



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
—
April 2012

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/ After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations

—
Péter Király, Tomáš Karásek
April 2012



Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
–
April 2012

Introduction

The international roundtable *Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/ After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations* took place in the Černín Palace of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic on 18 April 2012. It was organized by the Association for International Affairs (AMO) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the Public Diplomacy Division of NATO.

The findings of AMO's latest policy paper, *NATO and the Arab Spring: Challenge to Cooperation, Opportunity for Action?*, were presented at the onset event, followed by expert discussion on three main issue areas. First, opportunities and threats of the Arab Spring and consequent political changes in the MENA region were discussed by panellists from a NATO perspective. The next issue on the agenda linked the lessons of the Alliance's Libyan operation to the issue of smart defence, addressing the core political rationale and practical considerations of the implementation of the concept. Experts on the final panel discussed the changing strategic environment and the resulting challenges and trends in transatlantic cooperation. The discussions were held under the Chatham House rule.

Panel I/ NATO and the „Arab Spring“: Opportunity or Threat?

Discussants of the first panel emphasized that the lessons learned from the operation in Libya go beyond the almost proverbial capability-ambition gap and include the need for better planning in humanitarian operations, as well as the changing international political environment concerning the legitimacy of such interventions. Libya can be considered a politically uncomfortable operation despite being legally watertight. The consequent lack of land deployment might be indicative to further missions – which, however, means that security processes like DDR or SSR might face significant problems.

The issue of a potential intervention in Syria was also raised but speakers agreed that regional political environment and the intervention's possible consequences are more difficult than in Libya. Key issues include Turkish reluctance to act without international backing, the dynamics of Shia–Sunni relations and the lack of a strong and unified Syrian opposition government sufficient to change the policies of China and Russia.

As for the main result of the Arab Spring, the speakers agreed that the plethora of political actors in the MENA region diminishes the importance and potential effect of government-government relations and require the development of new frameworks encompassing new stakeholders. As of now, the balance between threats and opportunities is rather unclear due to the political quagmire in several key states.



Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
–
April 2012

Recommendations:

- Address problems with the policy of limited military intervention without regime change and extended state building should be addressed, such as dealing with refugee crises and the difficulties of DDR and SSR without land presence.
- Take into consideration individual interests and threat perceptions of regional actors.
- Develop new multilateral frameworks encompassing various actors in reaction to the diversification of local developments in the region.
- Pay more attention to the Sahel region in the near future as the area is becoming a source of several non-traditional security challenges.
- Increase public diplomacy effort both in the region, as well as towards domestic NATO audiences.

Q&A issues:

- The exact level of changes in the MENA region and their effects on the efficiency of government-government relations remains unclear.
- Libya as a watershed: Is the operation and its reception indicative of future missions and policies of global powers, or does it rather represent an ad hoc approach which will not establish a strong and widely accepted international norm?

Panel II/ Frugal, Yet Active? Challenges of „Smart Defence“

The second panel of the conference debated the challenges and opportunities of the concept of smart defence in NATO. The introductory remarks emphasized the seven necessary requirements for a successful smart defence initiative: strategic culture, trust and solidarity, forces of similar size and quality, level playing field for defence companies, clarity of intentions, seriousness of intent and low corruption.

The panel discussion centred around the role of austerity in the development of smart defence. Panellists emphasized that together with the operational challenges after the Afghan withdrawal and the deep strategic uncertainty of the international security environment, austerity is a key element in the ‘perfect storm’ to prioritize the capability- ambition gap on the security agenda. Nevertheless, the level of optimism regarding the long-term implementation of smart defence varies. Though the current political environment might be a chance to address an old issue, there is no guarantee that past problems will not re-emerge and make a sustainable long-term smart defence policy impossible. The discussants agreed that unless these political problems are solved the current economic and security environment risks furthering the crisis of European armed forces to the extent that they might completely lose their deployment capabilities.

Past initiatives for pooling and sharing in Europe were struggling with establishing economies of scale and resulted only in minor savings. Participants emphasized the need for finding a balance and consistency between NATO, EU and regional or bilateral policy initiatives, ensuring that lower levels serve as building blocks, not stumbling blocks. Examples for initiatives with some level of success include the Franco-British cooperation,



Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
–
April 2012

the Visegrad Group countries or the agreement on having a single Final Assembly and Check Out/Maintenance, Repair, Overhaul & Upgrade facility for all European F-35 jets between future operators of the platform. Panellists also called for more downsizing and re-evaluation of Cold War-era military structures with the important note that “cutting the fat and keeping the muscle” is not without social costs for individual countries and should be approached with caution at the national level.

