NATO'S ONGOING ADAPTABILITY AMIDST RISING SECURITY CHALLENGES

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is the most successful alliance in history because of its ability to adapt as the world changes. Today, NATO faces the most serious security challenges in a generation. These challenges are complex and are evolving. They include terrorism and instability in its southern neighborhood, Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine and elsewhere, as well as cyber attacks and hybrid warfare. This article outlines the specific steps NATO has taken in recent years to strengthen its defense and deterrence capabilities and to project stability beyond its borders. A discussion of NATO's priorities following the Brussels Meeting of Heads of State and Government on 25 May 2017, and the role of public support in ensuring NATO's ongoing adaptability and success are also included.

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N ATO is the most successful alliance in history because it has been able to adapt to keep pace with an ever-changing security environment.

In his insightful new book, *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950*, Seth Johnston suggests that NATO is unique among peer international organizations in its ability to adapt: "Unlike other enduring post-World War II institutions that continue to reflect the international politics of their founding era, NATO stands out both for the boldness of its transformations as well as their frequency over a period of nearly 70 years."[1]

For its first 40 years, the NATO Alliance focused mostly on issues related to collective defense. But that overriding strategic preoccupation did not prevent important changes from taking place within NATO. Far from it. During those first four decades, NATO issued two reports that I believe bear directly on NATO's long-term adaptability:

- The *Report on Non-Military Cooperation* (also known as the "Report of the Committee of Three" or the "Report of the Three Wise Men") issued in 1956;[2]
- And the *Report on the Future Tasks of the Alliance* (the "Harmel Report") issued in 1967.[3]

After the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953 and in the midst of the 1956 Suez crisis when Allied consultation on security matters was at a particularly low ebb, the North Atlantic Council, NATO's principal political decision-making body, could see that greater non-military consultation among Allies was needed. In setting up the 1956 Committee of Three, the Council assigned to this Committee the task of "advising the Council on ways and means to improve and extend NATO cooperation in non-military fields and to develop greater unity within the Atlantic Community."[4]

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[1] Seth A. Johnston, *How NATO Adapts*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 132nd series, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 176.

[2] NATO Archives, *Report on Non-Military Cooperation*, 1956.

[3] NATO Archives, *Report on the Future Tasks of the Alliance*, 1967.

[4] NATO Archives, *Report on Non-Military Cooperation*, 1956.

The Committee of Three issued a series of wide-ranging recommendations to strengthen the Alliance's political, cultural, economic, and scientific cooperation, which had far-reaching ramifications over the decades.

NATO: The Cornerstone of Transatlantic Security

From its inception, NATO had always been an alliance of equals with shared values. NATO's consensus-style of decision-making reinforced this by giving all Allies, large and small alike, an equal say in making decisions. By enhancing the non-military co-operation of Alliance members, the Report of the Committee of Three helped to create a more balanced, more inclusive, more responsive, and more adaptive Alliance.

Collective defense, of course, is the cornerstone of NATO. But the political commitment for collective defense requires more than a military relationship. This is where the Report of the Committee of Three was so incisive, highlighting that "the first essential … of a healthy and developing NATO lies

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in the whole-hearted acceptance by all its members of the *political commitment* for collective defense, and in the confidence which each has in the will and ability of the others to honor that commitment if aggression should take place."[5] (Emphasis added.) The Report singles out the importance of the *confidence* that Allies will honor their Article 5 commitment – the mutual defense clause which states that an attack on one ally will be regarded as an attack on all allies.

The question arises: From whence does that confidence come? My view is it derives organically from a more complete, holistic range of deep relationships of the kind recommended by the Report. That is to say, strong cooperation in all areas, including political consultation, but also cultural, economic, and scientific cooperation. This requires broad public and political support in each nation for NATO's policies and programs, which in turn develops from building a broad-based, multi-dimensional, transatlantic community. This is no trivial matter because NATO's mutual defense pledge is one of the principle benefits of NATO membership. Having a strong security guarantee provides the foundation for the stability and prosperity of each member state and its citizens.

