

# Reforming and Revitalizing NATO

## *A Memo to President-elect Obama*

*Sally McNamara*

*NATO stands as an example of how the United States can advance American national security—and the security of the world—through a strong alliance rooted in shared responsibility and shared values. NATO remains a vital asset in America's efforts to anchor democracy and stability in Europe and to defend our interests and values all over the world.*

—Barack Obama, statement on NATO summit, March 3, 2008<sup>1</sup>

CHANGE  
We  
BELIEVE IN

### AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

The freedom and security of Americans depend on America's global leadership.



*This product is part of the American Leadership Initiative, one of 10 transformational initiatives in our Leadership for America campaign.*



214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

**PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA**, during the presidential election campaign, you highlighted NATO as a valuable global partnership, and you have repeatedly made statements in support of NATO enlargement.<sup>2</sup> You have called on Europe to commit more troops and resources to the NATO mission in Afghanistan and have also stated repeatedly that Georgia should receive NATO's Membership Action Plan.<sup>3</sup> Your recent appointment of former NATO commander General James Jones as your national security adviser brings his considerable commitment to the Alliance to your security team.<sup>4</sup>

Your strong commitment to NATO and America's continued leadership within the Alliance is laudable. NATO is one of the most successful multilateral alliances in modern history and is the centerpiece of America's transatlantic alliance architecture, but NATO requires both leadership and reform to inject the energy necessary to revitalize the Alliance, which is being challenged by some members' lack of commitment.

As the Alliance approaches its 60th anniversary summit, to be held in Strasbourg and Kehl in April 2009, and to fulfill your promise to improve transatlantic cooperation within NATO, you should consider employing the following principles and elements to govern U.S. policy toward NATO:

- **Gain additional European commitments for the comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan.** You have stated that “[s]uccess in Afghanistan is vital to the security of the United States, to all NATO members, and to the people of Afghanistan” and that “NATO’s leaders must therefore send an unambiguous message that every country in NATO will do whatever needs to be done to destroy terrorist networks in Afghanistan, to prevent the Taliban from returning to power, and to bring greater security and well-being to the Afghan people.” You have further stated that “[t]his will require adequate numbers of capable military forces and civilian personnel from NATO members” and “the removal of restrictions that some allies have placed on their forces in Afghanistan, which hamper the flexibility of commanders on the ground.”<sup>5</sup>

You have also said that you consider Afghanistan to be the “central front” in America’s battle against terrorism,<sup>6</sup> and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has stated that “Afghanistan is a mission of necessity rather than one of choice.”<sup>7</sup> You are both correct that NATO’s success or failure in Afghanistan will be a major factor in the defeat or victory of al-Qaeda and its boldness in continuing to pursue global terrorist activities in Europe and America. Sadly, however, the three elements of NATO and U.S. strategy—security, economic development and improved governance—have not been observed by many of NATO’s European members

with anywhere near the enthusiasm needed to ensure Afghanistan’s long-term stability.

You have said that your Administration will seek to persuade many of Europe’s NATO members to commit additional combat troops and remove national caveats.<sup>8</sup> Your Administration should also seek additional European commitments for more trainers for the Embedded Training Teams, for the Afghan National Army, and for the Afghan police. All NATO members must demonstrate their solidarity with your Administration in considering Afghanistan as the central front in the war on terrorism if the overall mission is to succeed.

- **NATO should agree on a new threat perception.** It is important that NATO adjusts to the post-9/11 world; agrees on a common position on the types of threats it faces, starting with terrorism; and outlines robust proposals to confront them. The Strasbourg–Kehl Summit in April will produce a Declaration on Allied Security outlining NATO’s purpose and potentially paving the way for a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has described the Declaration as “a major deliverable” of the summit.<sup>9</sup> A new threat perception that meaningfully addresses security challenges such as cyberterrorism, ballistic missile attack, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will be a very positive start in revitalizing NATO as it enters its seventh decade.
- **NATO must make progress on its commitment to missile defense.** At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO leaders endorsed U.S. plans for a missile defense system to be based in Poland and the Czech Republic (the “third site”) and agreed to explore ways to link the U.S. system with “part of any future NATO wide missile defense architecture.”<sup>10</sup> NATO’s Foreign

1. “Obama Statement on NATO Summit in Romania,” March 3, 2008, at [http://obama.senate.gov/press/080303-obama\\_statement\\_128/](http://obama.senate.gov/press/080303-obama_statement_128/) (December 2, 2008).