Recommendations:

- Smart defence cannot be a solely bottom-up policy; effective and feasible top-down policies through legally binding arrangements, such as more future-oriented and intrusive NATO Defence Planning Process, are necessary to complement bottom-up Member State initiatives.
- Due to problems regarding sovereignty issues, a concentration on training and other soft issues is a promising start, yet it should be followed by further steps in maintenance and procurement. Setting up common European requirements for UAVs and UCAVs might be a step forward, followed by policies to decrease overspending due to differing national requirements for the same platform as it has been the case with the Eurofighter project.
- Overlaps between various bi- and multilateral regional initiatives should be avoided and consistency and complementarity between NATO/EU/regional/bilateral frames should be established keeping in mind the interests of national defence industry complexes.

Q&A issues:

- Is the window of opportunity due to the austerity environment sufficient to create ownership of the process of smart defence in the long term?
- To what extent should the concept of smart defence be stretched to include strategic questions such as missile defence?
- To what extent can different political and military frameworks be made complementary instead of competing and overlapping?

Panel III/ Shifting Internal Balance and Prospects of a Leaderless Alliance

The third and final panel of the conference put the issues of the MENA region and smart defence into a broader context by addressing the strategic shift of the United States towards the Asia-Pacific region and its potential consequences to NATO. Panellists agreed that the international strategic context is also deeply linked to domestic debates, such as the Republican-Democrat argument over economic policy or the sustainability of Europe's current growth model. They also characterized the results of the Libyan operation and the state of transatlantic affairs as typical half-full or half-empty glass problems, and a familiar one dealing with the constant issues of burden sharing and free-riding.

While the issue whether the Alliance was becoming leaderless was debated, the question how a missionless alliance can still strive and contribute touched upon more practical policy



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
–
April 2012

problems. Some panellists did not rule out missions in the near future, while others emphasized that the maintenance of residual capabilities is still necessary even if such mission are not to come. In that respect, increasing U.S. endorsement of greater efforts from European member states is to be expected, yet as austerity decreases the public support for defence issues and procurement, this requirement might result in severe domestic political problems. While failing to address these issues is unlikely to lead to a return to the political environment of the interwar period due to the safeguards of political culture and EU institutions, it will certainly result in a Europe with increasingly diminishing geopolitical relevance and agency.

Recommendations:

- Utilize moments like the Libya operation as an impetus to address structural issues in transatlantic relations.
- Europeans should be ready for taking more responsibility and sharing the burden in NATO, but the U.S. turn towards Asia-Pacific does not diminish US interests in the region or the level of diplomatic cooperation and interdependence.
- The argument for defence is unanimous in the expert community, yet the arguments cannot penetrate the public's threshold of threat perception without the support of the political elites and public diplomacy efforts to put defence back to the agenda even in the era of austerity.
- The U.S. turn to the Pacific might be an opportunity to build a more global NATO and might also serve European interests in the region as the lead country realigns its main focus.

Q&A:

- The sustainability of the current European political order might require a more developed European strategic construct if U.S. disengagement is increasing.
- To what extent can a missionless NATO keep or redefine its role and strategic goals?



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Conference Report

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2012/
After Libya: The Future of NATO Operations
–
April 2012

ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Association for International Affairs (AMO) is a preeminent independent think-tank in the Czech Republic in the field of international affairs and foreign policy. The mission of AMO is to contribute to a deeper understanding of international affairs through a broad range of educational and research activities. Today, AMO represents a unique and transparent platform in which academics, business people, policy makers, diplomats, the media and NGO's can interact in an open and impartial environment.

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS AMO STRIVES TO:

- formulate and publish briefing, research and policy papers
- arrange international conferences, expert seminars, roundtables, public debates
- organize educational projects
- present critical assessment and comments on current events for local and international press
- create vital conditions for growth of a new expert generation
- support the interest in international relations among broad public
- cooperate with like-minded local and international institutions

RESEARCH CENTER

Founded in October 2003, the AMO's Research Center has been dedicated to carrying out research and raising public awareness of international affairs, security and foreign policy. The Research Center strives to identify and analyze issues important to Czech foreign policy and the country's position in the world. To this end, the Research Center produces independent analyses, encourages expert and public debate on international affairs, and suggests solutions to tackle problems in today's world. The Center's activities can be divided into two main areas. Firstly, the Center undertakes research and analysis of foreign policy issues. Secondly, the Center fosters dialogue with the policy-makers, expert community and broad public. All publications of the Research Center can be downloaded on AMO [website](#). Shorter comments and articles are regularly published by our analysts and research fellows on [AMO blog](#).

Follow us regularly!

