



Report of the 2003 Security and Defence Forum NATO Briefing Tour

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The 2003 SDF NATO briefing tour was an unqualified success. The timing of the tour could not have been better, coming in a period marked by NATO's changing role in international affairs generally, and more specifically, the recently announced NATO involvement in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan playing a leadership and command and control role, and the logistical role played supporting the Polish mission into post-war Iraq. Throughout the tour these recent initiatives were a primary topic of discussion. This report will briefly summarize the tour noting the major topics discussed at each briefing – SHAPE, NATO, Canadian Ambassador to the EU, European Institute of Public Administration, and the Multinational AWACS Component based at Geilenkirchen, Germany.

SHAPE Briefing

The briefing conducted at SHAPE was a general overview of the NATO alliance, including a brief synopsis of the alliance's history, organizational structure and military chain of command, and the changing role of the alliance in international affairs, marked by the new strategic concept adopted by the alliance and its capabilities initiatives and organizational redesign aimed at making the alliance a credible and capable military force in today's changed strategic and security environment.

It should be noted that the briefing made clear that crisis management is now a primary mission of the alliance, that is to undertake non-article five missions (in alliance parlance) and that the area of operations of the alliance has now gone "global" after September 11. This was a consistent theme throughout the tour and was also noted at the NATO briefings, as is reported below.

Building on the crisis management role of the alliance, the capabilities focus of the current SACEUR (and capability development was his main focus) has been upon building high readiness forces with an expeditionary capability. A primary project involved in this initiative has been the development of a high-readiness headquarters capability. Three such HR-HQ's should be designated within the next two years. The other main project within this area has been the development of the NATO Response Force, NRF. The NRF is envisioned as a globally deployable, high-readiness, capability based, full spectrum force, deployable at less than five days notice with a standing HQ capacity capable of undertaking Peace Enforcement, strike, and combat evacuation missions among others. This force is the centerpiece of the new, redesigned NATO organization. It was stated that to be credible, NATO requires rapidly deployable forces. It was also noted that these forces are designed to act either preemptively or preventively to mitigate threats.

The briefing closed with a comment on the current challenges facing NATO. Included in the list were new emerging threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of WMD, the interoperability gap between the US and other members of the alliance, and the related problem of shrinking defence budgets, which adversely affects European (and Canadian one could say) attempts to keep up with the developments in the United States. A subject that was discussed in the briefing but not included in this list specifically, but that could easily be listed as a current challenge is managing EU/NATO relations with the developing role of the EU in conflict management initiatives including the deployment of military forces. This challenge was specifically mentioned within the context of the coming departure of secretary-general Robertson. It was noted that the alliance requires dynamic leadership at the top to manage EU/NATO relations. There have been agreements aimed at coordinating the role of the two organizations related to conflict management. At the Copenhagen summit, an agreement was signed outlining EU use of NATO assets and access to NATO intelligence and coordinated operational planning. In this respect, SHAPE will act as a coordinating body between NATO and the EU with the DSACEUR, who is always a European, acting as the commander of the EU forces.

Overall, the SHAPE briefing was informative and served as an excellent introduction to the tour and many of the issues on the table. Yet, it should be said that the briefing, on the whole, could have been more future-oriented and focused upon contemporary issues if it had not included the section on the history of NATO. The discussion was also hampered by the fact that the discussants were public information officers and weren't intimately involved with policy development.

NATO Briefings

The NATO briefings were by far the most detailed, most frank, and most interesting of the tour. Interestingly the visit took place just as the comments by Rumsfeld regarding Belgian Law at the NATO ministerial meetings were causing quite an uproar in the international press. The main topics of the briefings were: the Fight against Terrorism, by Jamie Shea; "Canada's Role in NATO from the Political/Military Perspective" by Charles Court, Deputy Permanent Representative and Col. Richard Hatton, Deputy Military Representative, Canadian Joint Delegation; Trans-Atlantic Relations by Michael Ruhle, Head, Policy Planning and Speechwriting Section, Political Affairs Division; the Impact of Enlargement on NATO by Robert Weaver, Euro-Atlantic Partnership and Co-operation Section, Political Affairs Division; and NATO after Prague by James Appathurai, Policy Planning and Speechwriting Section, Political Affairs Division.

