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The NATO Summit at Bucharest, 2008

Paul Gallis, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

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CRS Report for Congress

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Paul Gallis
Specialist in European Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

NATO held a summit in Bucharest, Romania, April 2-4, 2008. The summit did not become the occasion to adopt major new ideas or initiatives. A “Strategic Vision” paper on Afghanistan clarified several issues but did not lead to a greater sharing of the combat burden among NATO governments. Croatia and Albania, but not Macedonia, were invited to begin accession negotiations for membership. In a contentious debate, neither Georgia nor Ukraine were admitted to the MAP process. The debate over missile defense led to the consolidation of an evolving allied position. See also CRS Report RL34415, *Enlargement Issues at NATO’s Bucharest Summit*, coordinated by Paul Gallis. This report will be updated as events warrant.

Background

NATO held a summit in Bucharest, Romania, April 2-4, 2008. The allies face an enduring challenge in their effort to stabilize Afghanistan, and clarified elements of the mission there. The allies decided to begin negotiations to admit Croatia and Albania, but a dispute over the formal name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)¹ with Greece was not resolved, and Macedonia’s possible accession was postponed. A last-minute initiative by President Bush to persuade the allies to admit Georgia and Ukraine to the Membership Action Plan (MAP) failed.

NATO’s Mission

A principal theme of the summit was to be the clarification of NATO’s mission., but no definable progress was made. The allies will not begin drafting a new “Strategic Concept,” the guideline for NATO’s operation, until next year. The alliance’s role and the sharing of the burden for such objectives as defense against terrorism and proliferation of WMD, stabilization of countries and regions important to allied security, and

¹ The country’s name is in dispute. It will henceforth be referred to as “Macedonia” for the sake of simplicity only. The United States government recognizes the country by its official name, the “Republic of Macedonia.”

peacekeeping are issues likely to be more fully debated in the drafting of a Strategic Concept. NATO has found difficulty in drawing the line between missions that directly threaten their security, and ones that require a less robust intervention, or that can be left to other international organizations. Some allies also wish to discuss the strategic ramifications of enlargement in that coming debate.

Afghanistan. Above all, NATO's effort to stabilize Afghanistan is proving a test of allied capabilities and political will. Under a U.N. mandate, NATO has an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan that is simultaneously combating a resurgent Taliban and attempting to stabilize the country through an ambitious rebuilding program.² Some allies have proven reluctant to send combat forces to engage the Taliban, and have their forces instead in more secure areas of the country. This reluctance has led to sharp criticism by allies, such as the United States, Canada, Britain, the Netherlands, and Denmark, which have suffered casualties to their forces that are frequently engaged in combat. The allies now have approximately 42,000 troops in Afghanistan, as well as 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). PRTs are the core of NATO's effort to rebuild Afghanistan by constructing schools, roads, and hospitals, and urging national and local leaders to improve governance. A continuing problem is Afghanistan's narcotics trade, which continues to expand, and to fuel the Taliban insurgency as well.

The allies agreed to a "strategic vision" statement on Afghanistan. The statement commits the allies to remain in Afghanistan for an extended period; improve governance in the country through greater training of Afghan officials, including the police; pursue a "comprehensive approach" to stabilization that will include combat and economic reconstruction; and take initiatives to improve relations with Afghanistan's neighbors, particularly Pakistan, to counter extremism and the narcotics industry.³ The document did not commit governments to accept a greater share of the combat burden. France pledged to send 700 more combat troops to eastern Afghanistan, and several governments agreed to send more forces, but in small numbers.

New Capabilities Against New Threats

A second theme of the summit was discussion of the means by which NATO might counter emerging threats that often escape a purely military response. In spring 2007, a cyber attack against Estonia's government and banking system seriously disrupted them for a period of time. The Estonian government states that it traced the attacks to Russian governmental sources. In Bucharest, the allies agreed to greater sharing of information about cyber threats and began to discuss ways to counter them.

For the last several years, Russia has intermittently disrupted the flow of oil or natural gas to Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and other countries, a step widely viewed in the alliance as an effort at political intimidation. The summit did not result in major steps forward on this issue, but allied officials did travel to Kazakhstan after the summit ended, reportedly to discuss ways in which NATO might protect that country's energy

² See CRS Report RL33627, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, by Paul Gallis.

³ "ISAF's Strategic Vision," NATO, Bucharest Summit, April 3, 2008.

infrastructure in a crisis.⁴ Most NATO governments continue to wish to address energy security through conservation, development of alternative fuels, and strengthening the supply-demand relationship with countries such as Russia.⁵

The allies are not at the point where either a cyber attack or disruption of energy supplies would be considered an Article V crisis, leading to a call for mutual defense.

