

NATO: THE ENDURING ALLIANCE

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NATO has proven its ability to adapt to changing circumstances many times over its history. Since the Wales Summit in 2014 NATO has turned round many years of defence cuts across the Alliance, and taken significant steps to restore deterrence in the face of a resurgent Russian threat, for example by the deployment of troops to the Baltic States and Poland under the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP).

More recently NATO has agreed its first new military strategy for 50 years, with work ongoing towards a new Concept for the Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area. A renewed focus on readiness through the NATO Readiness Initiative – under which NATO allies agree to make 30 additional fighting units on land, sea and air available at 30 days’ notice – is also welcome. And many other important decisions have been taken since the Wales Summit, such as the adaptation and expansion of NATO’s Command Structure, establishment of the Hub for the South, and deployment of a new NATO training mission in Iraq.

All of this has reinforced NATO’s relevance in a changing security environment. And the accession of Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in the near future, demonstrate the enduring appeal of the Alliance to countries across the Euro-Atlantic area. Nonetheless the challenges to NATO remain considerable, and the UK remains determined to work with other allies to address them as we move towards December’s Leaders’ Meeting in London.

Much attention has been paid recently to the issue of fairer burden sharing between the US and Europe for safeguarding



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the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO’s very foundation rests on binding the US and Europe together through a collective defence guarantee, so that the horrors of world war can never again happen on the continent of Europe. Seventy years on from enshrining this guarantee in Article V of the Washington Treaty, Europe remains critically dependent on the US for many aspects of its defence, especially those required to challenge a peer adversary such as Russia.

As the US has pivoted towards the rapidly growing economies of Asia it is entirely understandable that Europe should be expected to take more of the burden for its own security. Whilst not a new demand, this has been brought into sharper relief in the past four years. European nations have responded: from 2016-2020 more than \$100 billion of new defence spending in NATO will come from non-US allies. Eight allies will spend at least two per cent of their GDP on defence this year and a further 11 have plans to reach two per cent by the end of 2024. Equally important are the plans of most allies to spend at least 20 per cent of their defence budgets on major equipment. This element of the Defence Investment Pledge agreed in Wales often receives less attention, but is vitally important to ensure that spending is invested in new capabilities.

This is a positive story, but clearly it does not yet go far enough. Nine allies still have no plans to spend two per cent on defence, including Germany, Europe’s largest economy. The current German commitment to spend 1.5 per cent by 2024 is welcome. But recent budget decisions in Germany have brought the credibility of this commitment into question, and any plans to increase spending beyond this will be subject to the complexities of German domestic politics.

Burden sharing is not only about cash, of course. Some allies who do not spend two per cent on defence often refer to the commitments they make to NATO in other ways, such as through NATO’s deployments in Europe or its missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. And the NATO Readiness Initiative referenced above is likely to rely on non-US allies for up to 90 per cent of its total commitment. The UK agrees that allies should be judged by their cash, commitments and capabilities. But we cannot avoid the fact that building capabilities, or committing forces to NATO, is impossible if the funding is not there to pay for them.

Meanwhile, what of the US? In reality the US commitment to European security remains as steadfast as it ever was. For example, the European Deterrence Initiative will see more than \$5 billion of new US investment in Europe next year, improving interoperability and building new infrastructure. Successive US defence reviews have concluded that membership of NATO provides the US with a key strategic advantage over its global competitors such as Russia or China.

The benefits to the US of NATO membership were shown earlier this year, on the demise of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. The US announcement of its intention to withdraw from the Treaty in November 2018 was followed by a six-month process of building consensus within the Alliance around the threat posed by Russia’s development



A soldier from 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (left) with a French infantryman from the French 7th Mechanised Brigade during a UK-French operational and tactical-level exercise in 2016, which aims to demonstrate full validation of concept of the Joint Expeditionary Force
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and deployment of the SSC8 missile system. This meant that, when the Treaty finally lapsed in August this year, the US and NATO could hold Russia responsible with one voice.

Of course questions about the US commitment to European security may not be the only source of tension in the Alliance when leaders gather in London. Growth of the European Union's level of ambition in security and defence will also draw speculation that it is the EU rather than NATO that will become the priority for some European countries in addressing the threats of the future.

The argument runs something like this. With the US commitment to Europe increasingly unpredictable, European countries should take greater responsibility for themselves and develop a form of 'strategic autonomy'. This should include a kind of collective security guarantee under Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, formalised meetings of EU Defence Ministers and a permanent Operational HQ. Meanwhile the UK's departure from the EU will remove one of the major breaks on development of an EU defence identity.

President Macron and Chancellor Merkel have also written of the creation of some form of 'European Security Council', though with somewhat differing visions. And a plethora of European security initiatives have developed outside of either the EU or NATO, such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, the French-led European Intervention Initiative, the Northern Group, or the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force.

However, this argument does not bear close scrutiny. The vast majority of EU Member States are also members of NATO. They have a single set of forces, and simply do not have the capacity to respond to two growing set of commitments. The

UK's exit from the EU may indeed remove one of the most cautious voices on the growth of the EU's defence ambition, but it will also mean the loss of 20 per cent of the EU's Force Catalogue, and critical enablers such as strategic lift and ISR. And of course for those EU Member States not prepared to commit to NATO's Article V, the prospect of being bound into a collective security guarantee through another organisation may be just as unpalatable.

Nonetheless, if certain conditions are met, the EU's growing role in building European capabilities can become an important part of burden sharing. Its European Defence Fund and Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) can provide powerful incentives for European countries to collaborate to build their defence capabilities.

The NATO Secretary-General has set these conditions. First, that the EU should build capabilities required by NATO; second, that such capabilities should be made available to NATO; and third, that there should be the fullest possible involvement of non-EU NATO allies. Yet it is far from clear that these conditions will be met. For example, current proposals for third party participation in EU defence initiatives still remain highly restrictive.

The EU's role extends beyond capability development. It can bring a unique set of tools in tackling modern security challenges, ranging from sanctions to civilian and military interventions. The UK was proud to command the Operation ATALANTA anti-piracy mission for more than ten years, and continues to play an important role in EU missions such as Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia, and EULEX Kosovo. Arrangements in both the draft Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship with the EU will allow the UK to continue to play a role in the EU's defence and security efforts should we so wish.

Other sources of tension will inevitably draw questions about the strength of the Alliance as leaders gather in London. Turkey's intervention in North East Syria, for example, drew serious concern from countries across NATO. But while we were clear that we disagreed with Turkey's actions and believed them to be wrong, Turkey remains a valued member of the Alliance and an important partner across a range of security issues. NATO's interests would not be served by Turkey drifting away from the Alliance and further towards Russia. Meanwhile trade, climate change or other global issues are all capable of casting a shadow over the core message of unity. Yet despite all this, we can be confident that the London Leaders' Meeting will indeed see the Alliance emerge rejuvenated, and better prepared to face the future. Over recent months important discussions have taken place at the North Atlantic Council on emerging and disruptive technologies, on cyber and hybrid, on space as a domain of operations, and on Russia's growing arsenal of missile systems.

Seventy years after NATO was founded and 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall we should celebrate all the Alliance has done to bring security and stability to more than a billion people across the Euro-Atlantic area. But we should also recognise that adapting to the challenges of the future will require just as much vision, commitment and resilience as that shown by NATO's founding fathers when they first met 70 years ago.