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CHICAGO NATO SUMMIT 2012

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NATO at the Crossroads

On the eve of the NATO summit in Chicago, the Alliance appears to be reaching a critical junction. During the Cold War, NATO's purpose was defined first and foremost by the existence of the Soviet threat and the need to deter it. In this context, NATO's Article 5 was the ultimate cornerstone and essence of the alliance. With the end of the Cold War, the Alliance successfully redefined itself by becoming predominantly a crisis-management operations organisation and through enlargement to former communist states. For NATO, no longer deterring an external threat but organising security became its essential role. But this could not last indefinitely. Further expansion of the Alliance is reaching its limits and the era of crisis-management operations is likely to come to an end following the pullout from Afghanistan. From this follow two fundamental questions: Is the Alliance in need of a new mission, and will the Chicago summit become a stepping stone in this process?

As several authors in this volume point out, the Alliance's future has already been defined in the New Strategic Concept adopted at the summit in Lisbon in 2010. NATO's new doctrine states that its key roles are collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. The implementation of these tasks, however, is challenged by the severe economic crisis in the Western world that has produced massive defence spending cuts and by the U.S. decision to pivot progressively away from Europe towards the Middle East and East Asia.

This volume is composed almost entirely of contributions by authors from Central and Eastern Europe or those who also know and understand the region's specificity and its security outlook. It was our intention to deliver a set of analyses that would represent a regional contribution to the debate on NATO's future. Naturally, over the more than two decades since the end of the Cold War, Central European perspectives on security have moved closer to those of other NATO members; however, there is no doubt that a certain regional specificity remains. The reader will find that Central Europeans stress the centrality of Article 5, prefer the status quo in approaching NATO's nuclear posture, and are supportive of the development of missile defence. Beyond these fundamentals,

the reader will find a variety of perspectives on some crucial issues, including NATO's relationship with Russia.

The last NATO summit held in the U.S. took place in Washington in 1999. Then, NATO agreed to commence the enlargement process by accepting three former members of the communist block: Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The NATO that emerged from that summit acquired a new mission, one that has proven to be of fundamental importance to the stability and security of Europe. There is hope Chicago will also succeed in opening a new chapter for the Alliance, this time with Central Europeans as co-shapers of a new NATO.

Marcin Zaborowski

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