NATO’S CHICAGO SUMMIT: ALLIANCE COHESION ABOVE ALL ELSE?

The NATO Summit in Chicago was mainly about the alliance’s collective defence capabilities and the end of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. The concept of Smart Defence is a compelling idea given the economic climate, but implementation challenges remain. NATO allies demonstrated a unified front on nuclear capabilities and missile defence, though political controversies are bound to resurface. What the Chicago Summit highlighted was the extent to which NATO has come to be defined by the missions it undertakes and the coalition of states that choose to participate.

The 2012 NATO Summit, held in Chicago on May 20 and 21, was intended to provide strategic direction to the alliance, while providing an updated assessment of the security environment for and by its members. Debating issues ranging from cyber security to the nuclear crisis in Iran, a whole set of security challenges was addressed in tandem with the identification of the appropriate defence capabilities to tackle them. Throughout these deliberations, a key concern was the preservation of an apparent consensus among the alliance’s 28 member states. Achieving consensus can prove elusive as there is wide variation when comparing different allies’ views on topics such as NATO’s defence capabilities, its nuclear weapons, the nature of its relationship with Russia, or further expansion of its membership. Nevertheless, the Chicago Summit did come up with a series of important decisions, advancing above all implementation of commitments made during the previous summit in Lisbon.

With the economic climate in mind, NATO is also implementing a number of reforms to the alliance’s command structure, its headquarters, and agencies. This rationalisation process is meant to improve efficiency on leaner budgets. This approach is also applied to the development of NATO’s defence capabilities, with the concept of Smart Defence. Smart Defence implies the prioritisation of alliance capabilities under conditions of fiscal austerity, without undermining NATO’s ability to respond to threats. It entails multinational coordination, as allies will be asked to do more with less. The Summit Declaration on Defense Capabilities encourages allies to “take forward specific multinational projects, including for better protection of [our] forces, better surveillance and better training. These projects will deliver improved operational effectiveness, economies of scale, and closer connections between [our] forces”. Finally, the Chicago Summit was also heavily focused on the transition of NATO’s military intervention in Afghanistan, given the end of the combat mission in 2014. Here too, alliance coordination is considered key, as nations articulate their exit strategies. Whether in Afghanistan or in other priority areas, the challenge that NATO faces is to consolidate what it has achieved thus far, despite an increasingly complex security environment and a difficult economic context.

Focus on capabilities
NATO summits present member states with an opportunity to discuss both short-term and long-term strategic concerns for the alliance. In practice, however, summit agendas tend to be dominated by ad hoc disagreement management, focused around the issues of the day. The official declarations that emerge from these summits are typically characterised by lowest-common denominator statements that reflect the alliance’s consensus rule in decision-making. Yet, every NATO summit generally has a specific emphasis. In 2008, debates were centered on NATO expansion, in 2009, on NATO-EU relations, in 2010, on NATO’s new Strategic Concept. An issue that had constantly been pushed off the agenda was the issue of the alliance’s defence capabilities, including a comprehensive review of NATO’s reliance...
also an estimated 150 – 200 American non-

Kingdom, and France (implicitly). There are
genic arsenals of the United States, the united
individual member states. Extended nuclear
priorities and threat perceptions held by in-
cease cohesion is compromised by different
sharing arrangements. Expectedly, alli-
certain NATO states have expressed their
member is arguably the most controversial, as
ance above and beyond the thorny issue of
NATO’s nuclear weapons.

The DDPR does not mark a significant de-
parture from the statement made by Sec-
retary of State Hillary Clinton during the
2010 Talinn meeting, where she outlined five guiding principles for NATO, as a nu-
clear alliance. If anything, the DDPR ech-
ees the American Nuclear Posture Review, 
suggesting that NATO allies would not
threaten or use nuclear weapons against
non-nuclear states that are in compliance
with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
Although the document hints at the pos-
sibility of a reduction in the role and number
of non-strategic nuclear weapons as-
gined to NATO, it is implied that any such
deliberations would happen in the context
of arms control negotiations with Russia.

The importance of nuclear sharing ar-
rangements is reaffirmed, whether or not
non-strategic nuclear weapons stay in Eu-
rope. The DDPR also confirms its commit-
mments to international disarmament, arms
control, and non-proliferation initiatives.

The US is the only state that has nuclear
weapons stationed outside of its own ter-

ority. Any decision on the removal of these
non-strategic nuclear weapons would be
more desirable as part of an arms control
package with Russia. While Russia objects
to the US hosting nuclear weapons in Eu-

ope, it does benefit from an asymmetry in
numbers. Compared to the estimated 500
tactical nuclear weapons possessed by the
United States (including those on its own
territory), Russia’s stockpile is believed to
be in the thousands. But the DDPR goes

above and beyond the thorny issue of
NATO’s nuclear weapons.

Smart and missile defence

Drafting the Review was a task that the al-
liance members set out to do at the 2010
Lisbon Summit. Beyond the issue of nu-
clear weapons, the document describes
the security environment as unpredictable
and adds that an additional challenge can
be found in the difficult economic context:
alliance members are facing, with obvious
implications for defence spending com-
mitments. The DDPR reaffirms the key pur-
poses espoused by the alliance: collective
defence, crisis management, and coopera-
tive security, all the while stating clearly
that “the alliance does not consider any
country to be its adversary”.

