

Meeting

'The Road to NATO's 60th Anniversary Summit'

On 19 November the Netherlands Atlantic Association organised a meeting with Dr Jamie Shea at Sociëteit De Witte, The Hague. Shea is Director of Policy Planning at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. During the meeting he addressed the many challenges that lie ahead for the Alliance. He also talked about the key issues on the agenda at the Strasbourg/Kehl anniversary summit meeting of April 2009.

Mr Shea started with the remark that originally NATO was expected to last no more than 50 years. Now approaching 60 the Alliance has outlasted its original goal. The reason that the Alliance has survived is "because it has not failed", although it came close during the Bosnian war in 1994, according to Shea. Security threats today have "migrated" rather than disappeared, he said. During the Cold War the Soviet Union was the West's primary focus, but now global security threats have become more diffuse. The problems of today are more complex than during the Cold War. Then, NATO could deal with just one major issue at a time. Moreover, because there is not one clear threat, Alliance members lack a single vision. Today, military operations last much longer and the use of force is not always as effective. In present-day missions the use of force needs to be complemented by non-military means.



Present-day security challenges create more demand for NATO. Its core business of deterrence still is relevant. NATO should prepare better for Article 5-type of operations. According to Shea, NATO should also train more for "global Article 5 out-of-area operations". A second issue for NATO is protecting the life lines of its member states. Communication lines and trade routes need to be kept open. The resurgence of piracy is a major problem in this respect. Related to this issue is the need to change the politico-military infrastructure of the Alliance by re-establishing a maritime command. A last demand on NATO is that of being a "good Samaritan", as Shea called it. Providing humanitarian assistance and the use of NATO's

rapid response force NRF for that purpose create challenges of their own.

Because of these increased demands Shea addressed the changes that would be needed within NATO. A new approach to the partnership arrangements is needed as the Alliance now has more partners than members. A more comprehensive approach is needed to share assets with other organisations, such as the UN and the EU. Since the EU too has expeditionary forces (Battle Groups) at its disposal, duplication should be avoided. Another key issue is the efficiency of the organisation. NATO's command structure might be too big, according to Shea. The role of the North Atlantic Council needs to be more managerial.

One of the concerns about the Alliance Shea expressed was that some members consider it as a means of serving their own national agenda and are not concerned with the broader picture. Member states should display more solidarity towards their fellow Alliance members. This will lead to a stronger consensus among them and provide a clearer vision as to where NATO wants to go. Right now member states have too many possibilities to opt-out. As a consequence, decisions are not always implemented by all of them.

Shea also stated that NATO should have a bigger say on political issues. As to policy areas where NATO is involved it should have a seat at the negotiating table. Shea elaborated by saying that it took a very long time for NATO to take part in the negotiations on Bosnia, even though the Alliance led large troops contingents in this country for years. Finally, NATO needs to broaden its horizon and anticipate events. To do this there needs to be more discussion among the members on issues such as missile defence. These internal discussions will help develop NATO's political sphere of influence.

Shea expressed some considerations on issues likely to dominate the agenda at the anniversary summit meeting in 2009. On the issue of Afghanistan he believed that more can be done. With more troops and resources NATO could expand its influence. What is more, operational restrictions need to be removed in order to operate more effectively. Local governments needs to be improved and more Afghan troops need to be trained. Contributing nations need to be able to decide on their own goals, increasing the willingness to contribute to ISAF. Shea also believed that NATO should continue talking to the Russians. Member states need to express their interest in Russia, since no-one benefits from deteriorating relations with the Russian government.

In a closing statement Shea said that NATO did a "relatively decent job" in the past 60 years. However, there exists a discrepancy between its ambitions and resources. Equipment needs to be upgraded to be able to carry out 21st century operations. The Alliance needs to develop a new strategic concept and a mission statement as to make it easier to explain what NATO stands for.

In response to a question from the audience Shea said that he hoped and expected that many pressing issues concerning the Afghanistan mission would reach a breakthrough at the summit in Strasbourg/Kehl. U.S. President-elect Obama has indicated that Afghanistan will be of major interest to his administration. As of yet it is unclear what his specific policies will be, but it is clear that Afghanistan will serve as a test case for the Obama Administration. Regarding a question on how to increase European involvement in Afghanistan, Shea responded that each country should be allowed to formulate its own specific goals within a comprehensive framework. This could help the parliamentary debate in each country.



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