2. “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: A World that Stands as One,” Berlin, Germany, July 24, 2008, at [http://www.barackobama.com/2008/07/24/remarks\\_of\\_senator\\_barack\\_obam\\_97.php](http://www.barackobama.com/2008/07/24/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_97.php) (December 2, 2008).

3. “Analysis: Crisis Shows Candidates’ Foreign Policy Skills,” *USA Today*, August 12, 2008, at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-08-12-candidates-georgia\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-08-12-candidates-georgia_N.htm) (December 2, 2008).

4. Ken Fireman, “Obama Turns to Marine Jones to Harness Veteran Security Team,” *Bloomberg.com*, December 2, 2008, at <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=a3jvfQn4e1H0&refer=home> (December 2, 2008).

5. “Obama Statement on NATO Summit in Romania.”

6. “Obama Calls Situation in Afghanistan ‘Urgent,’” *CNN*, July 21, 2008, at <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/07/20/obama.afghanistan/> (December 2, 2008).

7. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General, NATO, “Afghanistan and NATO: Forging the 21st Century Alliance,” speech at Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., February 29, 2008, at <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080229a.html> (December 2, 2008).

8. Barack Obama, “Refocusing on the Central Front,” *Time*, July 17, 2008, at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1823945,00.html> (December 2, 2008).

9. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General, NATO, speech at a seminar on relations between the EU and NATO, Paris, July 7, 2008, at <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080707b.html> (September 28, 2008).

10. Bucharest Summit Declaration, issued by Heads of State and Government participating in meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Bucharest, Romania, April 3, 2008, at [www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html](http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html).

Minister re-endorsed the third-site deal at the Brussels summit in December.<sup>11</sup> NATO must continue to explore its options on missile defense and be ready for analysis and discussion at its defense ministerial in Krakow next February. The Alliance must then be ready to move forward with a firm recommendation by the Strasbourg Summit, giving it a concrete mandate and a timeline in the final communiqué.

Your unequivocal support for the deployment of the third-site missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic should underpin NATO's efforts as it moves forward with this vital protection for America, its allies, and its forward-deployed troops. Your reluctance to explicitly endorse the third-site missile defense system is sending an ambiguous message to the Alliance that one of your first acts as President may be to rip up the Bucharest communiqué. This would be a major diplomatic disaster.

- **The United States should strongly support NATO's open door policy.** As you have noted, "Ukraine and Georgia...have declared their readiness to advance a NATO Membership Action Plan" and "should receive our help and encouragement as they continue to develop ties to Atlantic and European institutions."<sup>12</sup> On several occasions, you have called for Georgia and Ukraine to receive accelerated Membership Action Plans (MAPs) for entry into NATO.<sup>13</sup>

In recent months, both internal and external events have taken place with regard to these two countries: the dissolution of Ukraine's parliament and a short, brutal war between Russia and Georgia. However, it remains more important than ever that NATO's door continues to be open to these two fragile democracies. Appropriately, you have stated that the United States should "oppose any efforts by the Russian government to intimidate its neighbors or control their foreign policies."<sup>14</sup> Russian President Dmitri Medvedev's

threat, less than one day after your election victory, to deploy an Iskander missile system between Poland and Lithuania in response to U.S. plans for the third-site system should be evidence enough that Russia's intimidation of its neighbors is alive and well.<sup>15</sup> In April, President Vladimir Putin even threatened to aim nuclear missiles at Ukraine if it sought NATO membership.<sup>16</sup>

Failing to offer MAPs to Georgia and Ukraine at the Bucharest Summit was a geostrategic mistake the repercussions of which are not yet fully played out. NATO enlargement has been successful and should be allowed to continue. Your Administration should work closely with our allies to restate the case for NATO's open door policy and send the message that the Alliance is open for business and a vital part of the transatlantic security architecture.

