

NATO IN CRISIS: Uncertain Future for the Atlantic Alliance

By [Ludo De Brabander](#)

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May 20 and 21 the NATO-circus calls at Chicago for the biggest summit in NATO's history, according to its secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Stakes are high, Rasmussen said, for very important decisions are to be made about NATO's future.

Three headlines pop up: Afghanistan, capacities and resources, and reinforcing the network with international partners. The underlying real message emerges from a recent communiqué: "This implies that Allies will need to continue to invest political, military and economic capital to keep NATO strong. And in the present climate, this means allies must stay committed to NATO principles, prepared to maintain the necessary capabilities and open to developing connections with partners". In other words, Rasmussen sends a warning that a crisis is hitting NATO.

This summit, with a 55 million dollar reported budget, is to deal with the problem how to do more with less. The economic crisis is deeply felt. NATO standards speak of 2% of GNP for military expenditures. But with the European allies only the United Kingdom and Greece reach this threshold and the general trend shows further decline. But problems are not limited to a lack of resources. The Cold War belongs to the past and the fear to be attacked, the official primary reason of NATO's existence, disappeared a long time ago. Now that the expensive and non-productive ISAF mission in Afghanistan appears to run not that smoothly as often described, NATO is losing its legitimacy as intervention device. The average European or American citizen looks very uninterested towards ISAF. The allied forces and their partners search to limit the costs as they are preparing their exit.

NATO was badly in need of a success and therefore took in 2011 enthusiastically the lead in the attack of a poorly armed country, Libya. Gaddafi was indeed overthrown, but the success of the whole operation is very questionable. Only 8 of the 28 NATO members really engaged in this war. Only a small number shared the French and British zeal to wage war. Germany showed openly its dissatisfaction by calling home its troops which operated under NATO in the Mediterranean.

NATO's raison d'être has grown extremely thin and its cohesion has come under great pressure. A proof can be found in the huge disagreements on nuclear weapons; a discussion which is scrupulous hold behind closed doors. Anders Rasmussen said that the presence of nuclear weapons in Europe "was an essential part of credible deterrence". Who can still believe such a statement? It is no secret at all that the population in Europe and various allied governments think quite the opposite. In the past, three of the five countries that host non strategic nuclear bombs on their territory - Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany -

asked for their withdrawal. These nuclear arms are nothing more than militarily worthless cold war relics. In Germany, and in a more shadowy way also in Belgium, the removal of these nukes is to be found in the governmental declaration. So Rasmussen was to be careful and added that NATO gives it full support to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. Most probably Chicago will try and find consensus by linking the withdrawal to disarmament negotiations with Russia. This doesn't mean however that all allies play the same music, as London and Paris do not want to risk that their status of nuclear power could be jeopardised. To make matters worse problems grow around the European missile shield: big delay, mounting costs and critical technical problems. Russia's opposition to these projects is also cooling down enthusiasm with many Europeans.

In brief: NATO is confronted with a lack of enemies and a lack of resources. It is symbolic that two thirds of the Chicago budget is gathered by private corporations. The alliance offers jobs to generals, contracts to the arms industry and fully booked hotels during its meetings, but for an alliance that cannot get rid of its cold war mentality this is existentially seen rather meagre, isn't it?

This whole situation is covered with silence. The Belgian minister of defence , Pieter De Crem, works only according to one policy line: we follow Washington without participation of parliament. In 2010 the members of the Belgian parliament didn't have access to the text of the New Strategic Concept as it would be discussed and approved in Lisbon.

Last month the Defence Commission again was put in the dark. When minister De Crem was asked about the NATO strategy and the decrease of the global nuclear arsenal he simply stated "For security reasons the discussions and the report on the Defence and Deterrence Posture Review are classified, what does exclude a public debate". A scandalous mockery of normal democratic rules, which passes the more easily as most members of parliament react all too softly. In the long run this will however help the public make up its mind: NATO is useless, let us get rid of it.

Read here the background paper [NATO an instrument for geostrategic interests](#).

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