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NATO Watch Chicago Summit Media Briefings Series

No.7 'Off the agenda' but on the horizon

Introduction

With the Chicago NATO Summit under way, this is the final briefing of a seven-part series.

Originally planned as an "implementation" summit—to review progress on a series of goals laid out in a new Strategic Concept agreed at the 2010 Lisbon Summit—the alliance is now faced with a wider and more complex range of challenges, many arising from recent geopolitical events. The ante for this summit has been raised with the uprisings in the Arab world, the international financial crisis and the debate over transatlantic burden-sharing becoming major summit issues in their own right.

But in accordance with the parable of the wise builder, will NATO's Chicago house be built on a foundation of rock (and hence decisions taken will likely endure beyond 2012) or on a foundation of sand (with outcomes facing potential future subsidence)? This briefing series has so far previewed the six key items to be discussed in Chicago (see panel).

This final briefing reviews a collection of other issues also fighting for leaders' attention, even though they are unlikely to be on the agenda, including Syria, Iran, NATO enlargement, decision-making within the alliance and the broader question of what NATO's role will be post-Afghanistan.

Syria

NATO has strongly condemned the violence in Syria, but believes that a regional solution to the problem is the best way forward. [Secretary General Rasmussen](#) has repeatedly said that NATO will not become involved, but there are at least three ways in which the alliance could be drawn in:

Political pressure in the United States: [Senator McCain](#) advocating for a US-led intervention in Syria, said it was shameful that NATO has done nothing: "Is it now the policy of NATO that we will stand by as rulers kill their people by the thousands and our alliance won't even discuss what we might do to help stop them?". The [Obama administration](#) has been pressing for a Chapter Seven sanctions resolution at the UN and there have been discussions about creating 'humanitarian corridors'.

An Article V request by Turkey: Prime Minister Erdogan said on 12 April that "there is an [option of invoking Article V](#) of the NATO treaty" - the clause which stipulates that an attack against a NATO member is considered an attack against all members. This would require unanimous support from the rest of the alliance. This seems unlikely, but a NATO-supported buffer zone along the 910 kilometre Syria-Turkey border for sheltering refugees is possible.

WMD proliferation concerns: the [potential loss of government control over some of the country's chemical weapon stockpiles](#) could trigger US and a 'coalition of the willing' to secure the weapons using special operations troops, similar to plans to safeguard chemical munitions in Libya last year.

Iran

As in Syria, NATO's top officials are [on record](#) saying that the alliance has no plans to intervene in Iran. However, the US ambassador to NATO, [Ivo Daalder](#), appeared to leave the door ajar for NATO intervention when he said that international navies will keep the Strait of Hormuz open in the face of Iranian threats to close it. If force is used would this be done as a NATO mission or as a coalition of the willing? Italy has held joint exercises with Israel, which wants closer ties with NATO. Some may see this as a way of restraining a threatened Israeli strike on Iran. President Obama is also under pressure to contain Iran and his 'light footprint' strategy, in which the United States strikes from a distance but does not engage in years-long, debilitating occupations, looks the most likely approach should diplomacy fail. However, most allies will continue to seek non-military solutions.

NATO enlargement

In November 2011 NATO officially named Georgia as an 'aspirant' country, a category that had previously been limited to three Balkan nations: Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro. While the Chicago Summit will reaffirm NATO's 'Open Door' policy and provide further encouragement to those four aspirant countries, it will disappoint the (mainly US) voices that have argued for NATO to use the opportunity to discuss further enlargement. "We hear it said that this will not be an expansion summit," [Senator McCain](#) said. "That is regrettable. We must make it clear to all of these countries, and any other country in Europe that wants to be a part of NATO and can meet the criteria, that the path to membership is open to them". Serbia, Kosovo and Ukraine are also in a second tier of potential future

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members. However, many European member states are less supportive of NATO's continuous expansion, especially in relation to Georgia, not least because of the impact on relations with Russia. The process will continue to be complex and divisive, with the possibility of 'enlargement fatigue' on all sides. Selected nations in the Western Balkans may be invited to join in the near future, but the relationship with Georgia (and other controversial partners) is likely to continue along the lines of: 'you make contributions to NATO missions and we keep making the right noises about your close and valued relationship with us'.