Jean-Paul Olivier opened the day with some interesting comments regarding the changing role of NATO and the need to change NATO's public image from that of a cold war institution. He suggested that the member states need to make efforts to promote NATO themselves.

He also suggested that with NATO enlargement the principle of consensus, one of the fundamental principles underlying the structure and history of NATO as a political and military alliance, would remain even as the number of member countries jumps to twenty-six. Throughout the tour this theme was consistently mentioned – showing the strong commitment within the organization to maintain the consensus rule. One can but wonder, however, what the implications of trying to maintain a consensus-based decision-making structure in today's more complex security environment will have for NATO's conflict and crisis management role. Olivier suggested that while the consensus rule can slow regular decision-making processes, crisis decision-making and the necessity of quick decisions often allows the consensus approach to work more efficiently than in non-crisis periods.

Discussing NATO's conflict management role, Olivier noted that NATO had gone global and that out of area operations are now assured. He also suggested that this change in the role and focus of the alliance was a case of major change through incremental steps. Mentioning various out of area operations that are upcoming, Olivier noted the ISAF deployment and the support to the Polish contingent in Iraq. He also suggested that the idea for a NATO organized peacekeeping force in the Middle East in support of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process had been floated without any significant opposition, though nothing yet had been officially stated.

Jamie Shea reinforced that NATO has gone global in his presentation on the fight against terrorism – anywhere when required. He suggested that in today's environment one must deal or have a role countering terrorism; if not, you're not relevant. Accordingly NATO is transforming itself to play a role in countering the terrorist threat. He noted that NATO has developed an operational concept to counter terrorist threats and adopted it at the Prague summit – a quick doctrinal leap - which shows the capability of the organization to change and develop rapidly. He cautioned however that NATO was not an all-source provider, and that other institutions, namely the EU and the UN, would and are playing a major role ensuring international cooperation against terrorism.

Main problems that remain to be solved outlined by Shea include: the need to establish a set of circumstances where action can and should be taken - one wonders if the ICISS report findings recently

presented by P.M. Chretien could play a role in establishing such norms; EU/NATO cooperation and the need to avoid duplication; determining the role of NATO and how much the alliance should focus on either countering terrorism or performing peace support operations (Shea noted that NATO as an organization has built up substantial expertise in performing complex robust missions; and whether consensus based decision-making structures are suitable to counter murky and elusive terrorist threats when states lack a common approach toward terrorism.

One interesting point that came out of the discussion following Shea's presentation was that nowhere in NATO is there a peacebuilding planning/civilian liaison committee. This may be an organizational element that will be added as NATO becomes increasingly active in peace support operations. I would suggest that it should. Interestingly in the later presentation by Simon Duke it was noted that the EU has a group in its military/crisis management organization responsible for NGO/peacebuilding liaison and cooperation with a pre-mission planning role.

Charles Court suggested that NATO participation in PSO's allows national contributions to be made more easily and that the Canadian contribution to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan was designed in part to help push NATO's role in peace operations forward. However, he also noted that NATO is now becoming involved in more complex tasks and that the structure of NATO, its operations and processes must also change to meet the demands of the new strategic environment and the set of tasks facing the organization.

Ruhle reinforced the position that NATO now has a global focus especially when related to its counter-terrorism role. He also noted that the Prague Capabilities Initiative (PCC) was made in preparation for coalition warfare with the U.S. in high-intensity conflict operations. He also reiterated the need for a new strategy for the alliance suited to the new strategic/security environment, and noted that the Partnership for Peace program is becoming much more focused upon the Caucasus region due to the deployment of a NATO mission in Afghanistan.

