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“NATO 2030: A Celebration of Origins and an Eye toward the Future”

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Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, Chairman Connolly, Vice Chairman Turner, members of the Subcommittee and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It is a true honor to have the opportunity to testify to you today about the importance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO.

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to summarize some key points in my oral testimony and have the rest of my written testimony placed on the record. Is that acceptable to you?

NATO’s Response to New Challenges

NATO has finally recognized that the politics of the world have changed, a view clearly evident during the Brussels summit meeting on June 14. This moment has taken some time to arrive.

In 2014, the Alliance quickly took defensive steps to respond to the Kremlin’s military aggression against Ukraine and seizure of Crimea. It readied itself for reinforcement and a forward presence in the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Every single NATO member came forward with military forces, in case Russian action called for a rapid response.

I was always proud of those decisive early decisions, which were beginning to bear fruit when I arrived as Deputy Secretary General in the autumn of 2016. They were so at odds with what I had heard about NATO—that it was slow at urgent decision-making and could not get its act together in case of need.

Less than one year after I arrived, in July 2017, the battlegroups in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland were certified for action. Units from all over NATO, from Albania in the south to Norway in the north, were ready to fight together. Should Moscow have contemplated an attack, NATO in its entirety would have responded—a powerful deterrent to a potential aggressor.

But NATO’s political stance did not mirror that decisive action. The Alliance was saddled with a strategic concept that dated to 2010. It described the strategic environment in a way that was far from the reality: “Today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low.”

This characterization was hugely at odds with the quick and efficient military steps that NATO was taking, but some allies shied away from reexamining the strategic concept. Too many NATO members had different views of what the top security priorities should be, and they feared that debating a new concept would be too divisive. So NATO continued to make efficient progress on the military front, but its political underpinnings were lagging.

Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, called NATO out on this failing in November 2019, with his searing criticism that the alliance was brain dead—operationally capable, yes, but failing to see how the world was changing around it. Macron argued forcefully that new challenges, even threats, were coming over the horizon and NATO would not be ready for them.

Allied leaders picked up this challenge at their London meeting in December 2019, launching a year-long study to see if NATO could do better. Eminent experts from across the alliance did the work. “NATO 2030,” the result, produced a number of recommendations addressed to the Secretary-General. They are a worthy response to Macron’s criticism. They conveyed that NATO should step decisively into the future. At their summit on July 14, allied leaders accepted many of the recommendations, indicating that they are ready to confront head-on the global challenges confronting them.

Front and center is the sharpened competitive environment, with the persistence of Russia as a military power poised to do mischief on NATO’s periphery. The rise of China is a new and powerful focus, not because NATO would relocate to the South China Sea, but because China is playing in the midst of Europe. It is, for example, buying up control of transport infrastructure that may hamper NATO’s freedom to operate. Going forward, NATO will have to keep a sharp eye on both Russia and China, remaining ready forcefully to defend its interests.

I do want to emphasize that NATO should also seek opportunities to work with both countries. The long-standing approach to Russia stands—to be clear-eyed about the need to deter and defend, but also to look for opportunities to engage. Where China is concerned, NATO should develop a political approach, focused in the Euro-Atlantic space but recognizing China’s new role in the world.

I will not rehearse at length the NATO 2030 recommendations that alliance leaders blessed on June 14. However, I would like to highlight my enthusiasm for the fact that NATO is launching a process to develop a new strategic concept. It is high time. The new concept, in my view, should enable NATO to be a more autonomous and effective alliance, less dependent on American military power at a time when the United States is pivoting to the Indo-Pacific. NATO should be more ready to stand up for itself in the world; likewise, it should be more ready to stand with the United States when needed.

NATO’s Adaptability

Now I would like to turn to what I consider to be the main advantage of the alliance, and that is its adaptability. I will do so by focusing on how NATO reacted, and adapted, to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The front page of the NATO website caught my eye a year ago, in May 2020. There, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg “welcomed the offers of the United Kingdom and the State of Qatar to provide airlift assets coordinated by NATO’s Euro Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) in support of the United Nations’ effort to fight the COVID 19 pandemic.”

Of course, I am very proud of the EADRCC and the role that they played respond to the pandemic: it was perhaps the quickest and most coherent response of any international

organization, with the exception of the World Health Organization (WHO), which has health as its primary responsibility.

My main point about this website entry, however, is that NATO was available and was called on early by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA. The assistance that NATO provided with its member the UK and its partner the UAE, responded to a global appeal by the UN to airlift medical supplies to Africa, via hubs in Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa.

This would not have happened even two or three years ago. The United Nations would not have asked, because it was wary about working with NATO, since many influential UN member states were still heavily critical of the roles the alliance played in certain international conflicts and crises—the Western Balkans in the 1990s, Libya in 2011 being examples.

The critical attitude has shifted in recent years, however, with extensive cooperation opening up not only with the UN, but also with the European Union, thanks to Joint Statements or Memoranda that SecGen Stoltenberg has signed with the UN and EU leaderships, and the hard work of many staff in NATO HQ.

The African Union is another example of an international organization that has been wary of NATO, because of the earlier involvement in Libya, but now is working with NATO to perfect its peacekeeping training. The AU and the UN both consider NATO to provide the “gold standard” in peacekeeping training, therefore the NATO “brand” is already established in the peacekeeping arena.

