterways.²² How NATO would respond should the Iranians choose to attack a NATO member’s warship remains to be seen.

The Chicago summit will, therefore, have as a backdrop the potential escalation of NATO commitments in Africa and possibly also Syria and Iran while its membership remains divided over its current operations in Libya and Afghanistan. For some, notably the US, France and the UK, such operations are a core part of what NATO has become—a military alliance with worldwide responsibilities; for others, such an escalation is likely to prove deeply unpopular, and while they may tacitly approve these operations in order to placate the United States they are unlikely to deploy their own armed forces. Thus one of the core elements that has underpinned the alliance since its inception—shared risk—looks likely to be further undermined, with long-term implications for the alliance’s future.

NATO membership and Russia

Events in Libya, Syria and Iran have all highlighted the importance of Russia. The issue of NATO’s relations with Russia and its predecessor the Soviet Union has dominated NATO thinking since its creation in 1949.²³ The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and Soviet Union have allowed that relationship to progress to the extent that there is now a permanent Russian presence at NATO’s headquarters in Brussels. That said, the evolution of this relationship has not been a smooth one. It has been noticeable that the change in approach of the Obama administration compared to its predecessor has facilitated a thawing of a relationship; nevertheless, there remain the longer-term issues of NATO eastward enlargement, the potential deployment of a ballistic missile defence system and the presence of NATO forces in the Central Asian republics to be resolved.²⁴ Further causes for Russian concern have been the NATO involve-

²¹ ‘Iran cuts oil to six EU countries’, *Daily Telegraph* online, 15 Feb. 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9084030/Iran-cuts-oil-to-six-EU-countries.html>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

²² David Blair, ‘Britain, US and France send warships through Strait of Hormuz’, *Daily Telegraph* online, 23 Jan. 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/9031392/Britain-US-and-France-send-warships-through-Strait-of-Hormuz.html>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

²³ See William H. Park, *Defending the West: a history of NATO* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986).

²⁴ ‘Russia “to work with NATO on missile defence shield”’, BBC online, 20 Nov. 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

ment in Libya and the extent to which it exceeded the UN Security Council resolution, Russia's support for the Syrian regime, and the West's confrontation with Iran over its 'civil' nuclear programme.

For NATO, the relative priority given to these different elements will shape its future relations with Russia over at least the next few years. The main problem confronting NATO in this area is that its membership is divided over these issues. For example, the priority for the UK will be obtaining Russian support in the drawdown of its forces committed to Afghanistan, possibly involving use of the railway lines of the Central Asian republics and Russia.²⁵ The British government is also keen to obtain Russian assistance in tackling Iran. For the UK, the issue of a NATO anti-ballistic missile capability is far less important. By way of contrast, a number of the NATO members whose borders are far closer to Russia see the development of an anti-ballistic missile capability as evidence of US commitment to their defence. For the Obama administration, the situation has the added complexity of a domestic dimension. It is almost inevitable that any Republican opponent for the presidency will use the issue of ballistic missile defence as part of a narrative that says Obama has not been committed to providing for the defence of America.²⁶ Thus Obama will want to be seen to make some progress here, while at the same time seeking Russian support for the NATO pull-out from Afghanistan.

Furthermore, there continues to be a number of potentially aspirant members, including Ukraine and Georgia, whose admission would represent a hugely significant change in NATO's membership from a Russian point of view. Perhaps fortunately, the question of the continuing enlargement of NATO is on the back burner, and the question of Ukrainian and Georgian accession is likely to be left unanswered.²⁷ Neither country is likely to be given further encouragement in the near future, and although neither is likely to be blocked in the longer term, far more low-key measures will be pursued. And neither country is likely to object too strongly to this approach.

The Chicago summit will spend some time wrestling with these issues, and the final communiqué will need to be crafted in such a way that it allows President Obama and others to claim that progress has been made on these competing agendas but ideally not to the extent that they cause any further friction in the NATO–Russia relationship. Thus, one of the key measures of success is how little substantive progress is made.

news/world-europe-11803931, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

²⁵ William Leake and Will Stewart, 'The "new Dunkirk": British forces to use tsars' railway to travel 3,500 miles home by train from Afghanistan', *Daily Mail* online, 27 Nov. 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2066718/The-new-Dunkirk--British-forces-use-Tsars-railway-travel-3-500-miles-home-train-Afghanistan.html#ixzz1mZbpfW66>, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

²⁶ 'Obama shelves Europe missile plan', BBC online, 17 Sept. 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8260230.stm>, accessed 16 Feb. 2012.

