
NATO 2008: Is the Alliance Ready to Face New Challenges? Expectations from Bucharest

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and

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Romania is hosting the 2008 Summit Meeting of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] heads of state and government in Bucharest April 2nd to the 4th. This is the largest summit in NATO history with all—26 members plus 23 members of the Partnership for Peace—attending. At the summit I understand that President Bush is scheduled to meet with Romanian President Traian Basescu, Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, and NATO Secretary General and Summit Chairman, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. I read that Russian President Putin is going to attend the meeting; and NATO has said it hopes [the meeting] will, and I quote, “yield practical results.” Let’s hope it does.

So today our newsmakers are going to preview this largest NATO Summit to date, whether the organization is ready to face new challenges, and what might be expected from the Summit.

Acting Assistant Secretary Volker: I have been speaking a little bit about the NATO Summit in various venues now, so I recognize some of you from other events. So I apologize if I’m being repetitive; but I do think it’s important that we take some time to discuss what we see are the major issues involving NATO right now, what we hope to be accomplishing at the Summit.

The first thing I would want to call your attention to is that NATO has been undergoing a substantial transformation since the end of the Cold War, since the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans in the ‘90s, and since September 11, 2001. There has been a tremendous transformation that has taken place.

Let me give you just an illustration of how that transformation has gone. In 1995, not that long ago, 13 years ago, NATO was an alliance of 16 countries. It had no partners, had not established a Partnership for Peace yet, had never conducted a military operation, had of course done a lot of defense planning, had conducted a lot of exercises, but had never engaged in a military operation where NATO was leading that.

Fast forward that to 2006, 2007, 2008. Here you have a NATO that is now 26 members, having enlarged, brought in ten new members in a couple of waves of enlargement; having partners through the Partnership for Peace in Eurasia; partners in the Mediterranean through the Mediterranean Dialogue, seven of them; 20 in Eurasia; four in the Persian Gulf through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative; [and] working with other global partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, in common endeavors such as the operations in Afghanistan. And NATO, which had never conducted a military operation for most of its history, by 2006 and beyond was conducting multiple operations simultaneously. To name a few of them, obviously running the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] operation in Afghanistan; KFOR [Kosovo Forces] in Kosovo, having a presence in Bosnia still; Active Endeavor which is a NATO counter-terrorism operation in the Mediterranean; delivering humanitarian relief supplies after the earthquake in Pakistan [and] after Hurricane Katrina here in the United States, [and] transporting African Union soldiers to Darfur; so NATO’s role has transformed considerably.

The way I would explain this is that NATO's mission, NATO's purpose, the collective defense of its members, Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, remains unchanged. That is still the fundamental mission of NATO. The way it has to go about that mission in today's world is very different. The world today is characterized by threats that are very different than those that prevailed during the Cold War and immediately after. So we see things such as counter-terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, [and] extremism; and NATO's response to this is therefore very diverse. If you look at the operations that I mentioned, there's a great diversity in the ways in which NATO was handling these challenges, whether it is humanitarian, delivery of humanitarian relief, airlift, standard traditional peacekeeping operations, or very high intensity operations in combat such as in Afghanistan, so a great diversity of tasks that NATO has taken on for the same purposes of the security and defense of its members under the Washington treaty.

So this has been a substantial transformation that has taken place already since '95, since 2001, but there is more to come as well. I would characterize the Bucharest Summit as a further milestone in the continuing transformation and evolution of NATO, touching on these very same areas that I've already mentioned.

To give you some examples, we do expect there to be further invitations to countries to join NATO at the Bucharest Summit. There are three countries in the Membership Action Plan right now—Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia—who are seeking NATO membership. We hope to have the largest possible number of that group invited to join NATO at the Summit itself. We have been working very closely with all of these countries; and they've been working very hard on their political, economic defense reforms. So we'd like to see the strongest candidacies possible from these countries, and they've been working hard at it. And we'd like to see the widest possible enlargement agreed by NATO. So that is one of the issues.

Another is Afghanistan. I mentioned this already, but NATO will be having a meeting that is not just NATO but NATO working with a lot of different partners who are all contributing to the efforts in Afghanistan. President Karzai will be there; the European Union will be there, United Nations including the new Special Representative of the Secretary General Kai Edie, other institutions, other partners and contributors in Afghanistan. I understand the Australian Prime Minister is planning to be there. So this is an opportunity for NATO to mobilize and be a host for a larger international community to focus on our efforts in Afghanistan.

