



Bucharest: NATO and the Future of the Transatlantic Alliance

Kurt Volker, Acting Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs

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Acting Assistant Secretary Volker: Thank you, Nile. It's great to be here. And thank you Liam, it's a pleasure to be here with you. Liam has been a good friend and is a very strong proponent of close U.S.-UK cooperation on defense issues and a strong proponent of NATO, so it's a pleasure to be here with you.

I don't have the silver tones of Liam's Scottish accent so I have to make up for it in other ways, I suppose. One of them perhaps, is just a little bit of humor.

But I think one of the things that I've noticed, I see a lot of friends here from other places, places I've been around town talking about the NATO Summit, so I have to apologize if you're hearing the same thing for the fifth or sixth time. But the rule with NATO when you're there as an ambassador with 26 people around the table, the rule has always been that well, it goes around all the way until everyone has spoken once because even though maybe everything has been said, not everyone has said it. [Laughter]. I think the rule in Washington is we may have heard the same thing before, but we haven't said it in every venue, so it's important that we go around and make sure that we touch all of the different places from the German Marshall Fund to SAIS to Council of Foreign Relations and now to Heritage. So I'm grateful to Nile for having me here.

I may be a traditionalist in one sense. When we talk about NATO and the future, NATO's mission to me still remains very much the same mission that NATO has always had, which is the collective defense of its members. That's what it's there for. What's changed is the environment in which NATO needs to go about doing this. We don't face the Soviet threat that Nile described in the heart of Europe in the same way that we did back in the '80s or before; but we do face threats like terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, rogue states, and NATO has to deal with these new kinds of challenges. And in order to assure the security and defense of its members today, it needs to be acting in very different ways.

NATO has gone through a period of remarkable transformation to address this changing security environment. If I give you a snapshot in time from 1995 and a snapshot today, I think we can illustrate where some of these differences are.

In 1995 and before, NATO had 16 members, had no partners anywhere in the world, had never conducted a military operation. By 2006, 2008, pick your date, NATO has 26 members, over 20 partners in Europe and Eurasia, seven in North Africa in the Mediterranean Dialogue, four in the Persian Gulf through the Istanbul Initiative, others that are with us in Afghanistan, global partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan. And NATO is conducting operations vigorously, is running the ISAF operation in Afghanistan, remains committed to leading the KFOR operation in Kosovo, has run operations in Bosnia, Macedonia in the past, helping in Darfur transport African Union troops, even delivered humanitarian relief in Pakistan after the earthquake in Pakistan. So NATO has taken on an operational role that enhances the security of its members in very different ways than was the case during the Cold War.

So this is the transformation of NATO that we've seen over the past decades.

If I can turn to the Bucharest Summit, what we've seen there is a furthering of this transformation process. We've seen invitations to new members -- Albania and Croatia; and a commitment to Macedonia; we've seen enhancement of partnerships, and particularly with Ukraine and Georgia. Here I think NATO took an extraordinary step by saying that we believe that Ukraine and Georgia will be members of NATO. They will become members of NATO. This is a commitment from NATO to those two countries. A far-reaching statement coming out of NATO. More than we've done in past rounds of enlargement to make such a bold assertion at this point in time.

In addition, NATO issued a statement on Afghanistan that articulated the alliance's shared vision and long-term commitment to security, reconstruction, development in Afghanistan. It outlined a couple of key pillars of areas where we need to work more effectively. Strengthening the military commitments, training the Afghan military and police, working more closely with those Afghan security forces, strengthening reconstruction and development, and tying that more closely as well so we have better coordination between the military and civilian components, fighting the narcotics problem in Afghanistan, and strengthening governance in Afghanistan. These are all parts of what NATO articulated as a strategy together with the other members of ISAF at the Summit meeting.

We did see new contributions announced at Bucharest as well. France announced it would be contributing forces, a battalion into the east of Afghanistan where there is a significant combat role. This will give some flexibility to the commanders to move other forces around so we'll also see some strengthening in the south. We've seen other countries announce additional contributions as well, whether that's the Czech Republic or Georgia or Azerbaijan, others. I apologize if there are those who I may have left out -- Poland. There are other contributions that have been made at Bucharest, as well.

NATO also reiterated its commitment in Kosovo, so that it will continue to provide leadership of KFOR, to keep KFOR in place, to provide security, stability within Kosovo. And in doing so, to contribute to freedom of movement and the protection of minorities and religious sites in Kosovo, to create the conditions whereby a Kosovo government can succeed in the implementation of the Ahtisari Plan where the protections for the minorities in Kosovo can go forward.

