

'NATO's agenda in the run-up to the Chicago Summit'

Public meeting with Jamie Shea – 24 October 2011

On 24 October the Netherlands Atlantic Association organised a public meeting with Dr. Jamie Shea. He has had a long career at NATO Headquarters, and currently he is Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges. Some 80 people attended the meeting in Press Centre 'Nieuwspoort'. Topics that were raised by moderator Bram Boxhoorn (Director of the Netherlands Atlantic Association) in his introduction: What will the military and political program of NATO look like at the Chicago Summit? What lessons can be drawn from involvement in Afghanistan and Libya? What effects will budget cuts have on NATO capabilities? How does scepticism the U.S. Congress on NATO affect the organization? And, last but not least: What might be the new security issues for NATO?

The future

Shea responded to these questions with the remark that they require him to offer a long term vision, and long term visions always ought to leave room for potential changes. He made it clear that he would not be predicting the future, but rather to provide snap-shot views of developments in NATO at the moment.



First, Shea focused on the potential divide between the United States and NATO. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently announced that the U.S. is no longer willing to back up the Alliance fully. The U.S. is getting more involved in Asia. There is a new focus in foreign policy and a permanent readjustment of U.S. priorities. This does not mean, however, that the U.S. no longer sees transatlantic cooperation as critical.

Looking ahead at the Chicago Summit Shea did not expect enormous changes, since NATO is still digesting existing changes and developments of the last summit, in Lisbon. During this summit NATO achieved a lot: a new strategic concept was drawn up and there was agreement on missile defense issues. There was no bitter wrangling as was predicted beforehand. Big initiatives were launched, like the new global partnership.

Military involvement

Shea identified three focal points for NATO. The first focal point will attract the most attention: the actual places of military involvement, the locations where active troop involvement is at hand. The second issue will be that of continued partnerships and partnership expansion. The third issue will be NATO's future involvement in the light of the economic crisis and budget cuts.

Can involvement like in Libya be seen as a long term phenomenon or will there be an intermission in NATO involvement after the intervention and its consequences? The barriers to involvement have significantly increased after Libya. A repetition of such a large scale intervention seems highly unlikely at the moment. Besides Libya, none of the Arab Spring countries asked for any NATO assistance. Also there is great political will to end the NATO involvement to show that not every NATO operation lingers on for years or decades.

The focus will, more likely, turn back towards the day-to-day reality of involvement in Afghanistan and the upcoming withdrawal of forces in 2014. It is important to find a balance between the message of continued NATO support for the country and the reality of the set date of 2014. Shea pointed back to the Vietnam War to make clear that support for continued involvement is hard to sustain when troops are pulled back. This raises questions about troop levels, the shape of the funding package and the partnership with Afghanistan.

Shea wondered whether Afghanistan will evolve into a 'full' partner of NATO. The country is still largely dependent on foreign aid and this makes it hard to accept the country as an equal partner to NATO. A new regional framework for the country needs to be drawn up, but it is not easy to get all the countries involved (for example Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran) to the table. Will they attend the summit or will they disagree with the regional strategic plans?

There is still a lot of work to do between now and Chicago. Sustainable long-term plans (both military and financial) need to be developed. The intervention in Libya will come to an end this month, but other NATO activities are still continuing. The ongoing presence in Kosovo is coming to the fore again, considering the latest unrest in the region. A lot also depends on the U.S. presence in Iraq. Will they really draw back? Then there are the maritime operations of NATO against piracy, costing between 7 to 12 billion dollars a year. These enormous costs do not mean that NATO's involvement should not continue, but it makes one wonder whether the current approach is cost-effective. According to Shea it is clear that a higher level of coordination between operating units, countries and organizations like NATO is needed.

Partnership

The second focal point addresses partnerships. Closer involvement of partners in operations is desirable. The post-Afghanistan challenge is to maintain the support of contributors outside of Europe, like Australia and Malaysia. The question here is: Will NATO go back to Europe after Afghanistan? In the Balkans there are possibilities for expansion of NATO membership. Potential candidates are Bosnia and Montenegro. Georgia might apply for membership as well. The clear focus will be Russia. So far there has been no agreement on two missile defence centres. As long as disagreement prevails, the Russians are unlikely to attend the summit in Chicago. After Libya there will be change within the alliance. Partners like Sweden are drawing closer to NATO. NATO should be careful, however, not to lose existing allies like Turkey. The emphasis is on 'keeping the family together' whilst further integrating the partners.

The financial crisis

The third focal point is the financial crisis. Budget cuts make it even more crucial to find cost-effective approaches to upcoming NATO challenges. What capabilities does NATO really need, and what is the

right mix? There are varying ideas on this, considering the amount of nuclear capabilities in respect to conventional ones. Consensus has to be found between differing partners like Germany and France. The question here is if there will be an equal burden-sharing between Europe and the U.S., or will the latter remain the driving force? Another question is what type of challenges NATO needs to focus on. Should it expand its capabilities to deal with terrorism or cyber for instance?

Meanwhile, Central and Eastern European countries ask for more reassurances from NATO. Shea made clear that when it comes to reassurances “you can never get enough of it.” This means it can easily become a costly weight on NATO’s declining budget. The mission in Libya was relatively cheap, but it was still too expensive. More cost-effective approaches can be reached when attention is paid to intelligence. Intelligence systems of NATO lacked quality during the Libya involvement, which made NATO dependent on other partners.

The European countries should also be more willing to take the lead in operations. Now they are only quick to follow. Shea predicted that the amount of training missions will increase. Together with an approach geared towards conflict prevention, this should eventually lead to cheaper and less expansive operations. In a final statement Shea added that in ‘regular’ times when there are no operations, NATO should be an efficient organisation as well. The focus should not lay solely on crisis situations.

Questions

One of the questions from the audience dealt with smart defence. ‘Defence against what?’ Within NATO there is a focus on weapons of mass destruction, while hardly anybody in Europe worries about them. Another focal point is terrorism, whilst there have been few big attacks in Europe. Shouldn’t NATO focus on failed states and organized crime, which directly affect Europe’s security? Is there no money for such issues?

Shea agreed that the level of violence is at a historical low in Europe. There is no ‘real’ threat from any country. There are different options for NATO, like converting to humanitarian operations as in Libya or to get involved in failed states like Afghanistan. The latter does serve our own security as well. Also NATO could focus on cyber security: technology makes modern societies vulnerable to disruption. Afghanistan shows



that NATO actually is involved in failed states. NATO’s direction is dependent on public opinion, Shea added. Still there is no chance of NATO changing into a police, intelligence or emergency health organization. It will remain first and foremost a politico-military organization.

There are a couple of elements that will demand NATO's attention in the coming years. Interventions will most likely be built around modern technology and used to assist the local forces. Military specialization will be the key in these interventions. Besides this there will be a focus on training. A third focal point is the attention paid to domestic use of the military in case of natural disasters like floods and pandemics.

Another question focused on the influence of the budget cuts on NATO capabilities and on EU and NATO cooperation. Shea pointed out that decisions made after budget cuts are often mistaken. Libya made these flaws clear when, for instance, the UK did not have any aircraft carriers left and this complicated its operational plans. Cooperation between EU and NATO is limited. There is no real pressure to deepen the relationship since there are no real crises that require the organizations to work together. It is important that the alliance de-conflicts with the EU to enhance better cooperation in the future.

Rianne Mastop