NATO decision-making, transparency and accountability

While the framework of NATO's security policies has changed fundamentally since the end of the Cold War, the way in which those policies have been arrived at has not. Crucial positions are thrashed out between a few key national leaders, their advisors and intergovernmental bureaucracies behind closed doors. These are largely national leaders, pursuing national interests, as defined by their own national elites. [Three reforms are urgently required](#). First, national parliaments in member states need to sharpen their scrutiny of NATO affairs. Second, the democratic mandate of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly needs to be strengthened. Third, NATO should adopt an information openness policy consistent with the access to information laws already in place in the alliance's 28 member countries. NATO needs to become closer to its citizens. This means an updated, more open, transparent and accountable alliance. Unfortunately, there are no member states within the alliance championing these much needed reforms.

NATO after 2014

In two years, NATO's three remaining 'out-of-area' missions (Afghanistan, Kosovo and Somalia) might be over and NATO will again be looking for a role. So what lies ahead for NATO? NATO Watch presents five potential scenarios, not necessarily mutually exclusive:

Wait for next military challenge: Depending on your point of view, Libya was a striking example of NATO as an instrument of 'liberal interventionism', '[responsibility to protect \(R2P\)](#)' or US-led Western imperialism. Some, although few within NATO itself, want that repeated in Syria. Others, again few within NATO, see an alliance role in confronting Iran. But NATO leaders do not want another prolonged stabilization campaign. The Libyan campaign is likely a one-off, although NATO may start to do more to prepare for future R2P and peacekeeping missions. But the penny may have finally dropped: greater security doesn't come from fighting more so-called 'preventive wars'; it comes from fighting fewer of them or none at all.

Turn East (keep Europe safe from Russia): NATO could draw in its horns and stick to its core responsibility to safeguard the freedoms of member states. Russia is no longer an adversary, but neither is it a trusted friend. Many of NATO's easternmost members have been arguing for NATO to refocus on the Russian 'threat' and to re-think the earlier US-led 're-set' with Moscow. Missile defences and NATO exercises, such as [Steadfast Jazz](#) in 2013, which models an invasion of the Baltic region, are unlikely to improve NATO-Russia relations.

Focus on new security challenges (cyber, energy security, terrorism etc): Many of these 'new' security challenges cannot be deterred by the threat of military retaliation, nor will military operations be the most appropriate response. Instead, the emphasis will be on prevention and enhancing resilience. To play a meaningful role in addressing such challenges, NATO will have to better understand the nature of the challenges and build closer ties with other nations and institutions. Having established an [Emerging Security Challenges Division](#), NATO has already begun to act as a forum for discussing these issues and their implications.

Go global: Elements within NATO have been [pressing for a bigger global security role for NATO](#) for some time. Secretary General Rasmussen frequently argues that NATO's main security threats now emanate from new global security challenges. The Obama administration and some NATO governments have been open to this line of thinking. Although the formal declarations and concepts adopted in Lisbon reflect a global perspective, they make clear that the alliance's main activities beyond Europe and Afghanistan will consist largely of dialogue or joint defensive measures with other security institutions under a UN mandate. After Iraq and Afghanistan Europeans and Americans alike have little interest in patrolling the world as 'global cops'.

Rust: With the European economic crisis forcing governments to cut their armed forces and the US turning its attention to Asia, the alliance could enter a period of slow decline. Perhaps NATO doesn't really need to do anything. It is a common security arrangement that acts as an insurance policy against possible aggression. The alliance could rest easy. It doesn't need to be constantly searching for some new purpose. European stability is the goal, and if Europe is stable then it is serving that purpose. Oiling NATO's joints to prevent it from rusting could in itself be a sufficient rationale.