²⁷ See Deborah Sanders, 'Transatlantic relations: a view from Ukraine', and Tracey German, 'Georgia and the transatlantic relationship: new kid on the block', both in Andrew M. Dorman and Joyce P. Kaufman, eds, *The future of transatlantic relations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); see also Ted Galen Carpenter and Barbara Conry, eds, *NATO enlargement: illusions and reality* (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 1998).

Burden-sharing

The issue of burden-sharing has again re-emerged within the alliance.²⁸ Its cyclical highs and lows frequently mirror the economic cycle, resulting in a plethora of academic articles urging that the Europeans need to take on some of the US burden.²⁹ This is further complicated by the issue of the survivability of the euro which for Europe, and probably the United States as well, has become the number one priority. The decision by the Moody's credit rating agency to downgrade the credit rating of nine of the euro zone members, together with the continuing arguments within the EU over the Greek debt, highlights the seriousness with which the future of the euro is viewed.³⁰ As a result, across Europe nations are engaged in making significant defence cuts as part of austerity packages aimed at tackling their public finances and spiralling debt levels. For example, in its 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review the United Kingdom announced a real-terms cut of some 7.5 per cent in defence spending in the near term.³¹ At the same time, Spain's new conservative government approved a series of spending cuts totalling €8.9 billion including €340 million in defence.³² These are neither isolated reductions nor are they solely the prerogative of NATO's European members. The failure of the US Congress to find \$1.2 trillion worth of government-wide savings by a pre-Christmas 2011 deadline has triggered a reduction in defence spending of some \$500 billion over the next decade, and many analysts feel that more will inevitably follow given the scale of the US national debt.³³

Such cuts in defence spending are already having an impact on the armed forces of NATO's members. For example, the US Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta, has already announced that the US army is to withdraw two brigade combat teams from Europe and the question of whether the US will continue to retain a military presence in Europe has begun to re-emerge.³⁴ The scale of the cuts is significant. For example, the UK's defence review has led to the withdrawal from service of a range of equipment including the Harrier force, its four Type 22 frigates and two aircraft-carriers. Moreover, the cuts are not just to equipment. In January

²⁸ See e.g. Miriam Camps, 'Sources of strain in transatlantic relations', *Foreign Policy* 47: 4, Oct. 1972, pp. 559–78; C. Gordon Bare, 'Burden-sharing in NATO: the economics of alliance', *Orbis* 20: 2, Summer 1976, pp. 417–36.

²⁹ Scott Stearns, 'Clinton backs Gates on NATO burden-sharing', *Voice of America*, 11 June 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/Clinton-Backs-Gates-on-NATO-Burden-Sharing-123686254.html>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

³⁰ Larry Elliott and Phillip Inman, 'Eurozone in new crisis as ratings agency downgrades nine countries', *Guardian* online, 14 Jan. 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/jan/13/eurozone-crisis-france-credit-rating-aaa>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012; 'Greek bailout crisis: Brussels welcomes austerity vote', *BBC* online, 13 Feb. 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17012604>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

³¹ Cabinet Office, 'Securing Britain in an age of austerity: the Strategic Defence and Security Review', Cm. 7948 (London: TSO, 2010), http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf, accessed 17 Feb. 2012; see also Andrew M. Dorman, 'Making 2 + 2 = 5: the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review', *Defense and Security Analysis* 27: 1, March 2011, pp. 77–87; Paul Cornish and Andrew M. Dorman, 'Dr Fox and the philosopher's stone: the alchemy of national defence in the age of austerity', *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, pp. 335–53.

³² David Ing, 'Spanish defence spending suffers further cuts', *Jane's Defence Weekly* 49: 2, 11 Jan. 2012, p. 12.