The 1967 Harmel Report continued NATO's adaptation by encouraging the Alliance to take a more cooperative approach to security issues. In considering the tasks of

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[5] NATO Archives, *Report on Non-Military Cooperation*, 1956.

the Alliance for the next 20 years, the Report advocated a dual-track approach with a focus on defense and deterrence on the one hand, and coupled détente and arms control on the other.[6] In essence, the Harmel Report restated NATO's basic purpose and principles but added the concept of dialogue and the relaxation of tensions between East and West. This shift had a profound and lasting impact on the Alliance's strategic approach to cooperative security.

Taken together, these two seminal reports from the 1950s and the 1960s helped NATO adapt to the changing security environment during those periods and thereafter. These reports contributed to NATO's institutional capacity for organizational adaptability that has served the Alliance well, by broadening and deepening the Alliance's political cooperation.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union – the world changed dramatically and NATO had to change with it. NATO began to widen its focus by including the management of crises beyond NATO's borders. For example, during the 1990s NATO intervened to stop the bloodshed and keep the peace in the Balkans. This was a major departure for NATO, the first time the Alliance had gone "out of area."[7]

The Alliance also embraced change in other ways. For example, NATO continued to expand its membership, adding a dozen new members between 1999 and 2009, which amounted to a remarkable 75 percent membership jump (from 16 to 28) in one short decade. I would submit that NATO's enlargement – from the original 12 members in 1949 – has helped fuel NATO's evolution over the years owing to the introduction of new security requirements and fresh perspectives into our strategic deliberations and day-to-day planning.

Montenegro officially became NATO's 29th member on 5 June 2017, which is a positive development for the country, but also beneficial for the stability of the Western Balkans and for international peace and security. This continued enlargement demonstrates that NATO's door remains open and is one way that NATO will continue to adapt in the years ahead.

In addition to NATO enlargement, the Alliance regularly coordinates with a network of more than 40 partner countries. Moreover, NATO has always been a strong advocate of close cooperation with other international organizations with both regional and global missions. For example, NATO has been working closely with the Organisation

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[6] NATO Archives, *Report on the Future Tasks of the Alliance*, 1967.

[7] See "Twenty years ago: the birth of NATO's crisis-management role," 24 July 2012, http://www.nato.int/

for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Alliance's close coordination with the United Nations (UN) goes back to its 1949 founding treaty. NATO continues to build its coalition of partners to include representatives of civil society, among them those who work on conflict prevention and resolution, and women's empowerment. NATO's cooperation over the years with various UN agencies – and many other international partners – has helped make NATO a smarter and more adaptive organization.

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This is particularly true with regards to NATO's increasingly cooperative relationship with the European Union (EU). Both NATO and the EU face similar security challenges and neither organization has all the tools we needed to tackle all of these challenges. Working more closely together and ensuring that our efforts are complementary is not only a choice, but a necessity.

2014: A Watershed Year for the Alliance

Turning to NATO's recent evolution, at no time since the end of the Cold War has NATO faced greater challenges to its security. 2014 marked a major watershed year for the Alliance. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of East Ukraine have challenged the post-World War II rules-based international order. This was the first time since the end of World War II that a European power had taken the territory of another European country by military force.

2014 also witnessed the alarming rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh, as a major terrorist threat. The growing turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa carry very real security threats for all members of the Alliance. Bloody and brutal terrorist attacks have occurred on the streets of several Allies, including Belgium, France, Germany, Turkey, the UK, and the US.

Faced with these two disturbing new challenges, NATO has had to increase its collective defense capabilities in Europe while stepping up its efforts in the fight against terrorism and projecting stability beyond its borders. NATO had to adapt to these new, more dangerous realities. And it needed to act quickly.

Substantial progress has been made on both fronts. Over the past three years, Allies have implemented the largest reinforcement of its collective defense since the end of the Cold War, tripling the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to 40,000 troops, creating a 5,000 strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, and establishing eight small headquarters in the eastern part of our Alliance to aid planning and reinforcement, if needed.

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NATO is currently deploying four multinational battle groups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, with contributions from Allied countries from both sides of the Atlantic. This deployment is another clear indication of NATO's ability to adapt, demonstrating its unity while sending the clear message that an attack on any Ally will be considered an attack on all. Allies are also increasing NATO's defensive presence in the southeast of the Alliance, centered on a multinational brigade in Romania. Also of importance, the Alliance has bolstered its naval and air policing efforts in the Baltic and Black Sea areas.

