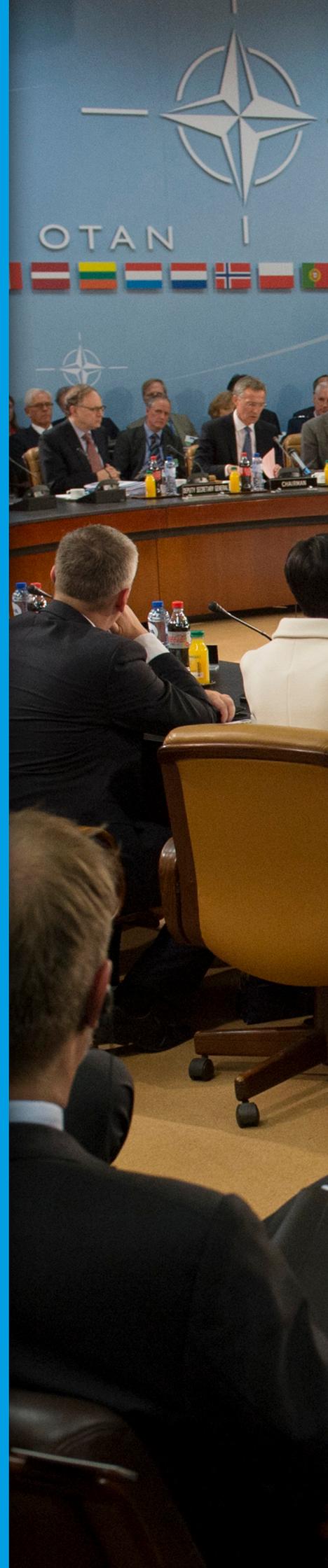


The Political Adaptation of the Alliance

GLOBSEC
NATO
ADAPTATION
INITIATIVE
Supporting Paper



The GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative, led by **General (Retd) John R. Allen**, is GLOBSEC's foremost contribution to debates about the future of the Alliance. Given the substantial changes within the global security environment, GLOBSEC has undertaken a year-long project, following its annual Spring conference and the July NATO Summit in Warsaw, to explore challenges faced by the Alliance in adapting to a very different strategic environment than that of any time since the end of the Cold War. The Initiative envisages a series of policy papers which will address the nature of NATO adaptation and the challenges it must overcome if it is to remain a viable and credible alliance for the peace and stability in the transatlantic area. The policy papers published within the GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative are authored by the Initiative's Steering Committee members: **General (Retd) John R. Allen, Admiral (Retd) Giampaolo di Paola, General (Retd) Wolf Langheld, Professor Julian Lindley-French, Ambassador Tomáš Valášek, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow** and other acclaimed authorities from the field of global security and strategy. The aim of the involvement of such a wide array of experts is to reinforce the unique partnership between policy-makers, military leaders and leading academics and commentators. These policy papers will prelude and result with the publication of the Initiative's Steering Committee Recommendation Two Pager and the Main Report to be launched in October 2017. The Interim Report will be released during the GLOBSEC 2017 Bratislava Forum.

These outputs will be augmented by shorter policy papers (on cybersecurity, A2/AD capability, intelligence, and threats emanating from the South) prepared by the GLOBSEC Policy Institute between January and October 2017.

www.cepolicy.org/projects/globsec-nato-adaptation-initiative

GLOBSEC NATO Adaptation Initiative: Supporting Paper¹

ONE NATO

The Political Adaptation of the Alliance

By

Alexander Vershbow

“In light of the changed and evolving security environment, further adaptation is needed. Therefore, we have decided to further strengthen the Alliance’s deterrence and defence posture”.

The Warsaw Summit Communique, 8-9 July 2018

The Allies must face political reality

America’s NATO allies have been breathing easier in recent weeks. Amidst the confusion of the new administration’s first weeks, President Donald Trump has said that he views the North Atlantic Alliance as of “fundamental importance” in his conversations with NATO leaders.

But this is no time for complacency in European capitals. The President has made clear on numerous occasions that he considers NATO obsolete and that it is not doing enough to address what is, for him, the #1 threat; international terrorism. His comments during the presidential campaign raised serious doubts about his commitment to Article 5 of NATO’s founding treaty, when he linked the US defence guarantee to allies spending more on defence.

Whatever his ultimate stance, it’s clear that President Trump will take a transactional approach to the Alliance, and that he believes that allies are not holding up their end of the deal. He seems to be posing the question in these terms: “I know what you expect me to do for NATO. But what is NATO doing for me?”

