

# Working Paper

Published by  
Konrad Adenauer Foundation

No. 132/2004

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## **The Divided Alliance**

NATO before the Istanbul Summit

Berlin, June 2004

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Only about three weeks before the tensely awaited NATO summit at the end of June, 2004, in Istanbul, the Atlantic Alliance is confronted with many open questions. The contentious issues are not, as in the past, about particular aspects of decisions, which are already fundamentally decided (as for example the question during the Madrid summit in 1997, about whether three or five new membership candidates should join NATO). Instead, NATO is still ad odds about core issues concerning the future of the Alliance. In hardly any pre-phase of a NATO summit in the last twenty years has there been so much division before the conference.

The causes for this are only partly procedural. The newly successful NATO expansion of seven states to 26 members brings considerably larger requirement for consultation and fine tuning. Additionally, the new NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, has been, up to this point, less decisive than his predecessor Lord Robertson. What is crucial, however, is that the clefs within the Alliance and between both sides of the Atlantic are deeper than the public statements from NATO representatives would lead one to believe. Clear differences govern not only the question of Iraq, but also the future role of international organizations, the value of consultation or the general course of the Atlantic Alliance. These differences present themselves in a number of points for the Summit agenda:

## **The Balkans**

If NATO with its military intervention and its lasting presence seemed to have durably stabilized the area, the newest outbreaks of violence have apparently destroyed such optimistic assessments. On the 18th and 19th of March, 2004, Kosovo Albanians, under the framework of an obviously long planned and coordinated action, mobilized approximately 50,000 violence prone demonstrators who were ready to assault the Serbian population. NATO reacted within a few hours to curb the excesses, but could only keep the destruction within limits. The result was 19 dead, 4360 wounded, 30 destroyed churches and monasteries, and 300 destroyed houses.

This sudden eruption of hate demonstrates the problems NATO has in the region:

- Now as before a political perspective for the Balkans and in particular for Kosovo that is accepted by all sides is missing. While the Kosovo Albanians promote in-

dependence for the region, Belgrade vehemently opposes a division. NATO and the EU try to postpone the problem by advocating, under the buzzword “Standards before Status” i. e. the consensus of standards of democracy, under which the status of Kosovo should later be decided.

- The intervention of NATO (KFOR) and the United Nations (UNMIK) during the insurgences has led to estrangement with the Kosovo Albanians, whose security was up to this point defended by NATO. Instead, the Alliance it is now at least partially accepted by the Serbs as a protective power. In light of upcoming highly charged dates (Presidential election in Serbia in June and Parliamentary election in Kosovo in October 2004) the situation remains tense. New violent occurrences are possible at any time.
- NATO will hardly be able to stop future sudden outbreaks of violence, even if they are planned ahead of time, because the NATO forces there lack early warning and detection capabilities. In fact the Alliance does not have its own intelligence capabilities and there are only a few alliance partners who share their intelligence information about developments in the region with the NATO headquarter in Brussels.
- The United States is currently undermining NATO’s efforts to come to a consensus on the perspectives of potential NATO membership for particular Balkan states. During the celebrations in Washington for the admission of seven new NATO members earlier this year, the Bush administration demonstratively invited three new applicant countries (Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia). This was obviously a demonstration of American ideas regarding future NATO member states, without having consulted its partners.

## **Afghanistan**

In Afghanistan the process of nation building advances only gradually. While Kabul, under the protection of NATO led force ISAF, is considered relatively safe and to a certain degree economically prosperous, the situation outside of the capital is as weak as before. The general goal of international engagement is to strengthen the position of the central government respectively president Hamid Karsai, and step by

step, with the help of the so called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) to export stability in the region (Germany is planning a second PRT near the Chinese border). With the help of small groups of up to 30 people spreading from a PRT in the surrounding area, the stabilizing effects of this approach will be broadened. However, the Alliance has to face many difficulties in its stabilization efforts:

- Although NATO members have agreed to a steady expansion of the Alliance's tasks in Afghanistan, the necessary forces are only hesitantly provided. Often even the basic equipment is lacking, in order to fulfill a planned mission.
- One decisive date will be the Presidential election (the scheduled June election date was delayed until early autumn 2004). The voting registration began on May 1, 2004. It is still open, however, whether and how NATO can secure and support the political process that is part of party building and parliamentary elections.
- The widespread disarmament of the country is proving to be excessively complicated. Under the leadership of Japan there has been some success in collecting weapons (in exchange for a small amount of cash). Even some "Warlords" such as Dostum or Atta have recently declared that they would put a part of their heavy weapons under international observation. Of course this partial disarmament of the "Warlords" must happen simultaneously, so that none of these regional leaders need to fear that his neighbor and rival could retain a larger inventory of weapons and through this change the balance of power.
- A vital question as much for Afghanistan as for NATO is the drug problem. In fact Great Britain has taken over the leadership of the Anti-Narcotics program, but is facing a hardly achievable task with very limited resources. The large scale burning of the Poppy seed crop has only contributed to correcting the overproduction of Heroin and has slowed the falling price of Heroin on the European and American markets. The offer of alternative crop possibilities contains little chance of success, because the proceeds to Afghani farmers from growing poppies is approximately fourteen times greater than that from growing wheat on the same acreage. Also the "Warlords" as well as Afghani governmental circles profit from drug trafficking, which make an effective fight even more difficult. Right now, attempts to secure the borders are being pursued in order to hamper drug exports

out of the country. NATO is providing support and know-how for an effective border control.

## **Iraq**

In the last few months NATO partners have not been overly enthusiastic to the idea of NATO engagement in Iraq, but neither did they seem to be fundamentally opposed. The torture scandal, however, has completely changed the situation. The number of members who are promoting a NATO role in Iraq has drastically decreased and it is completely open whether the Alliance will draft a concrete decision in that direction in Istanbul.

The consequences within and without NATO resulting from the pictures of tortured Iraqis can hardly be overstated. This all the more true since the full dimensions of the scandal are not yet publicly known. In the Arabic world the United States has probably lost any hope of a leadership role for years. But even within NATO the moral and political authority of the USA has dramatically suffered. This has consequences all the way to future military force structures. If it proves to be the true that the torture cases were not the individual acts of misguided soldiers, but was rather approved or even ordered by the top ranks, then the efficiency and self-conception of the American military as a whole is put into question. This is especially explosive because the United States has been pressing for changes in the militaries of NATO members using the US military as a model. This model function is faltering. Even the discussion of the type of military service can be affected in particular NATO countries: there is already the argument that in conscripted armies such occurrences would be inconceivable. This reasoning, however, ignores the fact that the offenders in the Iraqi prisons were almost entirely reservists and not professional American soldiers.

Presently, there are two competing positions regarding the question of a possible NATO engagement in Iraq. Opponents of a NATO forces deployment point to the fact that the Alliance will automatically be sucked into the maelstrom of hate for America in the region. Militant Iraqis would hardly make a distinction between (good) NATO troops and (bad) American soldiers. Even a United Nations mandate or the existence of an Iraqi transition government would probably not change too much. Also, NATO could only achieve little militarily, because NATO responsibility would not lead to a

noticeable increase of Alliance forces. Already 16 of 26 NATO members are present in Iraq - and the remaining ten are showing little willingness to provide soldiers. Furthermore, the question needs to be asked: What could NATO concretely contribute to improve the situation in Iraq?

Proponents respond that a NATO deployment would send an important political signal which would have positive effects. Countries such as Morocco, Jordan and Egypt (who under no circumstances would accept the leadership of an American commander) have already indicated that they might take part in a NATO led mission. Turkey would also be ready to engage militarily within the framework of NATO. The symbolic character of Islamic troops in the framework of the stabilization of Iraq would be exceedingly important. In addition, South American countries that are already represented in Iraq would put their troops under NATO leadership.