- **NATO should readmit France into its integrated military command structures only if Paris is willing to uphold the primacy of NATO in European defense cooperation and the alliance can be confident of a cooperative rather than a confrontational partner.** France has stated that it wishes to fully rejoin NATO, demanding American support for an independent European defense identity as a *quid pro quo*.<sup>17</sup> The full development of an independent European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) is a long-term French foreign policy goal, and negotiations are advancing to conclude the deal in time for the Strasbourg–Kehl Summit.

Within NATO, France has repeatedly engaged in deliberately obstructionist behavior, and until NATO can be sure that it will not do so in the future, it should not be afraid to frustrate Paris's demands. The Alliance must also have indisputable guarantees from Paris that NATO

11. NATO, "Final Communiqué: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers Held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels," December 3, 2008, at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-153e.html> (December 8, 2008).

12. "Obama Statement on NATO Summit in Romania."

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. Agence France-Presse, "Russian Leader Blasts US, Vows to Deploy Missiles Near EU," November 5, 2008, at <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iZLQLppNUQWpyylxuZMS9ibYAQQw> (December 2, 2008).

16. Peter Finn, "Putin Threatens Ukraine on NATO," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2008, p. A8, at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021201658.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/12/AR2008021201658.html) (November 24, 2008).

17. "Speech by M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic, Before the Congress of the United States of America," November 7, 2007, at [www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Sarkozy-s-speech-to-US.html?var\\_recherche=sarkozy%20congress%20US](http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Sarkozy-s-speech-to-US.html?var_recherche=sarkozy%20congress%20US).

remains the cornerstone of the transatlantic security alliance and that its primacy is unchallenged by the European Union (EU).

- **Recognize that this is a new era for NATO–EU relations.** You have said that “[i]n this century, we need a strong European Union that deepens the security and prosperity of this continent.”<sup>18</sup> The European Security and Defense Policy has been in existence for nearly a decade, average European defense spending has decreased, and NATO has seen little or no valuable complementarity.

Your Administration should re-employ the Albright principle, which states that NATO–EU relations are developed *only* by avoiding “the three Ds”—duplication, decoupling, and discrimination. To achieve your goal that the European Union should deepen security and prosperity, the United States should clarify NATO–EU relations with two underlying principles:

1. NATO’s primacy in the transatlantic security alliance is supreme.
2. The EU’s relationship to NATO is as a civilian complement, and the EU is defined as a civilian actor in the transatlantic security alliance.

- **Support new rules to ensure more equitable burden sharing.** Your well-documented frustration with many allies’ reluctance to share the financial and human costs of fighting in Afghanistan equally with the United States and the United Kingdom is understandable.<sup>19</sup> Members of the Alliance have repeatedly missed key NATO targets such as having 40 percent of its land forces be

ready for overseas deployment and spending 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. In fact, just four of the 21 EU–NATO members spend the NATO benchmark of 2 percent of GDP on defense, and average EU defense spending has significantly decreased over the past 10 years. There is considerable European underinvestment in high-end military equipment, and ludicrous national caveats are attached to troops that are deployed on NATO missions.

The Alliance needs to find a more equitable solution to the questions of manpower, equipment, and resources. NATO should consider making its “2 percent benchmark” a rule, with corresponding consequences. It must also be a qualification for membership. And to avoid the creation of a two-tiered alliance in which the few carry the many in NATO’s most hostile combat areas, all but the absolutely most essential national caveats should be removed.

## Conclusion

In the past decade, NATO has undertaken out-of-area missions, invoked the collective defense Article V of the NATO Treaty, and enlarged to include 26 members. The next decade will likely see equally big challenges for NATO—challenges that the Alliance must win for the sake of global security and stability.

NATO remains central to transatlantic security and is still the crowning glory of America’s alliance architecture. Few other formal alliances, if any, can boast the successes that NATO has enjoyed throughout its history. However, NATO is an alliance in need of reform and revitalization to accommodate new security policies and defense strategies. Your Administration will need to put its full weight behind this process if it is to be successful.

18. “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: A World that Stands as One.”

19. Jeff Mason, “Obama Says Europe Must Do More in Afghanistan,” Reuters, February 28, 2008, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSN2861811220080229> (December 2, 2008).

**Sally McNamara** is Senior Policy Analyst in European Affairs in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation. The author is grateful to Research Assistant Morgan Roach for her assistance in preparing this paper.

This paper is also available online at:  
[www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/sr39.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/sr39.cfm)