³³ Benjamin Friedman, 'How cutting Pentagon spending will fix U.S. defense strategy', *Foreign Affairs* online, 2 Nov. 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/133923>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

³⁴ Jim Garamone, 'Army to replace 2 brigades in Europe with rotating units', *American Forces Press Service*, 12 Jan. 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=66780>, accessed 17 Jan. 2012.

the UK announced the second tranche of redundancies to its armed forces as part of the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review.³⁵ Once the final wave of planned reductions has occurred, the British army will have fallen to a size not seen since 1838, while the civilian workforce will have been cut by 35 per cent.³⁶ Similar cutbacks are expected to occur in other nations, with the US Army and US Marine Corps earmarked to lose 80,000 and 20,000 personnel respectively.³⁷

Chicago is therefore likely to see a more vociferous debate about burden-sharing, particularly if Obama's Republican opponent attempts to use it as a means to attack the President. However, as the ongoing defence reductions are showing, none of the NATO members has any real appetite for picking up a greater share of the defence burden and for some, such as Greece, it is those same allies who are forcing it via the EU or the International Monetary Fund to make large cuts in public expenditure. At best Chicago is likely to see NATO agree to a smaller new minimum spending target which, like its predecessors, will undoubtedly be ignored. Moreover, burden-sharing is unlikely to be an alliance breaker because it is an effect of other factors rather than a cause in itself.

Divergent agendas

As indicated in the introduction to this article, the basic problem is that at NATO's heart is a disagreement among its membership over the role of the alliance. In simple terms, is it still an alliance based on collective responsibility and the Article 5 guarantee—still aimed, in the view of some, at countering a revanchist Russia—or is it something else, something with a global rather than a purely regional perspective?³⁸ This debate is not new; however, President Obama's decision to use his first public appearance at the Pentagon to announce a new strategic framework for the US in which the country's military would shift its focus to the Asia-Pacific region has raised the issue's prominence within NATO.³⁹ The difference this time is that the economic situation has, in effect, become the members' principal opponent and NATO as an organization is ill-equipped to deal with this threat. Factors outside its control, such as the survival of the euro, will have a profound impact on the future outlook of its members. This raises the question of NATO's ongoing relations with other international organizations, notably the United Nations and EU, and to an increasing degree the Arab League and the International Monetary Fund.

Even if the members could agree that NATO was solely about the Article 5 guarantee there are still a number of issues. First, is there any geographical

³⁵ Ministry of Defence, 'Second tranche of armed forces redundancies announced', 17 Jan. 2012, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/SecondTrancheOfArmedForcesRedundanciesAnnounced.htm>, accessed 18 Jan. 2012.

³⁶ Deborah Haynes and Tom Coghlan, 'Army in retreat: smallest force since 1838', *The Times*, 14 Jan. 2012, p. 12.

³⁷ 'Top army general backs plan to cut 80,000 troops', Reuters, 27 Jan. 2012, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45673582/ns/politics/t/top-army-general-backs-plan-cut-troops/>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

³⁸ See e.g. Joseph Lepgold, 'NATO's post-Cold War collective action problem', *International Security* 23: 1, Summer 1998, pp. 78–106.

³⁹ Daniel Wesserly, 'Obama looks to leaner military, As-Pac focus', *Jane's Defence Weekly* 49: 2, 11 Jan. 2012, pp. 4–5.

limitation to Article 5's applicability—does it apply to a member's forces deployed outside the Euro-Atlantic area? Second, the 2008 cyber attack on Estonia has raised a question-mark on whether Article 5 has to involve a loss of life. Is, for example, the destruction of a nation's banking sector an act of war? The cyber environment poses new challenges with the further complication of proving who conducted such attacks. What is sufficient evidence?

The combination of fiscal austerity and such divergent agendas poses severe problems for NATO's force structures. This is part of the reasoning behind the new Smart or Smarter Defence initiative aimed at getting the NATO members to meet their defence targets and offset austerity by increasingly moving towards role specialization and risk-sharing.⁴⁰ However, reductions to a nation's defence forces can discourage individual nations from allowing NATO defence reform if it results in the loss of a NATO headquarters in their own country. This was clearly evident in the attempted reform of NATO's air command, with the retention of seven Combined Air Operations Centres—five among NATO's southern members compared to only two among its northern members.⁴¹ Cuts may also encourage the alliance to focus on preserving its existing capabilities rather than developing new capabilities such as cyber-warfare as defence reductions inevitably lead to short-term thinking.

In view of this, a move towards greater cooperation and capability sharing sounds entirely sensible, and the more localized cooperation represented by the Nordic and Anglo-French initiatives might work. However, to be successful such arrangements require a far greater degree of cooperation than has hitherto been practised. There is a very real danger that as individual nations make cuts to their armed forces they will increasingly assume that some capabilities will be provided by others without necessarily communicating this assumption. Such a policy of risk-sharing can only really work if there is some degree of central management of the attendant risks to ensure that capability gaps do not appear across the alliance. For example, the decision of the UK to relinquish its maritime patrol aircraft capability would be reasonable so long as other NATO members are able to cover this gap. However, if all decided to relinquish this capability then NATO would have a problem. Similarly, the Dutch decision to cut its main battle tank force is reasonable if someone else will provide such a capability. To date there is little evidence that such cooperation has been practised to the necessary degree.

