

Lecture

What innovative agenda for NATO's next Summit?¹

Marjanne de Kwaasteniet

Recently, NATO moved into its new headquarters. Yet the new building is more than just a building — it is a symbol of how the Alliance has managed to adapt. Looking forward to the Summit in two weeks' time, that is the message I want to give to you today: We are adapting and we are in good shape.

I do not want to downplay the current tensions related to trade issues, the Paris climate agreement, the Iran nuclear deal and burden sharing in the area of defence. Those disagreements are real and of concern. Like Secretary General Stoltenberg wrote in *The Guardian* on June 19, it will take “political will, imagination and hard work” to overcome these differences.

However, I strongly feel that we should not let these issues overshadow the work that has been achieved with the support of all Allies. We are well on track. Let me explain why, workwise, we are exactly where we need to be: First, the Alliance is capable of keeping us safe. Second, the Alliance brings stability to its neighbourhood. Third, the Alliance adapts to new threats and challenges. And fourth, there has been real progress in the cooperation with the European Union.

An Alliance capable of keeping its people safe

First, we have an Alliance that is able to keep us all safe. We have reacted to a changed security environment with the decision, at the Summit in Warsaw in 2016, to strengthen NATO's presence in the Baltic states and Poland with four multinational battalions. By February 2017, these battalions were in position. NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) shows unity and willingness to take part. The Netherlands contributes to the German-led battalion in Lithuania. Our government just decided to extend our contribution to NATO's eFP up to and including 2020.

We have adjusted our military posture first and foremost because of Russia. With its intervention in Georgia in 2008 and later with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its destabilization activities in Eastern Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated it is not afraid to use military force as an instrument of foreign policy. Russia has also modernized and expanded its military forces and has created what we call Anti-Access Area Denial bubbles — that is areas inaccessible to those who are outside, for example in Kaliningrad and in the Black Sea. Snap exercises close to NATO's border and violation of allied air space (only this week in Estonia) have added to the picture of a more assertive Russia. Of course NATO's deterrence and defence posture is not merely directed towards Russia. NATO's approach is 360 degrees, into all directions.

Enhanced Forward Presence alone is not enough. Four multinational battalions will not be able to defend against a large-scale attack without a credible reinforcement strategy. Therefore, at the Summit in Brussels in July, we are announcing measures to increase our

readiness and responsiveness. Allies will commit to having 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat vessels ready to deploy within 30 days by 2020, over and on top of the Very High Readiness Task Force (VJTF), NATO Response Force (NRF) and eFP.

We are working also on the mobility of our forces. Military mobility will be an important topic at the Summit. The Netherlands is one of the strongest advocates of improved military mobility in Europe. Our former Defence Minister Jeanine Hennis put it high on NATO's agenda. Because, if we want to be ready and responsive, we do not only need to have our forces at the right level of readiness. We also need to increase the speed at which people and equipment are transported from one country to another. Military mobility will be a key project for EU-NATO cooperation, and my staff is working hard to be able to present our joint work at the Summit.

NATO's command structure will also undergo a change. We are increasing the NATO command structure with approximately 1,250 personnel. Let me put this into the right perspective, to avoid misunderstandings. This is not an arms race, as some have argued. At the height of the Cold War, the NATO command structure counted 30,000 heads. The last decrease, to 6,800, dates from 2010. Including the increase, we are now talking about 8,000 military staff. But in light of the new security challenges, adapting the command structure has been necessary. Among other things, it will enable us to move forces more quickly across Europe and to protect sea lines of communication between North America and Europe. Two new headquarters, in Ulm and in Norfolk, will help to improve logistics. These changes are fundamental to come to a credible reinforcement strategy.

A changed security environment means a changed deterrence and defence posture. And, to be frank, that costs money. The agreement amongst Allies to aim to spend 2% of our national product on defence stems from 2014. It is nothing new and the US has been pushing hard for this for ten years already. And we are working towards it. Over the last four years, European allies and Canada have spent an additional 87 billion dollars on defence.

Speaking about the Netherlands: we have added an additional five billion euros to the defence budget, spread over four years. It is not enough. But it's a good start and we are making progress. In my view, the glass is more than half full.

An Alliance making its neighbourhood more stable

The second point I want to make today is that the Alliance is making its neighbourhood more stable. Especially south of the Alliance, we are dealing with instability related to a complex set of interrelated threats and challenges. Terrorism. Irregular migration flows. Proliferation of weapons. Conventional warfare *and* hybrid attacks.

NATO's approach on the South is reliant on cooperation with partners. We cannot tackle these threats and challenges alone. The countries surrounding NATO are of key importance to our own security. When our neighbours are more secure, so are we. That's why, at the Summit, a train and advice non-combat mission for Iraq will be announced. As well as a new support package for Tunisia, to help Tunisia become more resilient in light of an increased terrorist threat.

We have also increased the size of the training mission in Afghanistan so that it is properly sourced and more tailored to the real needs of the Afghan Security Forces. It is necessary to further strengthen local forces and the ability of the Afghan government to look after its own security. My government has just announced to increase the Dutch contribution to NATO's Resolute Support Mission by 60%. We have also committed to sustain funding for the Afghan National Forces until 2024.

Countries that want to become members of the Alliance are expected to respect the values of NATO, and to meet strict political, economic and military criteria. But our door remains open. The accession of Montenegro almost exactly a year ago is a demonstration of this. And the solution to the name issue between Greece and Macedonia means that we can move on to bring Macedonia — soon to be called North Macedonia — closer to NATO. I am hopeful that, at the Summit, Allies will issue an invitation to Macedonia to start accession talks.