Missile Defense. NATO is also engaged in a continuing debate over missile defense. The Bush Administration has proposed a site in Poland with 10 interceptors and an associated radar system in the Czech Republic. The Administration contends that the sites would assist in the defense of NATO Europe and the United States against a developing Iranian missile threat. Russia contends that the sites are directed against its ballistic missiles. Public opinion in Poland and the Czech Republic opposes the sites. Warsaw is insisting that the United States provide resources to upgrade Poland's air defense system, in the event that the interceptors' presence provokes an attack.⁶

At the summit, the United States and the Czech Republic signed an agreement to place the radar site on Czech territory. The allies agreed at head-of-government level to positions on missile defense that they had previously taken more informally. The summit communiqué recognizes that "ballistic missile proliferation poses an increasing threat to" NATO, and that U.S. "missile defense assets" could make a "substantial contribution" to protection from long-range missiles, but did not name the country or countries from which the threat might come. NATO has been studying several ballistic missile defense systems for protection largely of forces in the field. NATO will continue to study how these systems might be "bolted on" to the U.S. system to provide protection for all allied space, but did not make a final determination which system, if any, might be appropriate, nor was any decision made on how the NATO system(s) might be funded.⁷

Some critics contend that the U.S. system is too rudimentary to counter a possible ballistic missile attack, and that extensive further testing is warranted before the system should be put in place. At a congressional hearing on April 23, one Member questioned why the Europeans will not contribute to the funding of the U.S. system, if it is intended to protect Europe and if in fact it is a capable system.⁸

Enlargement, and the MAP for Georgia and Ukraine?

The third principal issue at Bucharest was the candidacies of Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia for entry into the alliance, and the request by Georgia and Ukraine to be

⁴ "NATO weighs protection of Kazakh oil facilities," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, April 15, 2008.

⁵ See CRS Report RL33636, *The European Union's Energy Security Challenges*, by Paul Belkin, and CRS Report RS22409, *NATO and Energy Security*, by Paul Gallis.

⁶ CRS Report RL34051, *Long Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe*, by Steven Hildreth and Carl Ek.

⁷ "Bucharest Summit Declaration," NATO, Bucharest, April 3, 2008, paragraph 37; interviews with U.S. and European officials, 2008.

⁸ Hearing on the Bucharest summit, Europe Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, 110th Congress, 2nd sess., April 23, 2008.

placed in NATO's Membership Action Plan, a significant step on the road to formal candidacy.⁹

None of the three candidate states has sufficiently large and capable military forces to contribute significantly to allied operations. Each is in the process of developing specialized "niche" capabilities in order to contribute to allied security. In that sense, their membership would not represent a major strategic event. However, given the continuing instability in southeastern Europe, fueled by Serbia's aggressive opposition to Kosovo's independence, the three candidates might contribute to regional stability.

The allies extended invitations to Croatia and Albania. Under its Membership Action Plan (MAP), Croatia has made improvements in governance and in modernization of its military. Less progress has been made in persuading a strong majority of the Croatian population to desire NATO membership, a cause for concern in the event that NATO should undertake a new and controversial mission. Almost 60% of the Croatian population now supports NATO membership, a figure that has been rising in recent months. Croatia has recognized Kosovo. Zagreb could be an important channel for discussions to bring Serbia back into the fold of western-oriented European states.¹⁰

Albania is a small and impoverished country; its military resources are modest. OSCE reports on its recent elections detail a number of irregularities that call into question its adherence to international standards. The internal political atmosphere remains tense because of inter-party rivalries. The Albanian government is in the process of professionalizing and downsizing its military. While Albania has passed anti-corruption legislation, there remain doubts in the minds of some officials from allied governments about implementation. At the same time, Albania has pursued a moderate policy in the wake of Kosovo's declaration of independence. Albania has recognized Kosovo, and has renounced any effort to merge the two countries, once a point of concern in Europe because of the overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo.¹¹

NATO is in the process of preparing protocols for the two governments; the protocols will be sent to member governments, and are the instrument that must be approved for Croatia and Albania to join the alliance. The protocols may be completed by the end of July. At that point, each member government will follow its constitutional processes to amend the NATO Treaty and admit new states. All member states must approve a government's application to join for that government to be admitted. The process normally requires approximately one year to complete.

A dispute with Greece over Macedonia's name could not be resolved between the two countries, and Athens blocked Macedonia's application to begin accession negotiations. Greece contends that Macedonia's name represents an irredentist claim

⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see *Enlargement Issues at NATO's Bucharest Summit*, op. cit.

¹⁰ Interviews with Croatian officials and officials from allied governments in Zagreb and Brussels, February 2008.