Allies should view this not as a threat, but as an opportunity – an opportunity to demonstrate NATO’s practical value to the United States and global security. Indeed, rather than waiting for the next tweet from the White House, allies should start talking about a bolder agenda for the Alliance – one that the new administration can take up and defend as a “new deal” for the Alliance, for the United States, and for transatlantic relations. Make NATO the “indispensable Alliance” – militarily and politically – for the Trump era.

Share more of the military burden, including counter-terrorism...

What might such a “new deal” entail? On the military side, the Alliance is already heading in the right direction. Since Russia launched its aggression against Ukraine three years ago, Allies have done much better than is often recognized in rebuilding NATO’s defence and deterrence posture – the biggest increase since the height of the Cold War – and in reversing years of cuts in defence budgets. Of

¹A version of this paper first appeared on the NATO Source blog of the Atlantic Council, 14 February, 2017

particular note, European allies and Canada have taken the leading role in NATO's enhanced forward presence in the Baltic States, and in providing the forces for NATO's rapidly deployable "spearhead" force. But there's more work to be done. Going forward, allies need to do their share in fielding the follow-on forces – ground, air and naval – and the critical enablers needed to back up these "first responders." Right now, the US provides the lion's share of these forces, and allies should commit to shouldering at least 50% of the burden.

On the military fight against terrorism, allies are also doing more than is often appreciated. All 28 allies participate in the anti-ISIS coalition, even though it is not a NATO operation as such, and several are conducting air strikes in Iraq and Syria. Allies continue to match US force contributions in Afghanistan aimed at boosting the counter-insurgency capabilities of the Afghan security forces. So part of the answer to President Trump is to maintain these military commitments, and be prepared to increase them as needed to deliver a decisive blow to ISIS and other terrorist groups. NATO's effectiveness in countering terrorism can be further enhanced by standing up a new "strategic hub" for the South within NATO's Command Structure, as was agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit.

NATO could also contribute more to efforts aimed at preventing terrorist attacks within the territory of its members. While this is primarily a national and EU responsibility, with law enforcement and interior ministries in the lead, NATO's newly upgraded intelligence division, with its secure communications links to Allied capitals, could become a clearinghouse for exchanging classified terrorist threat information among allied internal security agencies on a real-time basis. The EU lacks the secure networks to exchange classified intelligence information in real time, so NATO would be filling a real gap while helping to make its people safer.

When it comes to defence and counter-terrorism capabilities, the biggest challenge is resources, and this is where President Trump has good reason to complain. The huge (70:30) gap in spending between the United States and the rest of the Alliance is simply unacceptable and politically unsustainable. Although total defence spending across NATO is beginning to rise, there is more the European allies and Canada could do to rectify the imbalance. For example, allies could take the initiative by making an unconditional commitment to reach the 2% of GDP target (now met by only five allies) by 2019, five years ahead of the Wales Summit deadline, and to aim for 2.5% of GDP by 2022. And they could pledge to meet the equally important target of devoting 20% of defence budgets to new equipment and R&D – a benchmark met by only ten allies – by 2019 as well. These commitments could be the centre-piece of the NATO Summit scheduled for the end of May.

Thinking transactionally, allies could indicate that, in return, they expect a similarly unconditional commitment by President Trump to the Article 5 security guarantee and to a robust US presence in Europe. They could point out that Article 5 benefits the United States as much as the other allies (after all, the only time it has been invoked was after the US was attacked on 9/11, and allied aircraft patrolled US skies). Moreover, a strong NATO, grounded in an unequivocal commitment by all allies to Article 5, is the prerequisite for any serious effort to reengage Russia based on "peace through strength." If President Trump wants a new deal with President Putin, he should proceed on the basis of a unified alliance approach, removing any ambiguity in Putin's mind that he can get away with reckless behaviour or wedge-driving against NATO.

...but do even more to expand NATO's political role...

If allies are heading in the right direction on the military side, the same cannot be said about NATO's political mission. The threats to the Alliance in recent years have become increasingly diverse, including, to the South; jihadist terrorism, regional instability, failing states and uncontrolled migration; while to the East; cyber-attacks, influence operations and other "hybrid" threats, to name a few. These are less easily addressed by military means. They call for increased efforts by NATO and its members to strengthen their own resilience and to build the resilience of key partners on their eastern and southern frontiers. Bolstering neighbours' ability to provide for their own security can reduce the need for more costly military interventions down the road.