NATO will be articulating a comprehensive approach, a vision for how we need to proceed in Afghanistan, supporting the Afghan government and working with them. Military areas, of course, because we face a very difficult insurgency, and I expect we'll see some announcements of new contributions, but also in civilian areas such as reconstruction, development, governance and supporting the Afghan government, and also in counter-narcotics and other ways.

Again, Bucharest furthering the transformation of NATO, I mentioned the enlargement issues; I mentioned Afghanistan. There are countries who have sought to be part of NATO's Membership Action Plan. That's Ukraine and Georgia. That will be discussed at the Summit itself. We certainly support their aspirations of drawing closer to NATO. It's something we have long supported. They have made official requests now to the Secretary General. These decisions are made by consensus within NATO, and we're in the process of consulting with our allies about those issues right now.

Concerning Kosovo, we face contention in the Balkan region right now as a result of Kosovo's declaration of independence and that being recognized by a large number of European countries, the United States, and others. And NATO has a particular job in Kosovo which is to maintain peace and stability in Kosovo, maintain freedom of movement, protect minorities in Kosovo, [and] protect related institutions; and NATO is fully prepared and capable of doing that job and will make clear at the Summit that it intends to continue to do that.

Finally I should mention missile defense is another area where we believe that NATO will be taking some substantial steps forward.

When I talked about transformation of NATO, it is facing different threats and challenges in a new era with the purpose still on collective defense. Here's an example where we do see an increase in missile threats that can reach the territory of NATO members, and it's perfectly appropriate for NATO to recognize that these threats are growing and to welcome the contribution of the U.S. and others toward a missile defense system that can protect alliance territories and population. And to task further work, what more should NATO be doing to look at alliance territory in the face of growing missile threats in the future? So I think NATO taking some steps forward on the issue of missile defense will also be part of what comes out of the Summit.

Those are the principle issues there. I can answer questions about those and about others that may come up, but let me turn to my Romanian colleague who I know has some things he wants to say about the preparations for the Summit as well.

Ambassador Vierita: Allow me to tell you that the NATO Summit is something which for Romania is extremely important. It's not [only because] Romania is a supporter of sound transatlantic relationship and NATO, but also because we are facing a very important decision for the alliance, for the organization.

For us in Romania, this is the biggest event ever organized by Romania; but I think that it's also the biggest event when it comes to the size of the Summit.

I think 24 heads of state have confirmed their participation. So far [we are expecting] 26 heads of government and 87 personalities having the rank of Ministers.

I'd like to refer briefly to three issues here—[organization], public diplomacy and substance, and deliverables for the Summit.

Organizational[ly], we are [doing] really well; and we are working according to the scheme. There is a huge mobilization of security and law enforcement forces and expensive preparations to provide for a proper level of convenience and comfort for a large number of delegates. We are expecting more than 3,000 delegates and 3,500 journalists to come. I'd like to kindly draw your attention on the second media advisory on the NATO Summit, which is placed outside. The first one was issued in January, but this second one is probably more important.

Public diplomacy and substance, allow me to say that there are a number of events designed to enhance the public profile of the Summit and to raise the awareness of the public opinion. We have in Bucharest the almost traditional, I would say, German Marshal Fund Conference on the transatlantic relationship; and we will have the U.S. Atlantic Council, Young Atlanticist Forum, which has a modern approach involving internet events with the purpose to project the Summit among the younger generation.

Other events in Bucharest [include] the CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies] Conference on Central European Security. We are expecting U.S. and European officials, analysts, [and] business leaders to attend.

Political agenda, as Kurt said, there is high expectation from this Summit; and allow me to tell you some topics which are of importance for Romania. Enlargement process, I would dare to say that this Summit is developing under the, I would say, auspices of the Figure 3. So it is—the Summit lasts three days. We expect three new members to be invited. And it is actually the third Summit after Madrid [and] Prague, where the alliance invited new member states.

Again, when we talk about partnership, again I think I could speak about three levels. First is upgrading NATO's relationship with three new partners in the Western Balkans—Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro have already expressed interest to participate, to develop an intensified dialogue with NATO. I also think that the alliance could give a strong signal to Serbia regarding the readiness of the alliance to cooperate [with] Serbia when Serbia is ready to do it.

[The second level is] the invitation of Georgia and Ukraine to the Membership Action Plan.

[The third is] consolidation of the Euro-Atlantic partnership that continues to represent strategic importance for NATO.

Missile defense [MD] is also very important for Romania based on the principles of solidarity and the indivisibility of security among allies. We would like to see a NATO MD system complementary to the U.S. one, and I think this could also be something that the allies may wish to debate also to convene in Bucharest.

Last but not least, you mentioned the visit of the President of the United States to Romania. We are attaching great importance to this visit, and we hope to have a very successful event in Bucharest.