

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

The NATO Summit at Prague, 2002

Paul Gallis
Specialist in European Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

Some allies are calling NATO's November 2002 Prague meeting "the Transformation" summit due to an attempt to define part of the alliance's mission as combat against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, matched by pledges to obtain the military capabilities to accomplish that mission. Not all allies agree on the implications of such policies. The allies will also likely name seven states as eligible for membership. This report will not be updated. See also *NATO Enlargement*, CRS Report RS21055.

The "Transformation" Summit

Some allies are calling the NATO summit at Prague on November 21-22 a "Transformation" summit because they believe that it should culminate allied efforts over the past decade to change from a military alliance, geared for conflict against the Soviet Union, to a more flexible alliance with new capabilities for new threats, an open door to democratic candidate states, and a forward-looking program for partnership countries able to contribute to security.

The Bush Administration, with the support of Secretary General George Robertson, has been the driving force for a changed NATO. The Administration hopes to use the summit to revitalize the alliance by clearly stating NATO's mission, securing pledges of capabilities to accomplish that mission, and embracing enlargement. Some allies are resisting aspects of the Administration's design for NATO.

Mission and Capabilities¹

During the Cold War, NATO's mission was to provide collective defense against the Soviet threat in Europe. Some allies' military structures remain geared for this threat, even though Russian conventional forces are weak and in disarray. The Bush Administration wishes to redefine the principal threats as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of

¹ This section is based primarily on interviews of U.S. and European officials, summer-fall 2002.

mass destruction. Administration officials believe that the United States is “at war” today against the sources of these new threats and that the allies must be prepared to engage adversaries in North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to ensure security.

The Europeans, in contrast, with few exceptions, do not believe that they are at war, and any policy of moving outside the NATO Treaty area of Europe remains a controversial one. Most European allies believe that terrorism can be subdued, not through military action, but primarily through elimination of its underlying causes and through law-enforcement measures.

At NATO’s May 2002 ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, the allies agreed that “to carry out the full range of its missions, NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives.”² The European allies had resisted such a clear statement of moving “out-of-area” until the Reykjavik meeting, and few have dedicated the resources to develop the mobile forces necessary to achieve such an objective. Some Bush Administration officials are now describing NATO’s mission as global, most prominently, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. In December 2001, when asked what NATO’s area of operations should be, he responded: “The only way to deal with the terrorist network that’s global is to go after it where it is.”³

For some allies, Reykjavik did not supply a definitive word on NATO’s mission and reach. Above all, French, German, and Belgian officials are wary of out-of-area missions; in raising doubts, they tend to cite the Administration’s new doctrine of “pre-emptive” or “preventive” action against terrorist or WMD threats. They do not wish NATO to become the instrument of U.S. policy against such threats, unless guidelines for taking NATO out-of-area are more clearly agreed. For example, Paris contends that a U.N. resolution should be required for any such out-of-area NATO action. The Germans, and some other allies, believe that the principal threats to European security remain on the continent, primarily in the Balkans, where instability, in their view, may yet again result in refugee flows and ultra-nationalist ideas and conflicts. Berlin believes that “collective security,” in the form of robust peace operations, should remain NATO’s principal objective.

The Bush Administration has taken several concrete actions in an attempt to ensure that the summit moves the alliance towards its own view of mission and capabilities:

- ! Plans are virtually complete for replacing the Defense Capability Initiative of 1999, which listed 58 capability goals that NATO should obtain, with a “Prague Capabilities Commitment” (PCC). The PCC would list pledges by member states to acquire a smaller list of key capabilities: strategic airlift, air-to-air refueling, precision-guided munitions, secure communications, and special forces. President Bush has reportedly been calling heads of government and asking them to make specific pledges at Prague to purchase selected capabilities.

² NATO Communiqué, Paragraph 5, Reykjavik, May 14, 2002.

³ Rumsfeld press conference, Brussels, Dec. 18, 2001.

