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The NATO Summit at Prague, 2002

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Summary

In November 2002, the NATO allies met in Prague at the “Transformation” summit in an attempt to define part of the alliance’s mission to combat against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They pledged to obtain the military capabilities to accomplish that mission. Not all allies agree on the implications of such policies. The allies also named seven states as eligible for membership. This report will not be updated. See also CRS Report RL32342, *NATO and the European Union*, and CRS Report RS21659, *Prague Capabilities Commitments*.

The “Transformation” Summit

On November 21-22, 2002, the NATO allies met in a “Transformation” summit in Prague. They sought to culminate allied efforts to change from a military alliance geared for conflict against the Soviet Union to a more flexible alliance with new capabilities for new threats. They opened the door to democratic candidate states and agreed to a forward-looking program for partnership countries able to contribute to security.

The Bush Administration, with the support of then Secretary General George Robertson, had been the driving force for a changed NATO. The Administration sought 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 resisted 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 mass destruction. Administration officials believe that the United States is “at war” today

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

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 have been 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 Iraq war of 2003, undertaken primarily on the mistaken assumption that Iraq was producing WMD, has further damaged U.S. leadership of the alliance.

However, in 2002, the Bush Administration took several actions in an attempt to ensure that the summit would move the alliance towards its own view of mission and capabilities:

- It led efforts to replace the Defense Capability Initiative of 1999, which listed 58 capability goals that NATO should obtain, with a "Prague Capabilities Commitment" (PCC). The PCC lists 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 called heads of government and asked 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.

- At Prague, there was 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.

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 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.

The NRF is now operational and has approximately 18,000 troops. The PCC, however, remains a work in progress. There has been some progress in purchasing or leasing sea lift and even more progress in developing a chemical/biological/radiological defense battalion. Yet there remain serious shortfalls in aerial refuelers and air lift.

Reforming the NATO Command Structure. The Administration was moved forward with an initiative to reduce the number of NATO commands and to streamline the ones that remain. Most controversial was 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 wished to modify SACLANT to a command that would work on conceptual issues, such as developing new doctrines and new forces, devising experimental training for such forces, and then putting them into the field. Ultimately, the allies accepted this proposal, and the new command is now operational.

Enlargement of NATO Membership

The alliance viewed enlargement as a secondary issue for the summit. At Prague, NATO issued invitations for membership to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania.

Each candidate had pursued an individual Membership Action Plan (MAP) since 1999 to improve democratic structures and military capabilities and procedures. Some Administration officials contended that the Baltic states, across the board, had made the most progress and that Slovakia had made considerable strides in military improvements. Slovakia’s September 2002 elections returned to power key elements of an existing reform government. Slovenia had made significant strides in political and

economic structures, but public support for NATO membership had wavered. Bulgaria, with minimal resources, had embraced key concepts of NATO military procedures, but it had a government that was increasingly unpopular and was following an uncertain course of political and economic reform. Corruption also remained endemic there. Romania was the most controversial candidate. Bucharest had made strides in military reform and provided bases and overflight rights for the conflict in Afghanistan, but corruption affected policies of its government from border control to procurement to government hiring.

Compared to the three previous successful candidates (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary), the new candidate states had 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 have tended 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. In the end, NATO accepted the seven states’ candidacies and welcomed them to full membership on March 29, 2004.

Building Partnerships

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

The NATO-Russia Council was formed in May 2002. 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 allied governments 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” in the ways of working with an alliance of independent, sovereign states.

Meetings of the NATO-Ukraine working group have often been difficult. The allies viewed Kiev as having made little progress on the road to democratic and military reform. The Bush Administration believed that, in violation of U.N. sanctions, the now-departed Kuchma government may have sold a Soviet-era early-warning system, called “Kolchuga,”⁴ to Iraq, a step that led to the suspension of some U.S. aid. The allies pointedly did not invite Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma to the summit. However, with the election of a reform-minded government in December 2004, NATO is assertively inviting Kiev to review its interest in membership.

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.

⁴ “Ukraine fails to reassure West on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 6, 2002, p. A13.

Debate over the Alliance's Future

In the background of discussions at the summit were concerns over the alliance's future. Some Administration officials sharply criticized 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.

Some allies continue to 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 in the view of some Europeans, have unduly antagonized 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.