In particular the US has been pushing for a NATO role, even if that does not include a large strengthening of troops. Obviously, Washington is recognizing ever more clearly how discredited its troops in the region are. It is open, however, if the US is ready to hand over the entire command to NATO in Iraq. The other alternative, of a regional limited role for NATO (in which NATO takes the command of the Polish sector or combined Polish and British forces), is not acceptable for many European Alliance partners.

## **Partnership for Peace**

One of NATO's classical tasks is the development of partnerships with countries that do not belong (or do not yet belong) to the Alliance. The Istanbul Summit is taking place ten years after the introduction of the program "Partnership for Peace" (PfP). This initiative was developed in 1994 in order to prepare the Eastern European countries who intended to join NATO for membership. Moreover PfP should provide the Alliance with some breathing room in the debate on NATO expansion. In the meantime 10 of the once 24 PfP countries have been accepted into NATO; three further countries (Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia) are official candidates for membership. Today there are partnership treaties with around 20 countries, the majority of whom do not show interest in joining NATO or for the foreseeable future do not come into question for membership. For the process of military and civil transformation of these

countries in Eastern Europe, around the Black Sea and in Central Asia, PfP is providing important contributions and beyond that can contribute to the reduction in regional tensions. NATO's partnership concept needs urgently to be changed from an instrument of enlargement to a mechanism of stabilization and discipline.

The partnerships with NATO, however, which are seen by the recipients as useful and worth protecting (the "discipline function") are costly. Already in 1994 the American government supported the PfP Program, which it initiated, with 100 million dollars (President Clinton announced this within the framework of the so called "Warsaw Initiative"). Other NATO partners got engaged in the following years along these lines. Measured by the future tasks of the PfP and the number of partner countries a similar financial framework would be required.

Finally it must be considered which experiences from PfP could be converted for a stabilization of the Mediterranean in order to more effectively shape the longtime NATO program "Mediterranean Dialogue".

## **Military Capabilities**

With respect to the constant NATO theme of improving the military capabilities of the European Alliance partners the picture is rather mixed. The initiative for strengthening NATO's military capabilities passed at the recent NATO Summit in Prague (The Prague Capabilities Commitment) was not implemented. The main reason was that the majority of the NATO members - with a few exceptions such as France or Great Britain – now as before have not provided the necessary means to implement the stated requirements (Germany especially belongs to this group). The United States is also not without blame in this misery, however. Although America presses the hardest for the development of European forces and for interoperability within NATO, Washington often itself fails to cooperate with just approved projects. The United States still has not, after two years of negotiation, agreed to the technology transfer necessary to implement the common project "Alliance Ground Surveillance System." Because of these sobering experiences, there are no further NATO initiatives to strengthen military capabilities planned for Istanbul, although stock will be taken.

On the other hand, good progress has been made with the rapid response unit, NATO Response Force (NRF), which was also agreed upon in Prague. Even the often difficult alliance partner France is showing an active engagement in the NRF. It is problematic, however, that the USA is not yet contributing troops to this project. Instead Washington increasingly tends to resort to the “toolbox approach” – using NATO capabilities via bilateral treaties with NATO members.

## **Conclusion**

The coming weeks are of decisive importance for the Atlantic Alliance. On the American side the pendulum is swinging to the side of multilateralism and the participation of allies. Washington’s almost desperate bid for support from NATO and the UN is unmistakable. However, this about-turn has not been implemented in the entire administration. Apparently, the Pentagon is still dominated by the idea of maintaining the “pick-and-choose” strategy among allies: prior to any mission it will be decided separately whether and which allies should take part. Some NATO representatives speak of a *Kulturkampf* that is currently taking place in Washington.

The European NATO partners should abstain from any type of satisfaction or even *Schadenfreude* about the American problems in Middle East. Instead the relative weakness of the United States within the Alliance offers the opportunity to put the security relations on a stable foundation again.