At the Warsaw Summit last July, NATO leaders announced a new series of programs along these lines, under the banner of "projecting stability." These included military training and capacity building for countries like Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia, Georgia, Moldova and possibly Libya. They also renewed their decision to provide maritime surveillance to assist EU and national efforts to control illegal migration.

This all sounds good, but the scale of these initiatives is painfully small. In reality NATO is playing a marginal role in addressing what allied publics see as the most immediate threats to their security: terrorism and the uncontrolled migration that has followed in its wake. Allies are too quick to offer excuses why this must remain the case: lack of resources; a desire to avoid provoking Russia or antagonizing Arab publics who allegedly dislike NATO; an unwillingness to involve NATO in areas where the EU is already engaged.

Here too, rather than waiting for the Trump Administration to act, allies should come forward with a more ambitious political agenda for NATO and commit the financial resources to make it effective.

This could include a more direct Alliance role in the international coalition to counter ISIS. For example, NATO could offer to take the lead in coordinating long-term training and capacity-building for the Iraqi security forces following the re-conquest of Mosul, permitting the United States to shift its combat forces to other fronts in the war against ISIS. Making NATO the "trainer in chief" would build on the Alliance's experience in Afghanistan and the earlier NATO Training Mission in Iraq. It would put the political weight of the whole Alliance behind efforts to press Iraqi Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds to work together, thereby helping to prevent a resurgence of ISIS and ensuring that the U.S. would not need to intervene in Iraq for a third time.

Beyond Iraq, allies could propose a major expansion of NATO defence capacity building programmes in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa and in Eastern Europe, which now represent a fraction of what the United States does bilaterally. Helping Ukraine, Georgia and other Eastern neighbours to defend themselves is the best way to discourage further aggression by Russia. And helping Middle Eastern neighbours build reliable defence institutions, secure their borders, and fight terrorism in their own regions is the best way to prevent them from becoming failed states and safe havens for ISIS. It would be a tangible way for NATO to address the root causes of the migration crisis and home-grown terrorism. In some areas, such as North Africa, this could be done in partnership with the EU. It makes no sense to compete with one another, when there is more than enough work to go around for both organizations.

Finally, allies should support a bigger NATO role in responding to efforts to undermine political institutions in member states, in countering radicalization and violent extremism within our own populations, and in defending against highly sophisticated influence operations, disinformation and "active measures" by Russia, such as the recent hacking attacks to influence the US election. These are not traditionally problems within NATO's mandate, but they are just as important as defending our borders. Here too, close collaboration with the EU makes sense – in countering propaganda and disinformation, in sharing intelligence about cyber and other hybrid threats, and in conducting joint exercises to ensure that "little green men" are not able to do to our countries what they did to Ukraine.

...and maintain a unified allied approach to Russia and Ukraine.

The last, and most challenging, piece of a new political strategy for NATO is how to engage with Russia, even as we seek to deter and counter the multiple threats it poses. Relations with Moscow are at their lowest point in decades, and President Trump is certainly right in wanting to explore possibilities for reducing the risk of conflict, lowering tensions and finding areas for mutually beneficial cooperation. But allies should insist that any engagement with Russia be based on a unified Alliance approach, one that addresses head-on the fundamental reason why relations have deteriorated in the first place – Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and its violation of the rules that have kept the peace in Europe in the decades since the end of World War II.

Most importantly, allies should urge that the Trump administration stick to the transatlantic consensus that any easing of the sanctions on Russia, and any return to practical cooperation between NATO and Russia, should be contingent on full implementation of the Minsk agreements and restoration of Ukrainian sovereignty over the Donbas, including control of its international borders. Anything less would reward Russian aggression and only embolden Putin to further destabilize his neighbours. Holding firm on sanctions and maintaining a strong NATO defense posture will provide the foundation of strength that is needed to engage Russia in a dialogue that brings benefits to both sides.

The Political adaptation of the Alliance

In sum, if the Trump Administration is going to view NATO in transactional terms, then the other allies should think transactionally as well: They should make clear that allies are ready to “go big” by increasing NATO’s practical value to the United States and to transatlantic security. They should indicate their readiness to support a NATO that does more – politically as well as militarily – on today’s biggest threats and challenges, and serves as the foundation for a principled, mutually beneficial relationship with Russia. In this way, allies can ensure that NATO becomes as indispensable to the United States in the Trump era as it has been for the past 68 years.

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