Apart from this development, he noted that the alliance has no long-term vision or plan to guide where the alliance is going. There is no long-term planning cell within the alliance to guide the process of change within the organization. Jamie Shea noted in his presentation that the alliance requires some form of political vision to guide its policy. This may be problematic in an alliance that will have a full-load of twenty-six members and operate on a consensus-based model of decision-making. In such a system having a strong Secretary-General to guide high-level change and direction in alliance policy probably becomes essential if the development of the alliance is to be managed effectively and efficiently. Significant levels of cooperation and lobbying among member states over the direction of the alliance will probably be required to deal with this issue.

James Appathurai focused his talk around the theme of alliance change, specifically discussing NATO and its mission as it is developing after the Prague Conference. Discussing NATO/EU relations, he pointed out that the EU is increasingly moving to out-of-area operations as well, and becoming more involved internationally, for example in the Middle East peace process.

He also noted that the primary role of the alliance is likely to be in the conduct of robust peacekeeping for lack of any other international organization able to fulfill that role. He suggested that war-fighting was a less likely NATO mission and that if such a mission was to be undertaken it would more likely be conducted within a "coalition of the willing" framework.

Discussing the concept of alliance change, James mentioned that he faced a problem when trying to explain decisions and issues to the public related to a more complex security and strategic environment. How does one compose simple messages to explain highly complex issues? This is an essential problem that must be

overcome if public support is to be built and maintained, and a problem that confronts the Canadian Forces and domestic defence decision-makers as well.

Briefing by the Canadian Ambassador to the EU

Ambassador Kinsman conducted his talk in a fairly informal fashion hitting a large number of issues ranging from the EU's role in international conflict management to relations with the U.S. and economic integration between North America and the European Union. His remarks regarding the latter were quite interesting when he noted that it is Foreign Direct Investment and not trade that matters when measuring economic relationships and levels of interdependence. He suggested that with the prevailing levels of FDI between Europe and the United States, sanctions are no longer a viable measure; imposing sanctions results in significant economic consequences for oneself as well as the intended target.

Discussing the international response to terrorism and to the division between the U.S. and Europe over the Iraq war, the ambassador noted that the differences revolved around responses and approaches and not value, and suggested that the rest of the world needs to find ways to make multilateralism work for the U.S. He also pointed out that the main issue facing the international community is failed states, not rogue states, and that to deal with this problem requires viable states, infrastructure and institutions, with good information and intelligence to guide decision-making.

Regarding Canadian relations with the European Union, he noted that Canada must boost its share of FDI in NAFTA, focusing on science-based export oriented investment (of which the U.S. is getting the lion's share currently). In order to do this, according to the ambassador, Canada requires a good "brand name," and a focus on excellence reflecting the development of "clusters of excellence" in the Canadian economy. Such a profile is a necessary precondition to drive heightened levels of FDI.

Briefing at the European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht

At the European Institute of Public Administration, David Duke presented his talk in two parts; the first titled "the Evolution of CFSP and ESDP: rhetoric and reality," and, "the Convention and external relations: back to the future." Overall Duke's presentation focused on a description of the development of the "second pillar" of the EU (the other two being economic integration and judicial and police cooperation), and the organizational structures that have been put in place by the EU in the security and defence sector.

Describing the CFSP instruments that are in place (as specified in the Treaty on European Union), Duke noted that conflict prevention is a key component included in the reports of heads of missions, which include conflict indicators. Provision is also made for early warning through the Commission committees.

The issue of EU and NATO relations and discussion over the role of the two organizations in the security sector was also discussed. Duke noted that the Joint Declaration on European Defence (1998, St. Malo, France) stated, "the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises..." He explained that the inclusion of the term "autonomous" created an element of obscurity as to the role of the EU relative to that of NATO, allowing the maintenance of the divide, at the political/diplomatic level, between European states with an atlantacist focus and those with a more independent European focus. Interestingly the third paragraph of the same declaration notes the context of the statement and the EU role is to take action "where the Alliance (NATO) as a whole is not engaged." This wording may give a right of first refusal to NATO – certainly atlantacist states would support this right. It is also important to note that the declaration calls for the creation of credible and capable European military forces, and in this respect is in line with the NATO focus on creating a credible and capable European military arm through the PCC initiative. At Helsinki in 1999, the EU member states committed themselves, by 2003, to being able to deploy within 60 days, 50-60,000 persons capable of the full range of Petersburg tasks sustainable for one year. So far this goal has not been met, hampered by an over-reliance on conscript based forces causing a shortage of deployable personnel.