NATO also took an important decision on missile defense, where in the past we've talked about feasibility studies and looking at what the potential threats are and what the potential responses are. NATO took this a bit further at Bucharest, and said that we recognize that there are growing ballistic missile threats out there. We recognize the substantial contribution that the U.S. is making through its missile defense program to the protection of alliance territories and populations. We tasked the North Atlantic Council, NATO's decision-making body, to do further work, to look at how we can add on to this U.S. missile defense program for further protection of all alliance territory. And we reiterated our desire to work together with Russia because missile defense is not targeted against Russia, but rather for enhancing the security of NATO against stray missile threats, and we'd very much like to work together with Russia to protect against these missile threats.

I should say one more word about enlargement. I touched on Georgia and Ukraine, and I touched on Albania and Croatia. We were disappointed that we were not able to extend an invitation to Macedonia at the Bucharest Summit. The issue of the name of Macedonia has been a subject of some international disagreement for some time. Greece and Macedonia have different views on this. We have tried to facilitate the negotiating process led by the UN. We believe that's very important. We do not think that this issue should have prevented Macedonia from getting an invitation, and NATO did make clear that it believes Macedonia is ready and as soon as the name issue is resolved then the NAC can go forward with a decision to issue an invitation. Therefore, in the wake of Bucharest, we hope that negotiations resume quickly and that a solution is found quickly so that we can proceed with an invitation to Macedonia, as well.

Liam spent a lot of time talking about capabilities. When you think about the transformation of NATO that I described -- enlargement, partnerships, the operational roles, the diversity of the operational roles, the geographic spread of the operational roles that NATO has taken on -- then clearly there's a lot of capability development that needs to take place, has already taken place to some degree but needs to continue.

I'll mention a few things that NATO has done but there's much more that's needed, and I'll come to some of the challenges in just a moment.

One thing we did at the Riga Summit was to launch an initiative where a consortium of countries could buy strategic airlift -- C-17s. This is critical because it's a gap that NATO has faced until now, how to get forces and equipment to the places where they're needed.

A current gap that we face within NATO is tactical airlift. Helicopters that have the right equipment that are able to deploy, sustain themselves in the field, and contribute to the operations. So, doing further work on helicopters is something that we also worked on at Bucharest.

NATO Response Force was a creation launched at the Prague Summit in 2002. We're looking at ways in which we can sustain the contributions to the Response Force, and actually use them. If we can break it into deployable pieces or find other ways that the Response Force can contribute to the effectiveness of NATO's operations today. It's important to have a reserve capability so that for contingencies that arise NATO has the ability to respond, but we can't just be tying up the resources in something that stays on the shelf. So we've got to make it useable, as well.

We've created a coordination mechanism for special operations forces, something that NATO had never done before the efforts in Afghanistan, and having worked together with allies, including special operations forces, we discovered a lot of potential for synergy, for joint training, for working together, and NATO is developing this special operations initiative, including on the ground in Afghanistan with the coordination center in theater.

Now, there are challenges ahead, there are serious challenges facing NATO, and this is what I think is going to be occupying us for the years ahead. Liam has touched on most of these, and I'll just reiterate a few things that he said.

Principally, I think a major challenge is that European publics do not currently see the well-being and the prosperity and the political development and democracy that is enjoyed within Europe as intimately linked to the investment and security in defense. I believe that it is intimately linked. I don't think you can have the sustainment of the kind of prosperity and well-being that's enjoyed in Europe or in North America without the investment in security. So we have to come back to that.

I think part of the reason is because the nature of the threats has changed. When it was the Soviet Union, when it was the Cold War, certainly we argued over defense spending then too. But it was a clear rationale and a clear threat. We face a much more diverse nature of threats today when we talk about terrorism, proliferation, the consequences of failed states. I think we need to sharpen our focus on what those threats are and how we respond to them and continue the investment.

A second element that I think is critical is the reinforcement of the idea that security still depends upon transatlantic cooperation, that it is still the United States and Canada and Europe that together form a single transatlantic, democratic community that is challenged by the same threats in much the same ways, and where we'll only really be effective in addressing them if we are addressing them together. So reinforcing the investment in security and reinforcing the commitment to a transatlantic partnership I think are two of the critical challenges ahead.

Then we face a lot of other specific challenges as we go through. Liam talked about ESDP. We need an ESDP that works. We need one that is both effective for contributing capabilities for NATO operations where NATO is taking the lead; able to be used by the EU if NATO is not involved; but with no competition or duplication of leadership; no pulling apart into separation between Europe and the rest of NATO. We need a closer integration, and we need an ESDP that can become a supportive part of an effective NATO and a transatlantic link.

We face other challenges, as well. I'm sure we'll come to many of them in the Q&A, so I'll pause here and thank you for having me.

[Applause].

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