With very little change with respect to
NATO’s nuclear forces, the DDPR also in-
cludes important information about con-
ventional capabilities as well as missile
defence plans. In the context of economic
austerity, the goals of interoperability and
close allied coordination are emphasised.

There is an acknowledged need for a new
conceptual approach to move towards
greater interoperability and the inevitabil-
ity of specialisation. In a nutshell, alliance
members will have to find ways to both
maximise cost effectiveness and avoid du-

plication with the European Union’s Pool-
ing and Sharing Initiative. Implementing
these new defence concepts, however, will
be pitted against entrenched bureaucratic
interests and resistance from national de-

ence industries.

As for NATO missile defence, the alliance
members declared at Chicago that their
system had reached the Interim Opera-
tional Capability stage, which is a signifi-
cant milestone on the way to making it
fully operational by the end of this decade.

Missile defence is described as an addi-
tion to NATO’s current capabilities, to pro-
tect its members against ballistic missile
threats and provide the alliance with an
extra layer of security to uphold the prin-
ciple of collective defence over the Atlantic
territory. It is meant as a complementary
capability, not one that would replace or
supersede the alliance’s nuclear weapons
or conventional forces.

At the same time, there is an attempt to
reassure Russia that “NATO missile defense is
not oriented against Russia nor does it have
the capability to undermine Russia’s
strategic deterrent”. The hope is that the
missile defence impasse will not under-
mine future arms control talks between
Russia and the United States. The fact is,
however, that the issue of missile defence
continues to be an irritant in Russia-NATO
and Russia-US relations. Tensions may in-
crease further if NATO, incapable of com-
zing to an agreement with Russia on the
conditions of missile defence deployment,
implies its shield as scheduled.

Another irritant with Russia is the possibil-
ity of NATO’s further enlargement to the
East, with states like Ukraine and Georgia.
Little progress on this can be expected
beyond the usual statements of good in-
tentions, as these countries must still un-
dergo significant reforms before member-
ship becomes accessible – and as many

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Airbase</th>
<th>Dual capable aircraft</th>
<th>Number of B-61s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Kleine Brogel</td>
<td>Belgian F-16</td>
<td>10 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Büchel</td>
<td>German Tornado</td>
<td>10 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Aviano</td>
<td>US F-16</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghedi Torre</td>
<td>US F-16</td>
<td>10 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Volkel</td>
<td>Dutch F-16</td>
<td>10 – 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Incirlik</td>
<td>US fighter aircraft (rotating)</td>
<td>60 – 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>150 – 200</strong></td>
</tr>
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Source: Norris/Kristensen 2011
NATO members are eager to avoid another row with Moscow. Nevertheless, NATO will pursue its air policing mission in the Baltic states and is exploring ways it can enhance its commitments to states on its Eastern border in a visible way, with implications for its defence capabilities.

On Afghanistan and Libya

The year 2014 will mark the end of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. The goal, looking beyond 2014, will be to preserve the progress sustained by NATO involvement and to foster a long-term partnership to ensure the stability of Afghanistan, a theme that was reiterated throughout the Chicago Summit. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will take over, running on an annual budget of US$ 4.1 billion for a force sized at 228,500, a downsized objective given the economic constraints. Even with a leaner ANSF, Afghanistan will be dependent on NATO for financial contributions that will sustain these force levels for the foreseeable future. While there will be a post-ISAF NATO military presence beyond 2014 focusing on tasks related to training the ANSF, the end of the combat mission remains a significant milestone, the operation in Afghanistan being the longest war in American history.

NATO’s operation in Afghanistan has underscored the extent to which there are few alternatives to the Atlantic Alliance when it comes to undertaking major military campaigns in the name of regional and international security. The intervention in Libya is another case in point. While it showed that American leadership is not essential throughout, the US military provided the bulk of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to the coalition of participating NATO states and partners. Through the Libya mission, NATO has in a sense demonstrated its continued relevance. Operations like Operation Unified Protector (OUP) could not have been carried out otherwise, unless as a US-led coalition of the willing. This casts further doubt on the EU ever being able to assert itself as an independent military actor, an assessment based on European states’ continued reliance on American assets during OUP.

On the other hand, the Libya mission also exposed some divisions within the alliance, as many NATO states chose to sit on the sidelines. Even more telling was Germany’s abstention at the United Nations, as many NATO states chose to sit on the sidelines. Even more telling was Germany’s abstention at the United Nations, as many NATO states chose to sit on the sidelines. Even more telling was Germany’s abstention at the United Nations. For instance, the US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta announced the withdrawal of two brigade combat teams from Germany earlier this year, with implications for NATO’s extended deterrence arrangements. Therefore, states are increasingly turning to capability sharing and specialisation as ways to fulfill their commitments and responsibilities under tougher economic conditions.

As it moves away from Afghanistan and towards the future, NATO is reaffirming its goal of global engagement and looking outward. More than 30 non-NATO countries were represented at the Chicago Summit, which indicates that the alliance is keen to find ways to engage more closely with non-NATO states that can contribute in a meaningful sense to its mandate. The military interventions in Afghanistan and Libya have been instructive in the sense that they have highlighted the increased participation of non-NATO states and the need to better integrate these valuable contributions from other allies. NATO then, might be best understood as a military alliance in any traditional sense.