

## Lecture: "NATO on the Way to Bucharest 2008"

On 11 March, Netherlands Atlantic Youth, in association with SIB Leiden, organized a lecture with Rick Olson, who is Deputy U.S. Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, on 'NATO on the way to Bucharest 2008'. Rick Olson covered a broad range of NATO issues, future challenges, and expectations for the NATO Summit in Bucharest, which is to take place between 2 and 4 April 2008. The meeting took place in 'De Burcht' in Leiden and was co-chaired by Brendan Troost (Chair of Netherlands Atlantic Youth) and Mea da Costa Mata da Conceição (Chair of SIB Leiden). Some 35 students attended.

According to Mr. Olson, NATO is a historical organization that brought peace, stability and prosperity to Europe. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Atlantic Alliance promoted democracy in Central and Eastern Europe and brought peace and stability to the Balkans.

Recently the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – which was established to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in Europe – has shifted its focus on challenges to outside the Euro-Atlantic space. NATO is actively engaged in Afghanistan where its primary concern is assisting in the reconstruction programs. Mr. Olson emphasized that a successful reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan depends on security. Both aspects are highly intertwined. Without security, reconstruction is impossible.



Mr. Olson stressed that Afghanistan remains a key priority operation, with the volatile situation in Kosovo coming close second. During the upcoming Bucharest Summit, these issues, as well as several other topics such as the training mission in Iraq, NATO support for the African Union in Somalia and the Darfur region of Sudan, the threat of missile proliferation, energy security, cyber security, future enlargement of the alliance, force levels and partnership programs will be discussed.

During the Q and A session Mr. Olson elaborated on Kosovo. In compliance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), NATO forces provide a safe and secure environment in order to protect the people of Kosovo.

KFOR operates in close relation with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Although Kosovo has been recognized by 23 countries, the question of recognition does not apply to the Atlantic Alliance. NATO is primarily concerned with recovering the economy and institution building.

After discussing Kosovo, attention was attributed to the Alliance's solidarity, especially to the attitudes of France, Germany and Spain. Mr. Olson stated that the comment of the American Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, wherein he criticized Germany's commitment to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, was misinterpreted. The Secretary's letter emphasized the importance of allied contributions to the current mission in Afghanistan. The United States is careful not to criticize individual countries on their commitment. With regard to France and Spain, who both contribute to the Afghanistan mission, Mr. Olson said that notwithstanding

the fact that not all requirements for the mission are fulfilled, it is crucial to inform the European public about the nature of NATO's presence in Afghanistan.

With another question the focus of the discussion shifted to the African continent, where NATO is currently supporting the African Union in both Somalia and Sudan. NATO has established airlift support for the AU Peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Furthermore the Atlantic Alliance has a number of troops on the ground that is working with the AU on the 'lessons learned'. Despite NATO's involvement in this region on the African continent, it is highly unlikely that NATO will launch a full-scale intervention in Sudan.

Attention was then paid to the challenge posed by the Missile Defence System, which is – according to Moscow – an offensive system that poses a threat to Russia. According to Mr. Olson, the U.S. approach to Russia is based on cooperation. Russia needs to be actively engaged on political issues where common interests exist. From the American perspective, the Missile Defence System has solely defensive purposes and should not be considered a credible deterrent against Russia, but rather as being a deterrent against the threats posed by Iran.

The United States is looking forward to the summit in the Romanian capital that is scheduled between 2 and 4 April of this year. Many important issues will be on the agenda to be discussed in order to keep NATO as history's most successful military alliance, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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