An Alliance that adapts to new threats — hybrid, cyber

My third point is: the Alliance adapts to new threats. Many of those threats are hybrid in nature. They are often, like we say, 'below the Article 5 threshold'. By that I mean that they will not immediately lead to an invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, but that we need to find ways to protect ourselves against these threats, and respond adequately when necessary.

Hybrid threats take on various forms: Cyber attacks are most frequent and perhaps most dangerous, as they can seriously affect the functioning of critical infrastructure. But I am also talking about disinformation campaigns. Fake news to make our citizens believe in untruths, to destabilize liberal democracies and undermine our values. The Netherlands has been a victim too, in particular in relation to the downing of flight MH17 and the work of the Joint Investigation Team. Lastly, the chemical attack with a Novichok agent recently in Salisbury is another — terrifying — example of hybrid means of warfare.

The question, how to deal with such behaviour of an adversary, is one of the most difficult questions facing the Alliance now. And a question that will take much of our time and energy in years to come. But NATO Allies have already shown resolve: First, we are building resilient societies. Second, if needed, we defend ourselves and mitigate the effects of a hybrid attack. Third, we are not afraid to take a united stance, for example by publicly attributing these attacks to those who are guilty. And fourth, we take counter measures in various domains, to ward off future attacks.

Although hybrid attacks are undertaken by various state actors *and* non-state actors, the actor we deal with most is Russia. How do we look at Russia? Most importantly as a peer competitor, who no longer plays by the book we developed in Helsinki. I am bringing you no news when I say that the relation between NATO and Russia is not in a good place. We suspended all practical cooperation with Russia in 2014, after the illegal annexation of Crimea. And regarding Ukraine, the situation has not gotten better, as Russia continues to have a destabilizing role in the country and fuels the conflict with the supply of weapons and military forces.

At the same time, it is important to keep the dialogue going. The NATO-Russia Council remains our main channel of communication and I can personally testify that our last meeting, on the 31st of May, was useful. During the meeting, we exchanged information on upcoming exercises. From NATO's side, we spoke about exercise Trident Juncture, which will be held in Norway in October and November. 40,000 participants, 130 aircraft and 60 vessels from 30 countries will participate. It is the biggest exercise held in the history of NATO. And therefore we attached much importance to provide information about this exercise during the NATO-Russia Council.

Recent talks between the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Scaparrotti, and the Russian Chief of the General Staff, General Gerasimov, showed that also on the military level, there is a willingness to talk. This is important, because military lines of communication take away misunderstandings and thus help to prevent incidents. The Netherlands has been a great proponent of such meetings.

Better cooperation with the European Union

The last reason for why I think that we are in good shape at the Summit has to do with the collaboration between NATO and the European Union. On a personal note, when I started as ambassador of the Netherlands to NATO, five years ago now, contact between the two institutions was scarce. For those working in Brussels' European Quarter, NATO has always been known as 'the dark side of town'. That was literally the case. The people on and around the Schuman roundabout had very little idea of what we were doing at NATO HQ — and vice versa. It could not be more different now.

Yes, there are political obstacles well known to us all that can make practical collaboration between NATO and EU difficult. But between the staffs, that is to say, between NATO's International and Military Staff on the one hand, and the European Commission and the EEAS on the other, contact is almost daily. I am talking about participation in each other's exercises. Close cooperation on cyber defence and on development of military capabilities. Harmonization of capacity building efforts in the Western Balkans. And coordination of counter-terrorism related efforts, for example in relation to Iraq.

Cooperation between NATO and EU is win-win. NATO and EU can make each other stronger. Among European leaders, there is an increased awareness that Europe needs to start looking after itself. About two weeks ago, two European leaders voiced a similar message. Firstly, our own Prime Minister Mark Rutte, in front of the European Parliament, referred to current challenges in the "multilateral order", which — I am quoting — "is being challenged in a way that we haven't seen in decades..." "...if we want to be able to act, if we want to determine our own future, Europe must stand united". That same week, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, emphasized the need for Europe to "act as one" in the area of foreign affairs. I believe it is not *strategic autonomy* that European leaders are after, but first and foremost *strategic responsibility* — the ability to look after your own citizens.

Taking your responsibility translates into further developing the European Security Architecture, with PESCO and the European Defence Fund as its newest components. These developments will make both the EU and NATO stronger. In the end of the day, 22 out of 29 countries are members of both organisations. We are talking more or less about the same

set of forces. Improved efficiency and better use of resources will ultimately be to the benefit of all. At the Summit, the Secretary General plans to sign a new joint declaration with President Tusk and President Juncker. It should give a further impulse to continue the good work.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, what will happen at the Summit? To a certain extent, this will depend on the developments in other fora. The world is more interconnected and multipolar than ever before. We cannot look at NATO in isolation. What happens in the UN, EU, the G7, G20 or the Global Coalition against ISIS, affects what happens in NATO. Bilateral issues find their way into multilateral organisations and decision making. We are playing chess on more than one board.

What I *can* say is that a strong transatlantic bond is a necessity for a successful transatlantic Alliance. And that, even though there are disagreements, the progress within the Alliance reflects unity and resolve. Across the board, Allies are stepping up their commitments to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. The bottom line is: we have a good story to tell. All the ingredients for a good Summit are there. NATO delivers.

And please remember: what divides us, makes headlines, what unites us, makes progress. Thank you.

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Would you like to react? Mail the editor: redactie@atlcom.nl.

¹ This article is a transcript of Marjanne de Kwaasteniet's key note speech at the seminar 'What innovative agenda for NATO's next Summit?', organized by the Netherlands Atlantic Association on June 25. De Kwaasteniet would like to thank Anna van Zoest for her contribution to this text.