¹¹ Discussions with officials from allied governments and Albanian officials, February 2008.

against Greek territory, which has a northeastern province named ‘Macedonia.’¹² Macedonian officials counter that they should have the right to name their own country, that they have amended the Macedonian constitution to renounce all territorial claims on Greece.¹³ The allies urged the two governments to resolve the dispute, and gave NATO foreign ministers the authority to issue an invitation to Macedonia to begin accession talks should a resolution occur. To complicate possible progress, the Macedonian government fell after the summit and some time may pass before it can be reconstituted.

A contentious discussion at Bucharest occurred over whether to admit Georgia and Ukraine to the MAP. U.S. State Department officials have contended that only Germany opposed the MAP for the two governments because Berlin was concerned about a negative reaction in Moscow to putting two neighboring countries on the road to membership.¹⁴ However, interviews of representatives of allied governments indicate a more complicated discussion, and broader opposition.

NATO makes decisions on the basis of consensus, and a vote is sometimes not taken on an issue that cannot be fully resolved. That was the case in this instance. According to CRS interviews, in addition to Germany, representatives of France and at least two other governments indicated that they wish the MAP process to go more slowly; they opposed Georgia’s and Ukraine’s entry into the MAP at this time. Several other governments also opposed the MAP for Georgia and Ukraine but would not have blocked consensus had it been within reach, which it was not. While some governments indicated a desire not to antagonize Russia, they said that larger issues were also considered.¹⁵ A majority of Ukraine’s population opposes NATO membership; some allies believe that Kiev must persuade its population of the value of membership before the MAP process can begin. Some allies also believe that Georgia must first stage its parliamentary elections in May and achieve acceptable international standards, and that it must make progress on resolving its two “frozen” conflicts within its territory. Some allies also raised another subject, not directly related to the two countries’ qualifications. These allies believe that progress must be made to ensure greater energy security in countries vulnerable to a Russian cut-off of their energy resources.¹⁶

Representatives of several allied governments criticized the Administration’s handling of the MAP issue. They noted that several allies had clearly indicated before the summit their opposition to Georgia and Ukraine joining the MAP, and that President Bush’s campaign in Georgia and Ukraine, and then at the summit, to persuade them to change their minds ignored their concerns. They also noted that their opposition to the

¹² Statement of Prime Minister Karamanlis, Athens, March 3, 2008.

¹³ Interviews with Macedonian officials and officials from allied governments, December 2007-February 2008.

¹⁴ See the testimony of Assistant Secretary for Europe Dan Fried at the hearing of the Europe Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, op. cit.

¹⁵ Interviews with European officials of NATO governments, April 16-17, 2008.

¹⁶ Ibid.

MAP for the two countries went well beyond concern over Russia's possible reaction to a favorable decision.¹⁷

The allies agreed in the communiqué upon the unusual formulation, "We agreed today that these countries [Georgia and Ukraine] will become members of NATO." The allies apparently wished to signal their confidence in the ability of the two countries' governments to make the necessary reforms to qualify for membership. The statement was also an obvious message to Moscow that it may not determine which governments enter NATO. The allies did not provide a time frame for eventual membership.¹⁸

Other Issues

Kosovo. NATO carried out a bombing campaign against Serbian forces in 1999 in a successful attempt to stop Serb "ethnic cleansing" of the majority Albanian population in Kosovo, then a Serbian province. Under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), the United Nations established a protectorate mission (UNMIK) in Kosovo. In 2006-2007, U.N. envoy Martti Ahtisaari developed a plan for Kosovo's "supervised independence" and Serbian minority rights under EU leadership. Russia would not accept the Ahtisaari plan, and threatened to veto it in the Security Council.

After long preparation, the European Union and the United States together decided to implement the Ahtisaari plan. Kosovo declared itself sovereign and independent on February 17, 2008. The United States and a majority of EU countries quickly followed with a recognition of Kosovo's independence, which Serbia and Russia continue to oppose. The United States contributes approximately 1,600 troops (in a force of 16,000) to NATO's KFOR, charged with maintaining a peaceful environment in Kosovo.

A long-term objective of the alliance is to persuade Serbia that its future lies in the Euro-Atlantic community,¹⁹ and that it must give up what NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer calls "a sullen nationalism."

European Union Defense. The allies acknowledged "the value that a stronger and more capable European defense brings, providing capabilities to address the common challenges both NATO and the EU face." This acknowledgment may assist in preparing the way for France's return to NATO's Integrated Military Structure, which it left in 1966. Beginning July 2008 France will become president of the EU, and will likely make an effort to build up the Union's defense institutions and capabilities.

Strategic Concept. Some governments had wished to begin drafting a new Strategic Concept to clarify NATO's mission. The Bush Administration contended that because there will be a new Administration in Washington in January 2010, debate over a new Strategic Concept should wait until early next year.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Summit declaration, op. cit.; interviews with officials from allied governments, April 2008.

¹⁹ "Strife could unravel stability in Kosovo," *International Herald Tribune*, March 21, 2008, p. 3.