
NATO: AN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMING

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The Prague Summit of 2002 and the Istanbul Summit of 2004 stand as bookends to a period of unprecedented progress by the NATO Alliance in transforming itself to meet the new and very different challenges found in the post-9/11 world. As NATO leaders convene the Istanbul Summit they will be directing an Alliance bound by common values, energized by a shared vision, and more responsive to the global challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's fundamental purpose remains collective defense, but the missions that flow from this responsibility are very different than those the Alliance planned for during the Cold War — and even from those executed in the last decade. Unpredictable, seemingly wanton terrorist attacks make clear the danger to open societies posed by those with a bent toward causing mass casualties. The scale of danger posed by terrorist organizations is especially alarming, given their desire for weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

NATO protects the transatlantic community from this threat, and is working hard to improve the strength of its shield and the reach of its spear to confront and repel this global challenge.

Two NATO summits — Prague in 2002 and Istanbul in 2004 — serve as bookends to a period of unprecedented activity in the Alliance. In fact, more constructive change has occurred at NATO over the past two years than in any 10-year period of Alliance history. The Prague Summit set the stage for milestone initiatives in military transformation, and Alliance operations have been implemented with remarkable speed.

NATO invited seven partners to join the Alliance. In April 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia became new members. Each has made contributions to the global war on terrorism. Soldiers of these Central European democracies serve with those of other NATO allies in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Their integration into NATO represents a significant step toward the common goal of building a Europe whole and free, where security and prosperity are shared and indivisible.

NATO took charge of the International Security Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. NATO agreed at the Prague Summit to take over the United Nation's mission to ensure security in Kabul. This is the first NATO mission outside of Europe. Today there are over 6,000 NATO troops deployed to Afghanistan to provide stability in Kabul and Konduz. The Alliance is considering an expansion of the ISAF mission, to include ensuring stability in the northern and western parts of Afghanistan and creating five new Provincial Reconstruction Teams.

NATO provided support to Poland when the latter took leadership of the multinational division in Iraq. When Poland stepped up to the difficult task of leading the 16-nation multinational division, NATO provided force generation, planning, and communications support. NATO's actions in Afghanistan and Iraq have decisively ended the debate over whether NATO "will go out of area or out of business." NATO is in both.

NATO continues Operation Active Endeavour. While launched before Prague, Operation Active Endeavour (OAE) was one of the first Alliance efforts to confront terrorism. As an important element of NATO's Article 5 response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, allied ships and aircraft contribute to the global war

on terrorism through maritime patrols in the Mediterranean and compliant boarding of suspected terrorist vessels. To date, OAE forces have led to the identification, tracking, and boarding of 48 ships suspected of terrorist-related activities in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and have escorted 421 civilian ships through the Strait of Gibraltar.

NATO has also established the NATO Response Force (NRF). The NRF, which is scheduled to reach initial operational capability in October 2004, is a 21,000 person joint force that is lethal, technically superior to any envisioned threat, and readily deployable on short notice (five to 30 days). The NRF is a vehicle for providing NATO with a distinctive, high-end capability for the full spectrum of Alliance missions, with allies committing forces on six-month rotations.

The NRF has already proven itself to be a profound driver of transformation. NATO military authorities are developing readiness and capability standards that NRF forces must meet, as well as a process to certify their ability. Alliance doctrine for NRF deployment will be standard curricula at NATO schools.

NRF-inspired transformation is being felt in Alliance capitals as well. Nations recognize the need to change laws that restrict employment of their troops dedicated to the NRF. Allies are ensuring that national laws smooth the way for quick dispatch of troops; most allies are increasing the number of forces that can be legally deployed.

A more nimble NATO command structure has been created. To efficiently handle quickly moving crises with deployable and joint military forces, the Alliance decided at the Prague Summit to modernize and streamline its command structure. This new structure, approved in June 2003, eliminated nine headquarters and provides for command and control of NATO operations anywhere in the world.

The Allied Command Transformation (ACT) has been established by NATO. As part of the command structure reform, ACT is developing new force planning and generation approaches, as well as developing Centers of Excellence and a certification

process for the NRF. As a driver of Alliance transformation, ACT promises to be the backbone of military interoperability within Europe and across the Atlantic.

NATO instituted a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) battalion. The multinational CBRN Defense Battalion, led by the Czech Republic, is already conducting readiness training and exercises. When fully “stood up,” it will be able to react rapidly to a CBRN attack, either alone or with a NATO force, such as the NRF. It will reach initial operating capability on 1 July.

What started at Prague will not end at Istanbul.

Allied contributions to military operations in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Afghanistan, and Iraq reflect the increasingly demanding global agenda before NATO. These operations are straining Alliance resources and underscore the urgency of NATO’s transformation. They highlight long-recognized defense shortfalls in areas such as airlift and precision-guided munitions. Moreover, while some allies are reforming their force structures to increase their deployability, sustainability, and lethality, overall allied forces are still stuck with excessive numbers of static, territorial defense forces.

To help address this situation, the Alliance needs to give renewed emphasis to the Prague Capability Commitment, particularly in areas such as deployability, sustainability and combat effectiveness. NATO is also developing a set of initiatives for Istanbul that will improve the way the Alliance determines its future force requirements, and how nations can meet them. Allies need to eliminate Cold-War era forces no longer appropriate to NATO’s contemporary missions, and to reinvest any freed-up resources in deployable, usable forces.

As NATO moves into the future, it faces an agenda that is both regional and global in character. We must remember that Europe is still not complete. Seven nations tapped for membership at the Prague Summit will take their seats at the table for the Istanbul Summit, but Europe will still feature democracies seeking NATO membership. Our vision of a Europe

whole and free will not be fulfilled as long as countries like Ukraine, Albania, Macedonia, and Croatia are not full members of the transatlantic community. Allies new and old have an interest in assisting these nations to meet the political, economic, and military requirements of NATO membership.

In a region of Europe better known in past years for its violence, the Alliance will consider the successful termination of one of its first “out of area” missions — the SFOR (Stabilization Force) mission in Bosnia. The European Union (EU) is considering a new, follow-on mission in Bosnia under the “Berlin Plus” arrangements, which governs cooperation between the EU and NATO. Even if the SFOR mission is ended, NATO will remain engaged in Bosnia to help foster Bosnian defense reform, among other missions.

From a global viewpoint, NATO must consider how it can contribute to peace and stability beyond Europe. The Bush administration’s forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East recognizes that as long as

freedom does not flourish in that part of the world, it will, as the president said, “remain a place of stagnation, resentment and violence ready for export.”

NATO can contribute to reform and democracy in this region by enhancing the Mediterranean Dialogue in which Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia currently participate. NATO can also create a wider set of relationships with selected nations of the Greater Middle East, working with them in the areas of counter-terrorism, counter-WMD, interdiction, and stability operations.

NATO recognized at Prague that it had to transform itself to successfully meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world. Toward that end, unprecedented progress has been made. As NATO heads of state and government convene at the Istanbul Summit, they lead an Alliance bound by common values, energized by a shared vision for a Europe whole and free, and more responsive to the global challenges and opportunities before the transatlantic relationship. ●