The performance of the EARDCC and the NATO Strategic Airlift capability based at Papa, in Hungary, are also steadily enhancing the NATO brand during the pandemic. Thus, I think that the combination of better institutional relationships and successful recent experience makes it possible for NATO to contribute significantly in the post-pandemic world.

If NATO works with the UN, EU and AU, that will be a major contribution, but we have also seen the World Bank interested in working with NATO in specific circumstances, such as the peace process in Afghanistan. I know that there are many “ifs” about that process, in fact many negative developments, but I only wanted to say that international institutions that will be providing aid and financial assistance to economies as the pandemic’s effects continue to unfold are also interested in cooperation with NATO.

These efforts cannot come, of course, at the cost of NATO’s primary missions to provide for deterrence and defense for all its member states, and to continue in the fight against terrorism. NATO’s three core tasks of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security will not go away. Therefore, work with these institutions should always complement these main NATO tasks. This will require some creative thinking inside the alliance, but I am sure the HQ will not get too creative. As you know, the allies are always alert to how the institution’s resources are being used, and heavily opposed to mission creep.

But I do believe that we can gain some dual advantage from NATO efforts, without necessarily running up costs. What NATO does to help its members and partners deal with disasters such as the pandemic builds resilience, and resilience is at the very heart of what the alliance must do to adapt to new military threats. When NATO provides an ally or partner with advice about addressing corrosive disinformation during a disaster, it is also bolstering military resilience, the ability to ensure that military propaganda does not impact a vital operation. We need to look for such two-for-one value wherever we can.

Thus, what NATO is doing to adapt to the pandemic and its aftermath can also contribute to what it needs to do to become a more capable and resilient military alliance. This adaptability and willingness to change is at the heart of NATO's success.

Burden-Sharing in NATO

I must here make a brief but heartfelt remark about the issue of burden-sharing: it will not go away. I know that many NATO member states are going to be searching for savings in their defense budgets as they address the economic crisis growing out of COVID-19. This process is natural at such a time, but I would strongly urge allies to stay the course with the Wales Investment Pledge.

The reason is simple: allies need to modernize. Some are still deploying Warsaw Pact equipment that is 50 years old. If NATO is to maintain readiness and reliability—never mind build up its capacity—judicious modernization of military equipment across the Alliance needs to occur.

This investment in the allies' own defense is vital, because the United States will continue its pivot to Asia. Strategic necessity continues to drive in that direction. Therefore, the NATO Allies will need to do more on behalf of their own defense.

Democratic Resilience at NATO

Finally, I would like to reflect on the concept of democratic resilience at NATO, a vital and continuing goal for the alliance. At their June 14 summit, NATO member states embraced a "Strengthened Resilience Commitment." In it, they emphasized that, "The foundation of our resilience lies in our shared commitment to the principles of individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law." Thus, these values are at the heart of resilience in NATO, but how best to advance them? Here I would like to make three points:

First, from my own experience as Deputy Secretary General, I can attest that NATO leadership is determined to advance this goal, and does so through deft private diplomacy. The NATO Secretary General is especially skilled at reaching out privately to his counterparts, the NATO heads of state and government. All of the top leaders at NATO HQ, civilian and military, take advantage of the good working relationships that they maintain to ensure that member states receive a constant and compelling message about the necessity of upholding NATO's foundational values, democracy and the rule of law, as laid out in the Washington Treaty.

Second, the NATO leadership also undertakes, consistently and persistently, what I call an “inside-out” approach to working the issues at NATO. The alliance consistently embraces democratic values and the rule of law, whether in conducting its daily business, training or exercises. An example of this is how NATO insists on the application of international humanitarian law to targeting policy, and so trains its personnel. This approach to training translates into a group of senior military officers and soldiers from across the alliance who are schooled in basic democratic values.

Third, NATO actively displays these values whenever it shows its public face. I recollect, for example, the “Crisis Management Exercise 2018” (CMX 18), which was built on the principle of transparency. It was designed to show-case NATO’s openness, close working relationship with its member states—there was strong public support for the exercise in Norway, where it took place—and allied unity, with good cooperation from the smallest member to the largest. Of course, the Russians received an open invitation to observe the exercise, and they did attend.

These three examples lead me to two recommendations. First, I recommend that NATO should reaffirm its foundational values in the context of the NATO 2030 review and the process of redoing the strategic concept. It is important that these values are front and center at this time, and that NATO send a clear message about them.

Second, I recommend that NATO look for ways to expand resilience in this arena with the establishment of an institutional structure affiliated with NATO. In my view, this structure should be built around the Center of Excellence (COE) concept.

NATO has developed a dynamic network of COEs in recent years that are working on some of the most troubling issues with which the alliance is contending. They are the site of policy innovation in the alliance, and are increasingly being pushed to work together to join forces against the challenges that NATO faces—cyber-attacks, misinformation campaigns, the whole panoply of hybrid challenges. Indeed, the NATO-EU COE on hybrid threats has been cited as a model for developing cooperation with the European Union on democratic resilience. I believe that such a NATO-EU COE on democratic resilience would be the best way to bring innovation to bear on this important problem, and I note that Romania has already offered to host such a center.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to your questions and to our discussion.