

## Europe And NATO Are Making Defense Efforts For Security Strategies

A conference on European security has opened in Berlin. It is focusing on ways to effectively strengthen European defense efforts with a view to improving joint missions in crisis areas on the continent and elsewhere. The two-day conference in Berlin has drawn high-ranking politicians, NATO officials and EU defense experts and aims to highlight efforts to further harmonize defense cooperation within the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU's own defense initiatives.

It is being held at a time when both the EU and NATO are in the process of building up rapid reaction forces, or battle groups, as European strategists prefer to call them. Both organizations are potentially drawing upon the same pools of soldiers which indicate that rivalry can never be ruled out. But in a bid to further heal transatlantic relations after the controversy over the US-led war in Iraq, assurances are being heard ever so often that the EU's own security efforts are invariably intended to complement -- not duplicate or rival -- NATO.

"It would be totally wrong to view the development of European defense capabilities separately from advances within NATO," said Germany's Social Democrat Defense Minister, Peter Struck. He added that both NATO and the European Union are currently making efforts to be better prepared for out-of-area missions in a bid to adapt to a fast changing security environment.

"NATO must be open to reform". There can be no doubt whatsoever that in future NATO has to be the place where dialogue on transatlantic security strategies must be intensified, Struck added. "The alliance has to be open for reform," Struck added.

This is what German chancellor Gerhard Schroder demanded at a recent security conference in Munich, and his words are being taken seriously by NATO leaders. Struck's message to the conference was taken up by Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, deputy secretary-general of NATO. He made it clear that it had been wrong to try and sweep different threat perception levels on both sides of the Atlantic under the carpet and demanded that a fresh initiative be made to debate security strategies more openly within NATO.

"We need to understand that NATO is not only a forum for action. We must also understand that it's a forum for debate," said Minuto Rizzo. "During the Iraq controversy, NATO was manifestly under-utilized as a consultative forum, and we paid a high price for that," he said. "I'm confident that we've learned our lesson. If we want to preserve NATO as a central framework for effective multilateralism, we must engage in multilateral debate."

The conference of NATO members, currently taking place in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, has seen the conclusion of a military cooperation agreement between the military alliance and Russia. The deal - hailed as a milestone by NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Schaffer - will make it easier to hold joint military exercises and for NATO troops and Russian forces to cross each other's territory. It now requires the approval of the Russian parliament.

Speaking at the conference, a senior NATO official said the alliance has no desire at the moment to get involved in the Middle East peace process. However, he added that it is not ruling out the possibility that it may do so in the future. Ukraine's Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk was also at the NATO meeting, where he announced that his country hopes to join NATO within the next three years. He said Ukraine could contribute to greater stability and security in the region.

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### About the Author

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