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Assessing the Chicago NATO Summit

By Frank Schell

NATO identified three particular issues for the Chicago Summit to address: the future of Afghanistan, alliance composition, and the environment of fiscal austerity. The NATO communiqués known as the “Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan” and the “Chicago Summit Declaration” evidence consensus on Afghanistan. The “Summit Declaration on Defence Capabilities: Towards NATO Forces 2020” affirms a commitment to core capabilities, as with other NATO summits.

Combat forces are expected to be out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014; 228,500 trained Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are envisioned, supported by training and advisory effort; and \$4.1 billion per year is anticipated to support the ANSF. While Afghanistan is an urgent operational challenge for NATO, the strategic challenge for the Alliance is Pakistan, an embittered ally that attributes much of its economic and political plight to the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the presence of NATO forces in adjacent Afghanistan.

NATO proclamations about its intentions in Afghanistan without strong Pakistani engagement and support address only the "what" of withdrawal, but not the "how." The strategists have spoken but the party that must execute, Pakistan, was not sufficiently part of the process. Moreover, the publicly noted snubbing of Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in Chicago by the Obama Administration does not bode well for rapprochement in the near term.

Pakistan has been the conduit for overland material since the invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11. However, overland supply routes are presently blocked in retaliation for the NATO airstrike in Salala that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers last November. An estimated 50% of NATO material once passed through those overland routes. Pakistan is seeking an apology from the United States, suspension of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations, reimbursement of certain GWOT costs, and \$5,000 per overland supply truck (an increase from \$250), among other conditions. Of late, it is not clear if the dismissal of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani by the Supreme Court and the intensifying conflict between the judiciary and the government will provoke a domestic crisis that could potentially undermine Pakistan's already weakened support for NATO.

Adding to the deterioration in U.S.-Pakistan relations, two days after the NATO summit ended, Pakistan announced the sentencing of Dr. Shakil Afridi to 33 years in prison for conspiring with Islamist militants, the Lashkar-e-Islam of the Khyber region (not to be confused with Lashkar-e-Taiba which is focused on the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan). Afridi had been known for assisting the U.S. in the hunt for Osama bin Laden, who was found and killed in Abbottabad, a garrison town in northern Pakistan.

In this environment of distrust, the reality is that after the NATO withdrawal, Pakistan will necessarily be the regional guardian with a vested interest in tranquility of the 40 million + Pashtun population, nearly 70% of which are concentrated in Pakistan.

Without a Pakistani commitment to open overland routes, and to maintain force of arms to guarantee peace in its own Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North West Frontier Province) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as well as project influence into Afghanistan where there is major ethnolinguistic affinity, NATO's communiqués regarding Afghanistan represent principally documents of intention but not those of means.

The litany of issues between the U.S. and Pakistan is well-known. They include the Raymond Davis affair; the stepped up use of UAVs inside Pakistan; continuing perceptions of Pakistan working both sides of the fence with its intelligence agency; the Navy SEAL assault on bin Laden's compound; and charges that after the SEAL raid the U.S. was contemplating the prevention of a coup in Islamabad. In short, the trust deficit has never been greater, and research polls show that a very small percent of Pakistan's population have a favorable view of the U.S. or of the killing of Osama bin Laden.

It is quite possible that the embitterment is now so deep and the impasse so great, that likely resolution of some major differences could require a new government in Islamabad and a new administration in Washington. Nevertheless, in spite of its behavior ranging from disappointing to outrageous, public criticism of Pakistan is most unwise and should be vigorously conducted through private channels.

As for the remainder of the NATO agenda, there has been some focus with regard to future composition of the Alliance but less on how to cope with fiscal austerity in member nations. Actions taken by NATO itself to become more cost effective are affirmed, although the Chicago Summit is silent on the size of future defense budgets.

With regard to the Alliance, in one sense it is reassuring that the western democracies in NATO now number 28, a major increase since the Cold War level, and that it is also looking to engage non-member nations as partners in a cooperative operating role. This is a signal that there is a continuing commitment to global order, geographic boundaries, and a respect for human rights fundamentally under western leadership. Further, the aspirations of the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine are well-described in the "Chicago Summit Declaration."

Nevertheless, while some new members have weak traditions of governance or a history of ethnic strife in their region, their security has been underwritten by the major NATO members,

including the United States, which is committed to their defense. While reflecting upon contingencies may well cause uneasiness in Brussels, Washington, and other western capitals, it should be remembered that other European countries, e.g. Italy, Greece, Spain, and Turkey, also have a history of weak democracy or ethnic strife.

In Chicago, NATO affirmed its intention for consolidation and rationalization of certain activities and reform of resources management in the interest of cost effectiveness. However, during a time of fiscal austerity, the level of defense outlays by member nations will be a continuing matter, including pressure from Washington, since the U.S. spends an estimated 4.8 percent of GDP on its defense budget. Of note, only Greece, the U.K., Turkey, France, and Portugal, spend more than 2%, with many NATO members well below that level (source: the World Bank 2012). But given the political nature of national budgets, NATO militaries can only ask for resources – they cannot approve them.

The Chicago Summit publicly addressed the most singularly pressing matter for NATO. However Pakistan, the future heir, successor, and assignee, has yet to be inside the tent.

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