However, one important element of the EU strategy, which perhaps is not receiving as much focus through the NATO side of the equation, is the provision and organization of non-military conflict management mechanisms to coordinate civilian means and resources, and to make them effective acting in parallel with military action. At the mission planning and management level, through the European Council, the EU has also created a coordination mechanism to ensure civil-military cooperation and joint pre-mission planning, in the Crisis Management Centre. In this respect the EU is probably ahead of NATO (and if criticism of the Iraq pre-mission planning is warranted, the US as well), in terms of coordinating action in complex peace support operations between military and civilian mission components.

Perhaps the most interesting part of Duke's presentation was his description of the "lead and framework nation concepts" designed as the two organizational concepts for EU missions. The main difference between the two concepts is that in framework operations, the EU has overall political and strategic control whereas, in the lead nation model the EU has no political role as a whole and political and strategic control is exercised by the lead nation, including the structure and design of the intervening force. Provision has also been made for the inclusion of non-European NATO members to contribute to EU conflict management actions. Duke mentioned that the current Congo mission, the first EU out-of-area operation was being conducted under the lead nation framework with France acting as the lead nation, and that in the short term, the lead nation model was the more likely structure for the conduct of EU operations.

Briefing from the Canadian Contingent to the E-3A AWACS Component, Geilenkirchen, Germany

The final days briefings at the NATO Early Warning E-3A component, an operational unit, were a good final counterpoint to the more theoretical and strategic level discussions held throughout the previous days. However, even in the discussion held at the unit, the wider themes discussed during previous briefings came to the fore. For example, one of the main roles for the unit is counter-terrorism and that role was mentioned as a current operational focus. In fact, the unit deployed to North America post-Sept. 11 to assist U.S. AWACS forces in controlling U.S. airspace, the first time the unit had deployed to North America. The unit is also increasing its focus on offensive operations contrary to the historical focus on defensive operations during the cold war and in the early post-cold war period. The Kosovo air campaign broke new ground for the unit. However, the defensive role is not yet antiquated as the component deployed to Turkey as part of the NATO commitment to defend that country before and during the latest Iraqi conflict – another Canadian contribution to the war in Iraq that received little attention in national media.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the briefing given by the Canadian contingent was the discussion surrounding the organization of the unit and the division of roles and responsibilities within the unit's hierarchy between the various national contingents; the AWACS component is one of the few truly multinational units within NATO. Interestingly positions within the component are determined by the ranking of monetary contributions to the unit. Since the U.S. pays the most, an American general is in overall command. The Germans have the deputy commander's slot, as they are the second highest contributor and provide the airbase facility. Canada is the third largest contributor, which gives us command of the first operational squadron. One of the issues brought forward by the contingent commander was whether it is cost-effective and worthwhile for Canada to contribute so heavily to the unit in order to maintain a significant level of influence. He detailed how the Canadian contribution at the current level allows access to information, conferences, planning, and technological modifications that perhaps a lesser contribution would not allow, noting how the Canadian budget must be used strategically to ensure it is being spent wisely. Is this a capability and a cost/effective capability/role for Canada to have?

Summary Comment

Overall the SDF briefing tour was an outstanding experience. Informative and, for the most part detailed briefings were conducted throughout by speakers who were often willing to cut through the “official lines” to give an inside view into their area of expertise and experience. Moreover the presenters were more than willing to answer questions to the best of their abilities and viewed the briefings as a worthwhile initiative from their perspective.

I would highly recommend future tours conducted along similar lines to anyone interested in conflict management and the policy and politics surrounding NATO and the EU and their operation in international affairs. The tour provided an inside look into the rapidly transforming security and defence architecture of the North Atlantic arena, a transformation that will, no doubt, have repercussions on a global scale.