
After NATO's Bucharest Summit

*Fernando del Pozo**

Theme: In general terms NATO's Bucharest Summit has been a success.

Summary: In general terms NATO's Bucharest Summit has been a success. It delivered on a significant number of questions that were being negotiated, such as the incorporation of Croatia and Albania. As expected, Macedonia failed to make it, but the problem should be resolved soon, and substantial progress was made on the Ukraine and Georgia, despite Russia's looming presence in the background. The outcome was less satisfactory regarding the design of a new Strategic Concept, but the hope is that the Declaration on Alliance Security should lead to progress being made for the next Summit, to be held in the spring of 2009 in Strasbourg and Kehl.

Analysis:

Prior to the Bucharest Summit we presented some reflections, including an assessment of the possible results, on what would be debated and the how's and why's of some of the most appealing issues. The dust has now settled and it is time to return to review what expectations have been fulfilled, where they have fallen short and why, and –most importantly– what are the new expectations and which is the way ahead.

Our first observation is that President Bush indeed seems to have gone to the Summit with the aim of making it an important part of his legacy. Mindful that this was his last opportunity to move things in the direction he wants, he relentlessly exerted pressure in certain key areas, as we shall see. The ensuing debate also helped to ensure that the Summit would not be quickly forgotten, as was the previous meeting at Riga, but that – along with next year's meeting– it will be, if not a watershed, at least an important reference point to steer the Alliance's policy for the coming years.

The first item of substance to be considered is enlargement. While the number of candidates, or countries proposed for candidacy, could not compete with the 'big bang' meeting at Prague in 2002, it was far from negligible. There were three nations in the Membership Action Plan (MAP), ie, with a degree of certainty that some day they would become full allies, although with no fixed date and conditional on their fulfilment of the exacting conditions that are periodically scrutinised by the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Of these, Albania and Macedonia had had such a status for no less than seven years, while Croatia had only recently achieved it. Nevertheless, it was widely predicted that only Croatia was sure to be admitted, but that Albania and Macedonia had a number of problems, especially the latter, which to any remaining failure to fulfil the requirements added the vexing problem of having its constitutional name, Republic of Macedonia,

* *Director of the Project on "EU-NATO" Relations, Elcano Royal Institute*

contested by Greece on the grounds that it betrays expansionist ambitions on other parts of Alexander's Macedonian kingdom, part of which –arguably the largest part– belongs today to Greece and is part of the cherished classical Greek inheritance.

Finally, not only was the prediction of Croatia's membership fulfilled, but Albania also saw its aspirations satisfied, both being invited to join. Macedonia only succeeded in having its efforts at reform recognised –even applauded– and the pledge that the invitation to join would be made as soon as the problem of the name is solved, implicitly without the need of a fully-fledged Summit.

Many formulas have been considered over the past few years to solve the Macedonian name problem, the worst no doubt being the one which in daily use at NATO –although invented at the UN–: 'the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)'. This compromise solution has had the odd result of Macedonia's place in the alphabetical order at both the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the UN General Assembly being in the letter 'T' (the letter 'M' being unacceptable to the Greeks and 'Y' and 'F' to the Macedonians). It has also made it very difficult to adopt NATO's new three letter acronym system, for similar reasons. Other formulas were suggested in desperate attempts as the Summit approached, but all failed miserably, including 'Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)', 'Macedonia-Skopje', 'New Macedonia' (understandably irritating to the Macedonians, who are proud of their country's history) and countless others. The authorisation of the Heads of State and Government (HOSG) to the Ambassadorial Council to invite Macedonia does not guarantee that the problem will to be solved any time soon: the Greeks have said they will not accept any name with 'Macedonia' in it, and the Macedonians will never accept any name without it. Worse, according to a recent poll the overwhelming majority of the latter are more disposed to relinquish the much-desired NATO membership than their current constitutional name.

But these were not the only nations for potential enlargement. The Ukraine and Georgia were very much on the agenda, not as immediate candidates for accession, to be sure, but it was hoped, especially by the US, that some sort of signal could be sent to raise hopes of membership. The issue, far more revolutionary than previous or current enlargements, was deemed to be a source of conflict, and it did not disappoint. To start with, positions as to Ukrainian and Georgian membership were already sharply divided before the Summit, with the US strongly leading the supporters and Germany and France on the opposite side, and no doubt for tactical reasons (that did not work) no attempt was made to find a compromise or somehow whittle down the problem beforehand, as is the usual practice with other thorny issues. On the contrary, the gist of the discussion was purposely left for a truly unusual series of '1+0' meetings (meaning only principals, with no note-takers seated behind) at the HOSG and Foreign Ministerial level, or '1+1' (HOSG plus FM). Clearly the expectation was, especially on the proposing side, that compromise would be avoided and a clearly positive decision would be reached. In its intent and optimism the US was not alone, as a number of nations, in particular on the Russian periphery, were firm supporters. But NATO is NATO, and what came out of the closeted sessions was nothing but a compromise. No Membership Action Plans for Ukraine and Georgia have been approved, which would have been the expected signal, as has so far been the case with all previous aspirants, but a truly novel declaration was issued to the effect that 'We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO', supported by the statements 'MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership' and 'we support these countries' application for MAP'. It is quite

astonishing that eventual membership is guaranteed even before the MAP is agreed, but then again compromises are reached out of unusual circumstances.