All of the measures NATO has taken to increase collective defense are defensive, proportionate, and in line with its international obligations. Despite the fact that Russia has sought to change European borders by force while pursuing a significant military build-up, Allies supported a two-track approach to Russia: meaningful dialogue combined with strong defense and deterrence. The Alliance does not, nor will it ever, accept Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Nonetheless, Allies believe dialogue is necessary to ensure that any incidents or accidents do not spiral out of control due to misunderstandings or mistakes. This duality echoes the deterrence-and-détente approach developed pursuant to the 1967 Harmel Report discussed earlier.

Three meetings of the NATO-Russia Council were held last year, with another meeting having taken place this past March. Allies believe that when tensions run high, it is critically important to keep talking to increase predictability and reduce risks. The Alliance does not seek confrontation with Russia and its defensive measures do not pose a risk to Russia. The steps are intended to prevent conflict, not provoke conflict.

NATO is adapting to address other challenges as well. For instance, cyber attacks are becoming more common, sophisticated, and damaging. These attacks can shut down infrastructure, undermine democratic systems, and affect military operations. At the Warsaw Summit last year, Allies made two important decisions to respond to the changing cyber threat. First, Allies recognized cyberspace as a military domain of operations similar to how we treat air, land, and sea. In addition, Allies pledged to strengthen their own cyber defenses, including national infrastructure and networks. Seven key objectives were stipulated as part of the Cyber Defence Pledge, including developing a full array of cyber defense capabilities and fostering better education, training, and exercises.[8]

Projecting Stability beyond NATO's Borders

Security is not only about what NATO Allies do at home, but also what the Alliance does beyond its borders. That is why NATO has agreed to do more to project stability in its neighborhood. This includes a broad effort to train local forces to stabilize their own countries and to fight terrorism. In fact, NATO has been engaged in the fight against terrorism for more than 15 years.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, for the first time ever NATO Allies invoked our collective defence clause, Article 5. In the ensuing days, NATO planes patrolled American skies to help defend an Ally under attack. Within a matter of weeks, troops from NATO Allies deployed to Afghanistan with a clear mission: to ensure that the country would never again be a safe haven for international terrorists. NATO launched its biggest combat operation in history in direct response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In the years since, hundreds of thousands of Europeans, Canadians, and troops from partner countries have fought shoulder-to-shoulder with American soldiers in Afghanistan. At this moment, approximately 13,000 troops from 39 NATO and partner countries are training Afghan security forces so they can stabilize their country. In addition, NATO has helped to keep the peace in the Western Balkans for over 20 years. The Alliance will continue to be a guarantor of peace and stability in the region for one simple reason: It is important for the security of the Alliance.

NATO has learned an important lesson from its experience in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and elsewhere: Training local forces is one of the best weapons in the fight against terrorism. It is far better – and more sustainable – to help partner nations to stabilize their countries themselves. And if NATO's neighbours are more stable, the

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[8] NATO's Cyber Defense Pledge, 8 July 2016, Warsaw Summit of Allied Heads of State and Government.

Alliance is more secure. NATO has trained Iraqi troops to defuse improvised explosive devices and taught soldiers counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency tactics in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, and Morocco. NATO's troops are helping Tunisia develop Special Forces of its own.

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To bolster its efforts to project stability in the Middle East and North Africa, NATO recently established a new regional hub for the South, based at its Joint Force Command in Naples, Italy. This new hub will help NATO improve its situational awareness and enhance its ability to anticipate – and respond to – crises in the region, assess potential threats, and engage effectively with regional partners. The Alliance has also opened the NATO Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) Regional Centre in Kuwait, to improve cooperation with NATO partners in the Gulf.

Operation Sea Guardian, a new maritime security operation in the Mediterranean, builds on the success of NATO's mission to cut the lines of illegal migration in the Aegean Sea. To deepen its understanding of the threats it faces, NATO has established a new Intelligence Division at NATO headquarters.

NATO's Continuum of Change: The Leaders' Meeting in Brussels 2017

The May 25th Meeting of Heads of State and Government in Brussels should properly be seen as part of a long-running continuum of change and adaptation on the part of the Alliance. The meeting offered leaders an opportunity to speak candidly and share ideas freely, and was a strong display of transatlantic unity and resolve.

