NATO's role in Critical Infrastructure Protection

At the recent summit in Riga in November 2006, NATO Heads of State and Government confirmed the Alliance's role in Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP), reiterating their "determination to protect our populations, territories, infrastructure and forces against the consequences of terrorist attacks" and underscoring that "Alliance security interests can also be affected by the disruption of the flow of vital resources".

NATO's interest in CIP started in 2001 and has been progressively consolidated in several policy documents and programmes. Several NATO bodies are dealing with CIP in a coordinated manner:
- In 2003 the Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committee adopted the background concepts on CIP, as well as a Road Map with six areas of work, aiming to develop tools that nations can use to prepare for and manage consequences of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) incidents, as well as, to some extent, of natural disasters, on their critical infrastructures. The actions in this area are part of a broader framework, the Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan for the protection of civilian population against CBRN events, particularly CBRN-related terrorism.

- In 2004, Heads of State and Government agreed a Programme of Work on Defence Against Terrorism aimed at promoting the development of cutting-edge technologies for the protection of military assets and troops. CIP is one of the ten priorities of the Programme of Work and is led by Belgium.

Seen from the civil emergency planning perspective, NATO's role in CIP does not rely on a regulatory approach. Rather, Alliance programmes aim to build skills and capabilities, by promoting governance and resilience in the field of civil emergency planning with a focus on consequence management. The main goal is to support national plans by promoting higher standards of preparedness and better interoperability in consequence management. Through the Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan, NATO also extends this support to its 49 partner countries.

NATO has recently developed a particular focus on energy security, which includes the security of supplies as well as infrastructure security. At the Riga summit, Heads of State and Government called for a "coordinated, international effort to assess risks to energy infrastructures and promote energy infrastructure security". The North Atlantic Council, NATO's governing body, was tasked with "defining those areas where NATO may add value to safeguard the security interests of the Allies and, upon request, assist national and international efforts". A Task Force has been recently appointed to deal with these matters.