- ! There may be formal announcement of a NATO Response Force (NRF), composed of 20,000 men kept in a high-readiness status, for high-intensity conflict, and able to reach its destination within 7-30 days of a NATO decision to use it. The NRF would be an “insertion force,” partly U.S. but mostly European in composition, for rapid movement primarily against terrorist and WMD threats. U.S. officials wish to see the NRF fully operational by 2006.

The Prague Capabilities Commitment and the NATO Response Force are closely related in political terms. The Administration is calling upon allies to spend more on defense for capabilities to equip the NRF, as well as capabilities for larger, mobile forces that might follow after the insertion of the NRF. Administration officials say that they have described these two initiatives to the allies as a test of allied will to revitalize NATO. Implicit in these initiatives is a view that only governments with sharply improved capabilities will play a role in “coalitions of the willing” against adversaries, and that only such governments would therefore have an important voice in allied decision-making.

The allies have accepted these two Administration initiatives in general terms, although with a number of reservations. Some allies, such as Germany, contend that EU-imposed budget strictures prevent their spending appreciably more on defense. Many also contend that U.S. restrictions on technology transfer impede the purchase of such items as precision-guided munitions and ground surveillance radar, a point on which Secretary General Robertson supports the Europeans. Some allied governments also contend that the NRF is an Administration effort to undercut the EU’s nascent military unit, conceived for crisis management.⁴ Administration officials respond that the EU has moved too slowly in forming the EU force, planned for full operational capability in 2003, but now years behind schedule; they also add that the EU force is for “lighter” missions than the NRF, a point disputed by some allies, including Britain, France, and Germany. Finally, France has several objections to the NRF, principally that it takes NATO “away above all from protecting its geographic [European] space. It is extremely dangerous” if the force is to be used for “preventive actions.”⁵

Reforming the NATO Command Structure. The Administration is also moving forward with an initiative to reduce the number of NATO commands and then streamline the ones that remain, a plan that would not come to fruition until 2003 at the earliest. Most controversial is the transformation of SACLANT (Supreme Allied Command Atlantic, in Norfolk) from a strategic command to a “functional” command. The Europeans have long desired maintaining the two strategic commands, one in Europe (SACEUR) and one in the United States, in part as a political symbol of transatlantic linkage. The Administration wishes to modify SACLANT to a command that works on conceptual issues, such as developing new doctrines and new forces, devising experimental training for such forces, and then putting them into the field. NATO conceived SACLANT during the Cold War to oversee operations in the Atlantic against

⁴ Under the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the EU had sought by 2003 to develop a force of 50,000-60,000 troops, deployable within 60 days, and sustainable for one year.

⁵ French Defense Minister Alliot-Marie, cited in “La création d’une force de réaction rapide reçoit un accueil....,” *Le Monde*, Sept. 26, 2002, p. 3.

the Soviet fleet, and Administration officials believe such a fighting command is no longer necessary.

Enlargement of NATO Membership

The alliance considers enlargement a secondary issue for the summit. At Prague, there is every expectation that NATO will issue invitations for membership to the three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), plus Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Accession negotiations with the candidate states will then follow for several months, in which NATO will require each state to take specific steps before their candidacies will be submitted to member governments for approval. Approximately one year will elapse from that point before all member governments have made a decision on the candidates; each member state must approve a candidate for it to become a member. Under this schedule, candidate states gaining approval would join NATO in early to mid-2004.

Each candidate has pursued an individual Membership Action Plan (MAP) since 1999 to improve democratic structures and military capabilities and procedures. Some Administration officials contend that the Baltic states, across the board, have made the most progress, and that Slovakia has made considerable strides in military improvements. Slovakia's September 2002 elections returned to power key elements of an existing reform government. Slovenia has made significant strides in political and economic structures, but only 40-45% of its public supports NATO membership; Slovenia is likely to hold a referendum on the issue of NATO membership. Bulgaria, with minimal resources, has embraced key concepts of NATO military procedures, but has a government that is increasingly unpopular and is following an uncertain course of political and economic reform; corruption also remains endemic there. Romania may prove to be the most controversial candidate. Bucharest has made strides in military reform, and provided bases and overflight rights for the conflict in Afghanistan, but has a government in which corruption affects policies from border control to procurement to government hiring.