The main obstacle to the acceptance of a prompt MAP for Ukraine and Georgia was that both nations have sharp disagreements with Russia, combined with energy issues. In Georgia's case this is complicated by the independence movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and in the Ukraine's by the problems inherent to what has been described as a country torn between East and West. All this, with the clearly articulated Russian criticism—even hostility—of this aspect of NATO enlargement, has led to no-win situation: if approved, Russia would retaliate in many ways that would be damaging to NATO, both collectively and individually. It could refuse to countenance a NATO-Russia Declaration, intensify its opposition to the Missile Defence—which is already quite strong—, act rashly in the question of gas supplies to Western Europe through the Ukraine or, ultimately, lose its hesitations to denounce the CFE Treaty. If not approved, NATO would cut a poor image, appearing to be hostage to the Russian veto over its sovereign decisions.

In any case, the compromise worked. Of all the potentially negative measures Russia could take, only the first—and mildest—was put into effect: the expected Declaration that had been strenuously negotiated the previous weeks has been replaced by a Chairman's statement, which although it receives the same media visibility as a regular statement, can easily be disavowed by any party. President Putin evidently chose to see the decision on the Ukraine and Georgia as a failure to bring them into NATO, and reportedly did not battle it out on the difficult question of the defensive missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic. Even more positively, he signed an agreement to allow the transit of NATO material and personnel through Russian territory in support of the ISAF mission. He did criticise the Allied interpretation and application of the CFE Treaty, as was to be expected, which he considers to be detrimental to Russia's interests, and continued to threaten to withdraw. All in all, however, the results have been relatively positive in a field—NATO-Russia relations—that is often fraught with risks.

Expectations were to a large degree focused on Afghanistan, and were not disappointed. Rather than being content with a long paragraph on Afghanistan within the regular Summit Declaration, the HOSG in ISAF format (meaning the Allies plus ISAF contributing nations, President Karzai and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon) issued an independent 'ISAF Strategic Vision', of great interest. Its main message was of international and long-term commitment, as well as a clear call to the Afghans themselves to take their future into their own hands. The latter produced from Karzai a commitment to take charge of security in the Kabul region by August 2008 with the increasingly assertive Afghan National Army, which if fulfilled will be a significant improvement on even recent predictions. The shift in emphasis, clearly perceived in the Vision document, away from a situation in which the Allies are the actors and Afghanistan the passive subject, towards one of increased Afghan responsibility for their own future, was perhaps the dominant note of the Summit's Afghan section.

Another positive answer to the call for a greater contribution came from France, which is to send a full battalion to the Eastern Region this Summer. Canada, the Netherlands and the UK, that have been holding high the NATO flag in the beleaguered Southern Region since ISAF moved into it, have suffered more combat casualties than anywhere else and have very understandably requested that the burden be more equitably shared, although apparently without much success. Indeed, no promise was extracted from Spain—among

others– to increase its presence or relax the caveats limiting its forces despite the strong peer pressure.

On the negative side, and despite the request from certain nations, no efforts seem to have been made to define any benchmarks for success. While the general intent does not require much explanation, quantifying progress towards a desired goal is an absolute must, especially since public opinion, within and without the group of ISAF-contributing nations, can easily waver as result of any adverse circumstantial headline news. Only something that can be demonstrably measured is likely to maintain the resolve to see the mission through.

The Summit, in dealing with Kosovo and the KFOR deployment, which should have by now been winding down if the Ahtisaari plan had been successful, tiptoed around the difficult problem posed by the unilateral Albano-Kosovar declaration of independence. Although some allies have –unaccountably– accepted, and even officially rejoiced at the bold declaration, others, among them Spain, have kept a cool head and not recognised the province’s self promotion to national status, a movement that clearly contravenes international legality, negates the very principles of ethnic and religious tolerance that our intervention there in 1999 was intended to uphold and creates an unfortunate precedent for other troubled areas, mostly in the near vicinity but also elsewhere. Therefore, in order not to bring this division to the fore, the HOSG have concentrated on declaring the continuance of the KFOR mission in extended compliance of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244, and have acknowledged the UN’s ‘rule of law’ mission, glossing over the fact that it is the EU that is carrying it out under the acronym EULEX, itself also a double bone of contention: first among Allies around the pertinence or otherwise of the Berlin Plus arrangements for the required NATO action of providing military support to the civilian EU mission, and, secondly, because it rubs salt in Serbia’s wounds, as the latter not consider it is warranted under UNSCR 1244.