Linked to the specialization argument is the issue of the nuclear dimension of NATO. For most of the post-Cold War period the nuclear dimension has remained relatively dormant, with little attention given to NATO's nuclear policies. NATO has always been a nuclear alliance, and while the US has provided the major share of the nuclear capability there have been three other elements. First, a nuclear capability has been formally provided by the UK: until the mid-1990s this consisted of free-fall nuclear bombs and the Trident submarine-launched ballistic

⁴⁰ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'NATO after Libya: the Atlantic alliance in austere times', *Foreign Affairs*, 90: 4, 2011, pp. 2–6.

⁴¹ Nick Harvey, Hansard (Commons), Written Answers, 31 Jan. 2012, col. 5734W, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120131/text/120131w0002.htm#120131143000091>, accessed 17 Feb. 2012.

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missile system. The former capacity was lost following the decision to take the WE-177 bomb out of service without replacement. The Trident system remains, with plans to build a new generation of submarines to carry it. This means that the nuclear options the UK provides to NATO are severely limited. Second, although not committed to NATO, the French nuclear capability provided a third centre of decision-making within NATO and this remains in being. However, it remains unclear whether a French government would be prepared to use nuclear weapons on NATO's behalf. Third, a number of NATO countries have hitherto maintained aircraft that could deliver US-supplied nuclear munitions if required. The continuation of this capacity looks uncertain, with a new generation of aircraft entering service over the next decade without the requisite hardened wiring and a failure to train for this role. As a consequence of all this NATO is becoming almost solely dependent on the US nuclear guarantee. Such a situation places greater expectations on a future US president and reinforces the burden-sharing argument that is again emerging.⁴²

Conclusions

In recommending a new strategic vision for the decade from 2010, a group of experts appointed by NATO and led by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright noted that only six of NATO's (then 26) members had met their defence spending target of 2 per cent of GDP.⁴³ While funding is only one sign of commitment to the alliance, the variation in relative contribution did not go unnoticed. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that in the run-up to the Chicago Summit the divergent agendas within NATO are becoming more apparent and a series of major issues for NATO are (re-)emerging which at times are at odds with one another. There are clear differences within the NATO membership over the order in which the issues should be addressed and how they should be tackled. This can only place further strain on the alliance's cohesion. Further complicating the situation is the fact that a number of these issues, such as the survivability of the euro, are outside the control of NATO. The Chicago summit could, as a consequence, turn out to be a disaster, producing significant in-fighting and a clearly frustrated President Obama.

Yet in many ways it is this very divergence that is the alliance's greatest strength. The Chicago summit does not have to answer all of the problems currently confronting the alliance. Rather, in many areas the way forward is not to find a single solution but to carry on with what John Baylis described in the UK context as 'serial disjointed incrementalism'.⁴⁴ Success is not just measured in terms of what is dealt with but also in what does not happen. Ultimately, to be successful NATO needs to ensure that at the Chicago summit none of these issues reaches

⁴² David S. Yost, 'Assurance and US extended deterrence in NATO', *International Affairs* 85: 4, July 2009, pp. 755–80.

⁴³ David Brunnstrom, 'NATO emphasizes defense spending despite crisis', Reuters online, 17 May 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/17/us-nato-doctrine-idUSTRE64G48920100517>, accessed 18 Feb. 2012.

⁴⁴ John Baylis, *British defence policy: striking the right balance* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 1.

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the point at which a fault-line is created within NATO. Careful risk management and communication must be the order of the day, with a carefully crafted communiqué that seeks to appease the various interests both within and outside NATO.

Inevitably, Afghanistan will feature in the discussions at the summit. For all the earlier discussion about success, the reality for NATO is that success is now much more narrowly defined, at least in private. The withdrawal of NATO forces with a minimum loss of life, leaving in place an Afghan government that can at least run a significant part of the country, including Kabul, for a few more years, would be an achievement. Anything more substantial is a plus. With Afghanistan moving off the agenda and hopefully the economic position looking somewhat better, then the wider issues of NATO's future role can be addressed in the summits that follow.