

# WebMemo



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## The NATO Riga Summit: Time for Backbone in the Alliance

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On November 28, world leaders will gather in Riga, Latvia, for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit. The meeting will take place against the backdrop of major NATO operations in Afghanistan, continuing transatlantic tensions over the war in Iraq, and the growing threat posed by Iran's nuclear ambitions. The summit of 26 nations should serve as a valuable forum for reinvigorating the role of NATO as a major player on the international stage. The United States must call on the alliance to increase its contribution to counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan, to stand up to Iran's aggressive threats, and to assert itself as a powerful force in the global war on terrorism.

During his visit to the Baltic state, President Bush is expected to unveil a major U.S. proposal to establish NATO partnership agreements with five allies: Australia, Japan, and South Korea, as well as Sweden and Finland. Their engagement would be a welcome development, significantly enhancing NATO's strategic presence in the Pacific at a time of increasing tension over North Korea.

### **Afghanistan: A Test Case for NATO Credibility**

The war in Afghanistan is likely to dominate discussions at the Riga summit. NATO took command of all peacekeeping operations throughout the country on September 28 and currently commands 32,800 troops from 37 nations.<sup>1</sup> The U.K.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) includes 11,800 troops from the United States, 6,000 British soldiers, 2,700 Germans, 2,500

Canadians, 2,000 Dutchmen, and 1,800 Italians. (An additional 8,000 American troops continue to take part in Operation Enduring Freedom, under separate U.S. command.)

Since May, NATO forces have conducted a series of major military offensives against the Taliban in Afghanistan's southern provinces involving largely British and Canadian troops. The Coalition has succeeded in killing over 1,000 insurgents in intense battle but has faced increasingly fierce resistance from a resurgent Taliban funded largely through the opium trade. Over 40 British soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan.

General James Jones, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer have called for more reinforcements in the south of the country, but their requests have unfortunately fallen on deaf ears. NATO commanders are urging an additional 2,500 troops. But Germany, France, Turkey, Italy, and Spain have all rejected calls to send their own soldiers to support British, Canadian, and Dutch forces in the south, on the grounds that the situation is too dangerous and that they are "overstretched." Only Poland has

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stepped forward, offering 1,000 additional soldiers, including 500 paratroopers. These troops are expected to deploy in February 2007.<sup>2</sup>

Incredibly, several European contingents in Afghanistan are operating under up to 71 “caveats” designed to keep them out of harm’s way. German troops, for example, are confined to Kabul and the relatively peaceful north of the country, “except under exceptional circumstances and on a temporary basis.”<sup>3</sup> Some of the same countries that condemned America’s decision to liberate Iraq, claiming that it was a distraction from the securing of Afghanistan, are now refusing to pull their weight in the battle to keep the country free.

Many major European Union countries are deploying militarily neutered forces in Afghanistan, commanded by lackluster political leaders petrified of the public reaction to troop casualties, and refusing to redeploy their soldiers to the south for military operations against the Taliban. This is a sorry spectacle that makes a mockery of Europe’s professed commitment to the war on terrorism. NATO is a war-fighting alliance, not a glorified peacekeeping group.

### Key Recommendations for President Bush

**Afghanistan:** The United States must urge major European NATO partners to send combat troops to southern Afghanistan to help fight the Taliban. President Bush should call for NATO to abolish “caveats” for member countries in theatres of war and call for all NATO member states to abide by the baseline rules in NATO operations or relinquish their memberships. It is unacceptable that British and Canadian troops are laying down their lives in counterterrorist operations while many fellow NATO member states participating under the same operational command refuse to lift a finger to help.

NATO must return to its original “all for one, one for all” spirit or perish as an institution.

**Iraq:** President Bush must urge NATO allies with troops in Iraq to remain alongside U.S. forces in combating the insurgency. The U.S., the U.K., and their NATO allies share fundamental national interests in staying and defeating terrorism in Iraq. The Middle East would view an early withdrawal as a humiliating defeat for the West and an emphatic victory for those who represent al-Qaeda in Iraq. A pullout would be an unparalleled propaganda success for a barbaric terror organization that has murdered thousands of Iraqi men, women, and children.

**The Iranian Threat:** NATO should send a strong message to Tehran that the free world will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran or threats against Israel. The United States should propose the admission of Israel into NATO as a full and equal member.<sup>4</sup> Israeli accession to NATO would explicitly extend the Western alliance’s nuclear deterrent to cover Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Israel meets NATO qualifications: It is a democracy, has a free-market economy, and is able to contribute to the common defense. Unlike some new NATO members, Israel would be a major net addition to the alliance, with lift and logistics ability, a superlative officer corps, and a first-rate military capable of all aspects of war-fighting. Israel spends nearly 10 percent of its GDP on defense and has active armed forces numbering 167,000 men and women, with 358,000 in reserve. It possesses up to 200 nuclear warheads and a well-equipped Air Force and Navy.<sup>5</sup> Israel’s intelligence capabilities have been a vital asset in prosecuting the war on terrorism. Like the U.S. and Great Britain, Israel is a genuine warrior nation. Its accession to NATO could only enhance the alliance’s capabilities.

1. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), at [http://www2.hq.nato.int/ISAF/media/pdf/placemat\\_isaf.pdf](http://www2.hq.nato.int/ISAF/media/pdf/placemat_isaf.pdf)
2. “Poland Sets a ‘Good Example’ As It Speeds Up Its Troop Deployment,” *The Daily Telegraph*, October 26, 2006.
3. “UN Call for Freer Hand to Tackle the Taliban”, *Financial Times*, September 5, 2006.
4. This idea was originally proposed in John Hulsman, Ph.D., and Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., “Confounding the Mullahs of Iran: It’s Time for Israel to Join NATO,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* # 966, January 24, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm966.cfm>.
5. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2003-2004*.

**European Defense Identity:** Along with widespread apathy, moral cowardice, and European countries' general unwillingness to fight, the greatest threat to the future of NATO is posed by the drive for further political and defense integration in the European Union. The United States must firmly oppose moves in Europe to establish a European defense identity separate from, and in competition with, NATO. The Bush Administration should work to prevent attempts in Europe to weaken the NATO command structure and should deny logistical, intelligence, and research support to any European Union army.

**Darfur:** President Bush and Prime Minister Blair should call for an immediate meeting of key NATO allies in Washington or London to discuss the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. Up to 400,000 people have been killed by Sudanese-backed Janjaweed militias in barbaric acts of ethnic cleansing. The United States and the United Kingdom should support the establishment of a NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Darfur, based on a coalition-of-the-willing strategy, in support of African Union peacekeepers. The West cannot rely upon an ineffective and morally ambivalent United Nations to take action over the biggest man-made humanitarian tragedy of the 21st century while tens of thousands of refugees face sustained attacks from Islamic militants. The U.N.'s track record in the face of genocide, from the killing fields of Rwanda to the "safe haven" of Srebrenica, has been one of appalling weakness and callous indifference in the face of human suffering.

## Conclusion

In an age of global terrorism and rogue regimes developing weapons of mass destruction, NATO remains vital. The recent al-Qaeda bombings in London, Madrid, and Istanbul; the huge scale of terrorist atrocities in Iraq; the resurgence of Taliban operations in Afghanistan; and the growing threat posed by Iran reinforce the need for greater transatlantic cooperation in the war against terrorism.

The United States must ensure that NATO remains the preeminent transatlantic security institution. The Cold War may be over, but NATO's role is no less important today than at its founding in 1949. Global terrorism and its state backers pose as great a threat to world security as communism and fascism once did.

NATO has by far been the most successful multilateral organization since the end of the Second World War. Unlike the United Nations or the European Union, it is not a supranational institution that constrains national sovereignty. Rather, it is a flexible grouping of nation-states that acts in defense of common interests. Unfortunately, NATO is riven by divisions and some members' unwillingness to take their obligations seriously.

Today, NATO operates to a great degree as a grand penny farthing astride the world stage, with the English-speaking nations of the United States, Great Britain, and Canada at the front, bearing most of the military burden, and the rest of the alliance (Poland and Holland excepted) trailing behind. In Afghanistan major European countries such as Germany and France are punching way below their weight, undermining international security as a result.

The NATO alliance cannot allow the Taliban to reassert control over wide swathes of Afghanistan. The country must not be permitted to become again a safe haven for al-Qaeda and return to the Medieval savagery of the pre-9/11 era. This would be a disaster for the war on terrorism and would destroy NATO's credibility. To prevent this end, alliance members must commit to contribute personnel and materiel to the war in Afghanistan and to stand up and be counted in defense of the civilized world.

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Appendix		WM 1261	
<b>NATO Defense Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP, 2004</b>			
(Based on Constant Prices)			
Belgium	1.3	Hungary	1.5
Bulgaria	2.4	Italy	1.8
Canada	1.2	Latvia	1.3
Czech Republic	1.9	Lithuania	1.5
Denmark	1.4	Luxembourg	0.7
Estonia	1.6	Netherlands	1.6
France	2.6	Norway	1.9
Germany	1.4	Poland	1.9
Greece	2.9	Portugal	1.7
		Romania	2.1
		Slovakia	1.8
		Slovenia	1.5
		Spain	1.3
		Turkey	3.1
		United Kingdom	2.3
		United States	3.8
<p><b>Source:</b> NATO–Russia Compendium of Financial and Economic Data Relating to Defence, compiled by Data Analysis Section, Force Planning Directorate, Defence Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, December 2005. Taken from Robin Harris, <i>Beyond Friendship: The Future of Anglo-American Relations</i> (Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, Heritage Foundation, 2006).</p>			