



Asociace
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Conference Report 1/2013

Prague Transatlantic Talks 2013 – NATO in Afghanistan and Beyond:
Search for a Mission, Quest for Capabilities

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June 2013

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Introduction

The international expert roundtable [Prague Transatlantic Talks 2013 – NATO in Afghanistan and Beyond: Search for a Mission, Quest for Capabilities](#) took place in the Černín Palace, seat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, on April 24, 2013. It was organized by the Association for International Affairs – AMO under the auspices of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Karel Schwarzenberg and with kind support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

The findings of AMO's policy paper [NATO and Liberal Interventionism: Don't Back Off](#) were presented at the onset of the event, giving the participants an overview of the main issues discussed by the authors – **lessons learnt from Afghanistan, implications of the operations in Libya and Mali**, and what all these experiences mean for **the possible future role of the Alliance as an instrument of liberal interventionism**. The first panel then dealt with the prospects of NATO operations after 2014 and gave speakers and guests the space to discuss NATO's prospects for next missions, focusing largely on the repercussions of the deployments in Afghanistan and Libya. The second panel concerned a more specific topic – future development of NATO capabilities under the current financial austerity and public disapproval of substantial military spending, necessary to sustain these capabilities. The discussions were held under the Chatham House rule.

Panel I: The Endgame in Afghanistan and the Future of NATO Operations

During the first panel participants tackled a challenging topic of **NATO's purpose after the termination of the operation in Afghanistan**, very possibly the most significant experience for the organization in the 21st century. Throughout the discussion, three main areas emerged that deserve more attention and deliberation as they touched upon crucial issues pertaining to NATO and its future role. The first broad topic concerned **the methods of the Afghanistan operation** and pointed out the ambiguity surrounding the question of what the Alliance has achieved (or sought to achieve) in the country. According to the speakers, the most serious problems were connected to **unclear objectives and measurements of the success of the mission whose progress was moreover hindered by frequent changes of goals**. This situation was invited mostly by different definitions of sought values among NATO member countries and its local partners, as well by the divergence in their objectives.



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The second topic arising from the discussion linked to the aftermath of the operation was the issue of **human capital and comprehensive approach towards areas in which operations take place**. The integrated approach demonstrates that **NATO has a potential to adapt to complex situations and deploy and use non-military elements in the course of its operations** as well. The emphasis is thus put on long-term development, rather than on strictly military affairs, with the aim of **enhancing the performance of state institutions and public services providers**. The ISAF mission has been highly valuable in this regard, as it has brought about multinational cooperation, shared knowledge and common understanding.

Nevertheless, these achievements have often been compromised by other interests and considerations, jeopardizing the long term goals. At the same time, **the ISAF mission has also highlighted certain ideological inconsistencies** like partnership of NATO with the Central Asia's governments. The success of the nation-building efforts in Afghanistan has also been jeopardized by too close connection to Tajik at the expense of majority Pashtuns. **NATO has thus run a risk of being perceived as an external actor pushing interests of arbitrarily chosen ethnic groups**.

Lastly, the panel focused on **a variety of approaches which have been implemented during the ISAF mission**. The participants discussed American and European handling of the situation in the country and devoted space especially to the anthropological approach dealing directly with **the needs and inclinations of the locals through the work of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams**. This is in stark contrast to the “traditional” Western military culture which is itself a certain kind of mentality that is not easily compatible with the principles of counterinsurgency, as the Afghani experience during first phases of the operation painfully demonstrated. **Individual participating states' divergent conceptualizations of the conflict and different ways of dealing with Taliban and other armed groups also burdened the mission**. The fact that it has lasted for more than a decade has further complicated the task.

Panel II: Developing NATO Capabilities under Public Disapproval and Economic Austerity

The afternoon panel of the conference investigated **the impact of austerity measures and accompanying public dislike of unnecessary spending on the defence sector in NATO countries**. As the speakers agreed upon, the last decade in the history of the Alliance was significant not only because of the activation of Article 5 for the first time, but also due to



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the economic crisis which has been influencing NATO for five years now. Extremely costly overseas deployments have been perceived profoundly negatively by public and subsequently by governments responding to popular demands.

Under these circumstances, **the Visegrad group countries can serve as an example** for other small states suffering from the problems connected to budgetary cuts. Cooperation among individual member states is needed to retain necessary capabilities, possibly leading to a peculiar kind of military interdependence among partners. Despite all these obstacles, conference participants agreed, **NATO must strive to remain relevant in the contemporary world and to stay in position to be able to safeguard safety of people in the Euro-Atlantic region.**

In order to achieve that, **more realistic and precise goals, aspirations and means must be proposed and formulated.** It is, however, increasingly evident that NATO leaders have to address three different audiences in the matters related to overseas operations: intervening partners, political elites and the public in the particular country in which a mission takes place, and the public at home. Reactions of all three audiences must be taken into account when planning and conducting missions. **Member states further need to shape their respective national interests in a way that will make them compatible with each other,** i.e. agree upon certain “core” values and goals.

On a more practical level, the focus should be on **streamlining of the agenda** as well as on **implementation of the business patterns in the top management of defence sector in NATO countries.** Improvements are especially needed in regards to innovations of the defence systems. Nevertheless, in the 21st century innovations as such pertain not only to the processes of development and manufacturing, but to the organizational aspects as well. NATO thus must be good at quick assembling of forces, configuration of military capabilities, and serving as a common platform for joint projects. A huge challenge therefore lies in the Alliance’s attitude towards profound transformation its culture currently undergoes, as it needs to manage **the shift to the culture of innovations and resourcefulness.**



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ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (AMO)

Association for International Affairs (AMO) is a preeminent independent think-tank in the Czech Republic in the field of foreign policy. Since 1997, the mission of AMO has been 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 briefings, 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 pursuing research and raising public awareness of international affairs, security and foreign policy. The Research Center strives to identify and analyze issues crucial 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: first, it undertakes [research and analysis](#) of foreign policy issues and comments on [AMO blog](#); and second, it fosters dialogue with the policy-makers, expert community, and broad public.

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