The statements the HOSG produced on the NATO Response Force (NRF) have been quite predictable. Much like in regular Defence Ministerial –even ambassadorial– meetings, all Allies agree that the NRF has to be provided with more forces and more support, in particular strategic and intra-theatre lift helicopters, and remedy a full catalogue of shortfalls that threaten to convert the NRF into a hollow declaration rather than a jointly-owned force capable, at the high end, of initial entry operations, not to speak of the entire gamut of peace-support roles. But the declarations of goodwill are collective, and it is only with strenuous efforts that individual nations will come to accept that it is a binding pledge for each and every one. Let us hope that this time, with the additional weight of the HOSG, the declaration succeeds in loosening the strings of national purses during the next force generation conference. It is nevertheless worth mentioning that the paragraphs on the NRF include references to information dominance, to the need of the much delayed –and curtailed– Alliance Ground Surveillance system, and to the new concept of maritime situational awareness (MSA).

A bit of a surprise was provided by the inclusion in the Declaration of a discussion on the missile defence system currently at an advanced state of planning by the US, with radars and launchers in the Czech Republic and Poland, which threatens to destroy the CFE Treaty, such is the Russian antagonism to it, and, more interestingly, its linkage to ‘any future NATO-wide missile defence architecture’, which in the following paragraph is amplified into exploring ‘the potential for linking United States, NATO and Russian missile defence systems at an appropriate time’. Whether this is an argumental line dropped to

help lessen Russia's tough opposition to the US system is anybody's guess, but the use of words such as 'architecture', rather than 'system', which probably would be used if plans were already advanced, and '... at an appropriate time' might give a clue.

One big disappointment was the failure to agree on the launching of a new Alliance Strategic Concept (SC), given the clear obsolescence of the current version, dating back to 1999. Obtaining approval to develop a concept for the Summit in 2009 was indeed considered to be very unlikely, mainly because of the political difficulties posed by the change in the US presidency in between the two events. On the other hand, it was expected that at least Germany would push for a decision, and it was publicly known that the Secretary General favoured it. The result, true to NATO's tradition for compromising, has been to draft a new document to be called 'Declaration on Alliance Security', which should be delivered and adopted at the 2009 Summit.

Drafting a new SC, as was intended, would in itself have meant lowering the level at which NATO's current doctrinal contradictions and problems would have been solved, because they are of such a depth and importance that in principle they should require to be dealt with in the untouchable Washington Treaty itself. Thus, it was thought, demoting the debate to a SC level should help alleviate the misgivings of certain nations. But, in fact, the agreement reached at the Summit means demoting it yet another level, to a declaration whose place in the NATO documentary hierarchy is not yet known, but which is certainly inferior to a SC. Whether this new document will stand by itself and be the tool to 'further articulate and strengthen the Alliance's vision of its role in meeting the evolving challenges of the 21st century (...)', as the Summit Declaration says, or whether it will rather pave the way to a fuller and more revolutionary SC remains to be seen. For the time being we shall have to be content with this compromise.

Much was expected from President Sarkozy's recent declarations on the intended return of France to NATO's command structure, or rather, as he put it, the renewal of France's relation with NATO. Nothing has transpired, but then again it was known that the President's wish requires a lot of theoretical work in Paris in order to materialise, work that should have borne fruit in a new White Book due last March. Unfortunately it has been delayed until just before France takes over the EU Presidency on 1 July. We will hear more about it once the French White Book has been issued, and perhaps during the discussions leading to an update of the current EU Long-Term Vision document, which France reportedly intends to promote during her EU Presidency despite the fact that it is only about two years old.

As expected, the Summit Declaration includes a reference to NATO's role in Energy Security, a task it set itself in Riga 18 months ago. The paragraph is rather bland, containing some general statements with not much original material, assigning the task to the North Atlantic Council –in permanent (ambassadorial) session– of preparing in time for the next Summit a report on the progress achieved. The Council's enthusiasm does not seem to have been kindled by such inspired expressions as 'information sharing', 'projecting stability' and 'supporting consequence management' into producing any really new, bold ideas on this important problem.

Conclusions: Overall, the Bucharest Summit has been a success. It did not deliver on everything that was brought to the table –which was to be expected–, but it did achieve a reasonable amount and certainly more than the previous Summit in Riga. Perhaps the highest stake was enlargement, and in that respect its performance was not at all

unsatisfactory: Croatia, as expected, and Albania, long an aspirant, have now become members. Macedonia failed to make it, but that was a certainty anyway and the problem should be soon resolved. In the cases of the Ukraine and Georgia, progress was far greater than could be reasonably expected. Despite that, and other contentious issues, such as missile defence, and notwithstanding the failure to sign a common Declaration, the balance of the Summit with Russia is clearly positive. On the negative side, the failure to agree on the launching of a new Strategic Concept is to be deplored, and is only alleviated by the hope that the Declaration on Alliance Security sparks a more ambitious revamping of the Alliance's strategy. Thus, as predicted, the Bucharest Summit will be understood in the future only in combination with the next one in the spring of 2009, to be held in Strasbourg, France, and Kehl, Germany.

Fernando del Pozo
Director of the Project on "EU-NATO" Relations, Elcano Royal Institute