It is important to underscore that actions send a powerful message. For instance, the US recently announced a budget proposal that includes a 40 percent increase in funding for American military presence in Europe. That proposed increase sends an important message of US commitment to European security. In recent weeks, thousands of US troops have been deployed to the eastern part of the Alliance to enhance NATO's defense and deterrence.

During the course of the discussions in Brussels, Allies made significant progress on the two main themes of the meeting: the fight against terrorism and fair burden-sharing. Allies agreed to specific action steps in both areas.

Regarding terrorism, the Alliance agreed to expand its support for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL. NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) surveillance planes will help improve airspace management for the Coalition. Several Allies have committed to providing air-to-air refueling capabilities for those AWACS. NATO itself has now joined all 28 Allies as a full member of the Global Coalition. Being in the coalition does not mean that NATO will engage in combat. But it does send a strong signal of its commitment to fight global terrorism. As a member, NATO will be able to take part in political deliberations, including with regards to coordination of training and capacity building.

NATO will continue its training and support mission in Afghanistan and its training program for Iraqi forces. At the Brussels meeting, NATO leaders decided to establish a terrorism intelligence cell within the new Intelligence Division. This new unit will improve the sharing of information between Allies, including the threat of foreign fighters.

The Alliance will explore making greater use of NATO's Special Operations Headquarters, which already provides counter-terrorism training for Allies and partners. This could involve expanding the number of mobile training teams in select partner countries. Leaders also decided to designate a senior NATO official as coordinator for implementing counter-terrorism efforts.

Regarding fair burden sharing and defense spending, leaders discussed the pledge all Allies made in 2014: to stop cutting defense budgets and to gradually increase defense spending towards two percent of the GDP by 2024. The Alliance has already made progress. Billions more have been invested in defense, reversing many years of decline.

NATO leaders underscored the importance of increasing defense budgets to keep up the momentum and to ensure fair burden sharing across the Alliance. To that end, leaders decided to develop annual national plans, setting out how Allies intend to meet the defense investment pledge made at the Wales Summit in 2014.[9] The national plans will cover three major areas: cash, capabilities, and contributions. Cash relates to how nations intend to meet their commitment to spend two percent of the GDP on defense, of which 20 percent should be invested in major equipment. Capabilities concerns investing additional funding in key military assets that we need, and contributions deal with how Allies intend to contribute to NATO missions, operations, and other engagements.

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[9] "Wales Summit Declaration" issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, 5 September 2014.

The first set of national plans will be completed by December 2017 and will be reviewed by defense ministers in February 2018. We still have a long way to go, but we are moving in the right direction.

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In considering issues related to burden sharing and increased defence spending, it is important to think about the vital importance of public support for NATO's mission and programs. As NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, it is my responsibility to ensure the public has reliable, fact-based information available about NATO. With that in mind, I am pleased that NATO recently launched an exciting communications effort called, "#WeAreNATO."[10]

Research shows that there is broad public support for NATO across the Alliance. But there is also a lower level of understanding and clarity about what NATO does than we would like. This communications effort will highlight NATO's role in protecting the safety and security of our nearly one billion citizens. That, after all, is NATO's primary responsibility.

Even as NATO has adapted over the years, some things must never change: the enduring bond between Europe and North America, the solidarity and resolve of all members to defend each other, and the uncompromising commitment to NATO's values and the common peace and security of all member countries. At its core, NATO is about what the Alliance does together – as members and partners. And in this community of values, there is absolutely no place for coups. This is why, immediately after the coup attempt in my native country, Turkey, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg condemned this as an assault on NATO's values, and reiterated his full support for Turkey's democratic institutions. He welcomed the commitment by the Turkish people and all political forces to democracy and to the democratically elected government.

NATO's ability to adapt to the evolving security environment has been a major factor contributing to its success for nearly seven decades. Seth Johnston ends his book, *How NATO Adapts*, with an intriguing and challenging question apropos NATO's

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[10] "NATO Steps Up Efforts To Increase Public Understanding of Alliance Role," NATO Press Release, 22 May 2017.

long-term adaptation in the years ahead: "How it will do so remains of enduring importance."[11]

Indeed it is. If history is any guide – and I believe it is – NATO will continue to adapt as the world changes and will do whatever is necessary to protect the security of its member countries, just as it has done so effectively over the past seven decades.

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[11] Seth A. Johnston, *How NATO Adapts*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 132nd series, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 184.