Compared to the three previous successful candidates (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary), the current candidate states have less well-developed political and economic structures, and militaries with a longer road to travel to reach NATO standards. At the same time, new members normally require a decade or more to approach those standards. Officials in allied states tend to describe the Prague round of enlargement as a "political" rather than a strategic round, undertaken above all to enhance stability in Europe by securing governments in NATO, where their paths to strong democracy can be encouraged.

Building Partnerships

The allies are in general agreement that Partnership for Peace (PfP) and other programs meant to improve cooperation with non-member states have been successful, and should be extended and enhanced. Strengthening partnerships will be the third goal of the summit.

The NATO-Russia Council, formed in May 2002, continues to have monthly meetings. Most progress has been made on the issue of joint peacekeeping arrangements between NATO and Russia, with less progress over such issues as stemming proliferation. Some governments complain that the Russian ambassador is an old-style Cold Warrior; others believe that the Russians wish to use the Council to revive an earlier era, in which Washington and Moscow were the two principal interlocutors in resolving key matters of European security. U.S. officials believe that NATO should give the Russians time to be “educated” to the ways of working with an alliance of independent, sovereign states.

Meetings of the NATO-Ukraine working group have often been difficult. The allies view Kiev as having made little progress on the road to democratic and military reform. The Bush Administration believes that, in violation of U.N. sanctions, Ukraine may have sold a Soviet-era early-warning system, called “Kolchuga,”⁶ to Iraq, a step that has led to the suspension of some U.S. aid. The allies pointedly did not invite Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma to the summit.

From a strategic viewpoint, the Administration believes that partnership programs with Central Asian states have borne fruit in the Afghan conflict, where Uzbekistan, above all, has provided important support. U.S. officials now speak of extending the alliance one day into Central Asia. At Prague, the allies may discuss new initiatives to enhance PFP in Central Asia.

Other Summit Issues

Administration officials say that they will attempt to persuade the allies to agree to a declaration that, at a minimum, condemns Iraq’s pursuit of WMD. The Administration will seek to include language that promises unspecified consequences for Iraq unless Baghdad disarms according to the agreement that ended the Gulf War. U.S. officials will not seek pledges for a NATO deployment against Iraq.

Some NATO members, particularly France, wish to turn the NATO-led force in Macedonia over to the EU. Such a move is unlikely, as long as Greece and Turkey block agreement (referred to as “Berlin Plus”) over how the EU might borrow NATO assets, such as the planning staff. Many allies that are EU members do not believe that the Union, without U.S. and NATO participation, could assemble a sufficiently robust force to manage operations in Macedonia. The Administration will press its view that NATO should reduce its forces in Macedonia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Most allies oppose a reduction, and continue to view the Balkans as highly unstable, and in need of both a U.S. and NATO presence.

Debate over the Alliance’s Future

In the background of discussions at the summit are concerns over the alliance’s future. Some Administration officials sharply criticize the allies for their failure to develop forces to respond to today’s threats, and for the cumbersome decision-making procedures that seem to impede steps to make NATO more flexible.

⁶ “Ukraine fails to reassure West on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 6, 2002, p. A13.

Some allies have very different views of the threat to European and allied security. While some states, such as France, Germany, and Italy, see a growing threat from terrorism and proliferation, they believe that the United States is narrowly obsessed with such issues, and that political, diplomatic, and law-enforcement initiatives can manage much of the current threat. They do agree with the Administration that law enforcement measures are a key element in combating terrorism and proliferation, but think that military instruments are less effective. They believe that the Administration is often impulsive in confronting current dangers. They strongly object to President Bush's doctrine of "pre-emptive" or "preventive" action, and almost uniformly oppose using NATO assets in the name of such a doctrine. The Administration's strong support for the Sharon government in Israel and threats against Iraq, in the view of some Europeans, are unduly antagonizing the Islamic world, and are political abrasions undermining allied solidarity. Some European officials talk of following the French practice of developing "hedging strategies," in the event that U.S. policies in the Middle East, viewed by the Europeans as overly aggressive, should fail. Building an EU force to handle crisis management, or developing better relations with Iran, are examples of such strategies.