

Seminar: Engagement and Transformation? The NATO Summit in Bucharest

On 20 March 2008 the Netherlands Atlantic Association organized a seminar on 'Engagement and Transformation? The NATO Summit in Bucharest'. Some 100 participants attended the seminar, that was held in Press Centre 'Nieuwspoort' in The Hague and that was chaired by Kees Homan, Senior Research Fellow at the Clingendael Institute. NATO's agenda for Bucharest was introduced by Mr. Thierry Legendre (Senior Policy Advisor, Policy Planning Unit, NATO Headquarters). His introduction was followed by responses by Dr. Karl-Heinz Kamp (Director, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome) and Dr. David Haglund (Professor of Political Studies, Queens University, Ontario, Canada). Ambassador Herman Schaper (Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to NATO) concluded the seminar with a Dutch perspective on the NATO Summit.

Legendre

Mr. Legendre started with the remark that the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 frustrated the trans-Atlantic relations. The NATO Summit in Bucharest, however, should show the shared interests and challenges of the Atlantic Community. He stressed that unity within NATO does not always lead to success, but division certainly guarantees failure.



Mr. Legendre continued by addressing the three main topics of the Bucharest agenda: NATO enlargement, current operations and '21st century challenges'. He pointed out that NATO's ambitions on enlargement send a powerful message that NATO is still vital and committed. NATO is a 'stabilising force' within Europe. Mr. Legendre stated that Georgia and Ukraine, despite the recent turmoil in these countries, remained democratic states. Georgia and Ukraine should be rewarded for this by NATO,

although it is yet unknown how exactly. With regard to Russia, Mr. Legendre mentioned the common interests and challenges like a stable Afghanistan and the fight against international terrorism. Despite their differences, Russia and NATO should engage in a 'constructive dialogue' on such issues.

Operations will form the main topic at Bucharest. The recent events in Kosovo have shown a reaffirmation of NATO's commitment to the region and its support for democratic development. Afghanistan is perhaps the most important operation. The Bucharest Summit should show that the mission in Afghanistan is not only one of reconstruction, but also a security challenge. And not only for NATO, but for other international organisations as well. Training the Afghan police and army is a priority, because without such training an exit strategy for NATO is not even possible. In order to make 'Afghanistan' successful, a 'comprehensive approach' is necessary. This means a combination of civil reconstruction

and military force. There can be no reconstruction without security and vice versa. Cooperation between NATO and the European Union could prove to be an important contribution to the 'comprehensive approach'.

The '21st century challenges' include climate change, energy security and cyber defence. At the Washington Summit of 1999, NATO agreed on a strategic concept for the 21st century, which stated NATO's objectives and the ways to achieve them. In Bucharest, the alliance should start thinking about an update of the strategic concept of 1999, according to Legendre.

Kamp

Mr. Kamp responded by speaking about the long-term consequences of the NATO Summit. The agenda will address problems within NATO, such as the difficulties that NATO is facing with operations in Afghanistan. The 'comprehensive approach', which combines military force with civilian reconstruction, has not yet lived up to its expectations, because of the problems NATO is facing with the execution of this strategy. It is still unclear whether NATO itself should carry out the civilian operations, or let them be performed by other organisations.

NATO also faces a myriad of conceptual problems. First of all, there is no consensus within the alliance about how well or poor NATO is doing in Afghanistan. Second, there is no clear goal for NATO in Afghanistan. And without a goal, success is very hard to define. This complicates the issue of public support. Kamp called for an assessment group for NATO in Afghanistan to tackle these issues.



Kamp continued by tackling the issue of enlargement. Both Ukraine and Georgia are being considered for future NATO membership (an eventual Membership Action Plan will prepare them for possible entrance into the alliance). However, Ukraine is a big country, and only a small percentage of the Ukrainian people supports NATO membership. Georgia faces a border conflict with Russia, which, if it lingers on, could on the long term inflict serious damage to the NATO-Russia relationship. NATO should maintain its 'open door-policy, but the alliance should also consider how to include non-NATO members in future plans.

Mr. Kamp also addressed the redistribution of influence within NATO. France has shifted its policy under president Sarkozy and full reintegration in NATO is an option for the future. France now seeks more synergy within the EU-NATO relationship (especially with regard to the European Security and Defence Policy), which will certainly account for US approval. This will most likely result in French leadership within the ESDP, legitimised by the US. Other allies, Germany in particular, will lose influence. This redistribution of influence is a result of NATO evolving from a 'Eurocentric defence organisation' to a 'global stability organisation'.

Mr. Kamp saw a positive trend in the transatlantic relationship. The US will not lose interest in NATO, simply because the alliance is now militarily usable and globally deployable. NATO is currently in the shape that the US always wanted it to be in.

Haglund



Mr. Haglund emphasised the position of Canada within NATO. Canada senses a lack of solidarity within the alliance, especially in the case of Germany. Haglund pointed out two ironies. Firstly, Canada has become a NATO member that lectures other allies about commitment, whereas it used to be the other way around. Secondly, the Canadian-German relationship now appears to be a normal one, as opposed to the 'cult of specialness' surrounding the Canadian-German relations. Mr. Kamp responded on the supposed lack of German commitment in Afghanistan, by stating that after the

Second World War the allies opposed the idea of a strong German army. It takes time for the German army to evolve.

Schaper

To conclude the seminar Mr. Schaper reflected on the NATO Summit from a Dutch perspective. The Dutch objectives for Bucharest are: increasing support for the Afghan National Army (ANA), burden sharing and more solidarity within NATO, how to avoid casualties in Afghanistan and how to embed ISAF in the comprehensive approach. In addition, Mr. Schaper raised questions on how to improve coordination of security, development and governance and how to increase the focus on regional development.

The Netherlands has 1,600 troops under ISAF command in Afghanistan. The main priorities for the Netherlands in Afghanistan lay in the planning process, improving airlift, increasing common funding and a more efficient command structure.

Mr. Schaper continued on missile defence. The number of non-NATO countries with intercontinental ballistic missiles has increased. From the Dutch perspective the first line of defence is counter proliferation. A missile defence structure for the European Union (EU) and NATO allies would increase security. In this matter it is important not to ignore the Russian position and to employ a transparent and cooperative approach.

With regard to the enlargement issue it is clear that the 'Adriatic Three' (i.e. Albania, Croatia and Macedonia) will enter NATO. This will only be a matter of time. The Dutch opinion here is that Albania, Croatia and Macedonia have to enter on their own merits, not as a group. Russia should not have any veto power with regard to NATO enlargement. However, the relationship between NATO and Russia is of strategic importance.



Finally, Schaper stated that it is clear that NATO's agenda has broadened, which is necessary in light of the new security challenges of the twenty-first century. For security reasons, NATO remains essential to both Europe and the United States.

Maarten Katsman and Femke van Paasschen