

# Op-Ed: Heading Toward the NATO Summit

April 9, 2012 | [Dr. Jeffrey D. McCausland](#)

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From the perspective of the Obama administration, the last NATO Summit that was held in Lisbon in November 2010 was critically important and was described as a great success in its aftermath. President Obama arrived in office with the goal of rebuilding American alliances, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was the “cornerstone” of that overall effort. This required careful consideration of a number of complex issues. Three issues remain critical for the upcoming Summit that occurs this May in Chicago, and this summit may be even more difficult than the last, the three issues are:

- Relations between the Russian Federation and the United States, as well as NATO, more broadly, and the proposed deployment of a ballistic missile defense;
- A thorough review of the Alliance’s agreed strategy and force commitments to the war in Afghanistan; and,
- The role of nuclear weapons in the Alliance and, in particular, so-called *tactical* nuclear weapons.

One senior administration official described the President’s larger effort in Lisbon as a transition from *NATO 1.0* that was focused on the Cold War and the defense of the Alliance from the threats posed by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact; *NATO 2.0* that was concentrated on a new relationship with the Russian Federation and the successor states of the Soviet Union; to *NATO 3.0* that is focused on new global threats and a true partnership with Moscow. Clearly, the Chicago summit will have elements of both 2.0 and 3.0.

As the administration prepares for the upcoming NATO Summit, the following issues assume an even greater urgency.

## **Afghanistan**

In a speech in Brussels in early February, Secretary of Defense Panetta stressed that the United States and its NATO allies expect to end their combat role in Afghanistan by the end of 2013. This would be followed by a continued training/advisory role with Afghan forces as well as special operations missions. Obviously, this has caused a growing focus on the readiness of Afghan security forces as the United States and its NATO allies begin to shift more security responsibility to their Afghan counterparts in the coming year. Many have recently argued that this process should be accelerated following increased tensions between Afghanistan and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) after the burning of the Koran by American Soldiers and the

massacre of 16 Afghan civilians by an American sergeant in Kandahar province.

Still, at this juncture, there are many reasons for concern. The cost for the Afghan Security Forces (both Army and police) was \$9.8 billion last year and will be \$11.8 billion this year. Of these costs, 90 percent are paid by the United States, 6 percent by Afghanistan, and 4 percent by allies. It is estimated that the sustainment cost for the Afghan Army at its current proposed strength of 352k is \$6-8 billion annually. There is, however, a proposal to downsize the Afghan Army from 352k to 230k. This would reduce sustainment costs to about \$4 billion annually. But even this lower number exceeds the total annual budget of the Afghan government.

Senior American officials have publicly admitted that only 1 percent of Afghan units are now deemed capable of operating independently. Only 42 percent are rated as “effective with advisers,” which is the second highest rating that Western forces give. Still, there is little question that Afghan forces depend heavily on the United States and ISAF for medical evacuation, airstrikes, intelligence, etc. Many officials remain openly worried about high desertion rates, corruption, and drug use among Afghan forces.

This situation has been further complicated by attacks on ISAF soldiers that have accelerated in the aftermath of the Koran burning and the killings in Kandahar. Even prior to this sad event, 10 percent of all ISAF casualties were due to fratricide. In the aftermath of the violence, senior American officials have publicly reaffirmed their commitment to the agreed Afghan strategy. Still, the administration may be facing a difficult choice. The demonstrations in Afghanistan show the population’s clear frustration with the continued presence of American and ISAF troops. This might encourage those in the West who are pushing for an accelerated withdrawal. Meanwhile, ISAF will find it increasingly difficult to provide Afghan forces with the effective training and mentorship that is critical if Afghans are to shoulder the security responsibility for their nation in the coming year.

## **NATO-Russia Relations**

Russia agreed at the Lisbon Summit to allow the transit through its territory of NATO supplies enroute to Afghanistan. This has become increasingly important in the last few months based on the decision by Pakistan to close NATO’s supply lines that crossed its territory. Moscow also has significant influence over many of the Central Asian republics that are important to providing logistical support to the NATO forces deployed to Afghanistan.

Though an agreement was reached in Lisbon concerning initial cooperation between Russia and NATO over ballistic missile defense, little actual progress has been made. It remains a very contentious issue between the Alliance and Moscow. Several questions are important, particularly in the aftermath of the re-election of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation. Will he, in fact, attend the Summit? Can any steps be taken in Chicago or before to improve relations with Moscow which have seriously deteriorated over the past year? Putin actually accused the United States of

attempting to interfere in the Russian election campaign, and the Obama administration delivered a very tepid note of congratulations upon his re-election.

Furthermore, the cost of the ballistic missile shield for Europe has been estimated to be \$1.5 billion over 10 years. It is difficult to see where European members of the Alliance will find funding for this effort, absent making additional reductions in funding for their current forces and while continuing to shoulder support for the Afghanistan mission. Consequently, the Obama administration must not only find an accommodation with Moscow over this issue, but it could also be faced with a dilemma—either slow the deployment of antiballistic missiles or convince an ever increasingly skeptical Congress that the United States should bear this financial burden largely alone.

### ***Tactical Nuclear Weapons***

Many European experts openly criticized the Alliance for not addressing the issue of the future of “tactical nuclear weapons” (often referred to as “non-strategic nuclear weapons”) in Lisbon. The Alliance still retains roughly 150-250 forward deployed American tactical nuclear weapons based in five European NATO countries (Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Turkey), and three of these states (led by Germany) had openly called on the Alliance to review this deployment prior to Lisbon. This reopened a long-standing debate concerning the role of nuclear weapons and the Alliance.

Some experts have suggested that NATO’s failure to address tactical nuclear weapons as part of current and future defense planning suggests that NATO’s nuclear declaratory policy is not properly aligned with current American thinking as described in the 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review*. The Alliance did agree at Lisbon to conduct a “Defense and Deterrence Posture Review,” and the results are to be presented in Chicago. This effort has included all Alliance members as well as France. It is intended to describe the essence of Alliance deterrence in the 21st century and the role of nuclear weapons.

This is an equation with multiple variables, each affecting the other, and tactical nuclear weapons are only a part of that equation. For nearly 5 decades, these weapons were a crucial link binding Europe’s future to the American promise to wage nuclear war to defend common Allied security. It will be difficult, but not impossible, to find greater clarity on this one issue. But it is imperative to do so, not only because of the importance of nuclear weapons themselves, but because the dilemmas raised by the presence of tactical nuclear weapons are central to the question of NATO’s future as an Alliance.

As President Obama prepares to host NATO leaders in his hometown, the agenda for this summit is both large and imposing. Serious questions about the future of NATO were raised in Lisbon and now they must be answered in Chicago.

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