

“NATO At 70: A Strategic Partnership For The 21st Century”

Statement of
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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and other members of the committee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on Foreign Relations to address NATO’s value as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the alliance. I would like to make clear that the views I express are mine alone. I am not speaking for the German Marshall Fund of the United States, which does not take institutional positions on policy issues.

In two days, on April 4, NATO turns 70. This is truly a remarkable achievement. Alliances typically disband shortly after the original threat that gave rise to their creation subsides. One historical study found that alliances last, on average, for 17 years.¹

Not so with NATO. The secret to NATO’s longevity has been its ability to adapt and remain relevant to a changing strategic landscape and meet the resulting new challenges. NATO was established to deter the Soviet threat. But when the Cold War ended, NATO played an important role by stabilizing the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. There were also calls for NATO to move “out of area” to meet shared security challenges. And NATO responded by expanding its mission when the alliance fought to restore peace in the Balkans. With the attacks of 9/11, NATO, for the first and only time, invoked Article 5 – and it did so, notably, to come to the defense of the United States. Ever since, NATO allies have been vitally important partners in the fight against terrorism. NATO’s most significant operational commitment to date is the mission in Afghanistan, starting with the International Security Assistance Force under NATO leadership from 2003 to 2014 and followed by Resolute Support to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces. Finally, and most recently, NATO returned to its core business of deterrence and collective defense following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, Ukraine’s sovereign territory, in 2014, while continuing to pursue crisis management. These are the chapters of NATO’s 70 years of action. Throughout, NATO – both a military

¹ Patrick Warren, “Alliance History and the Future NATO: What the Last 500 Years of Alliance Behavior Tells Us about NATO’s Path Forward,” Brookings Policy Paper, June 30, 2010, p. 48.

and a political alliance – has been a key pillar upholding the rules-based international order that the United States has long promoted.²

As NATO's mission has expanded, its membership has grown too, from the original 12 countries to 29 today. The next country likely to walk through NATO's "open door" is the Republic of North Macedonia, with the accession protocol concluded and that protocol now being ratified by existing members.

NATO has powerfully served American interests. The political, economic, and security interests of the United States require a stable Europe. We learned this lesson through the tragedy of two world wars, a lesson that must never be forgotten even as those tragic events recede from us in time. As Winston Churchill famously observed in 1948, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it."

Now, at a time when we are experiencing a global shift of power and fierce competition for domestic resources, having reliable allies willing to share the burden of collective defense has become only more important for U.S. interests. NATO is unique in providing a command structure, multinational interoperability, and deployable capabilities. That is why NATO is so often referred to as the partner of first resort for the United States. The challenge today is how to continue to adapt and modernize this alliance to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Much has already been said and written about NATO at 70.³ I won't review those points and provide a comprehensive overview here. Instead, my focus will be two-fold. First, I will highlight opportunities relating to burden-sharing, NATO's relationship with the European Union, and the challenge posed by China. Second, I will discuss the vital role Congress plays in providing U.S. leadership in the alliance.

NATO Burden-Sharing: Shift the Focus to European Defense Capabilities

The debate about burden-sharing among NATO members goes back to the earliest days of the alliance. More recently, near the end of his tenure as Secretary of Defense in June 2011, Robert Gates memorably lamented being "the latest in a string of U.S. defense secretaries who have urged allies privately and publicly, often with

² The other pillar is the liberal compact that Bob Kagan describes eloquently in *The Jungle Grows Back* (New York, 2018, pp. 135-6): "In exchange for nations forgoing traditional geopolitical ambitions and ceding the United States a near monopoly of military power, the United States would support an open economic order in which others would be allowed to compete and succeed; it would not treat members of the order, and particularly allies, simply as competitors in a zero-sum game; it would through participation in international institutions, an active multilateral diplomacy, and the articulation of shared liberal values support and sustain a sense of community among those nations that made common cause on behalf of those shared values and interests."

³ See, for example, Transcript of "NATO at 70: An Indispensable Alliance," Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, March 13, 2019; and Douglas Lute and Nicholas Burns, "NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis," Harvard Kennedy School Report, February 2019.

exasperation, to meet agreed-upon NATO benchmarks for defense spending.” He stood in Brussels and challenged Europe, explaining that “it will take leadership from political leaders and policy makers on this continent. It cannot be coaxed, demanded or imposed from across the Atlantic.”⁴ Those words remain true today.

Defense spending alone – especially viewed in a vacuum without appropriate context – tells us surprisingly little about a country’s actual military capabilities. In 2018, NATO Europe spent \$264 billion on defense, which represents the second largest defense budget in the world, outpaced only by the United States. That European total represents 1.5 times China’s official defense budget (\$168 billion) and roughly four times Russia’s \$63 billion.⁵ Even viewed in this context, defense spending by allies needs to increase, but other metrics matter too, namely, what those defense euros are spent on. The inefficiencies, redundancies, and clash of strategic cultures across Europe’s national militaries are sobering.

Thus, we need to focus not only on the total level of defense spending by allies, but equally on what that spending is allocated to. To be sure, allies should spend 2% of their GDP on defense, a target they recommitted themselves to in 2014 following Russia’s annexation of Crimea. But it matters just as much that they spend 20% of those outlays “on major new equipment, including related Research & Development.”⁶ That 20% guideline measures the scale and pace of modernization. Allies can spend all the money they want, but if their equipment is obsolete or interoperability gaps widen, NATO will be weakened. Moreover, some expenditures that count toward the 2% target – such as outlays for military pensions – contribute little if at all to current military readiness. These nuances are often lost in the current debate over the allies’ contributions to NATO.

NATO’s Cooperation with the European Union: More is Needed

One thing we have learned from history and two world wars is that conflict in Europe inevitably drew the United States in. Thus, the post-war administration of Harry Truman encouraged European integration to ensure the countries of Europe would never go to war again. The Marshall Plan was one of the first steps on this path. Today’s European Union began with a European Coal and Steel Community to “communitarize” the key instruments and industries of war and provide a framework for the peaceful coexistence of France and Germany, in particular. We often forget that the post-war recipe for a stable, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Europe included two key ingredients: U.S. engagement and European integration.

⁴ Remarks by Secretary Gates at the Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, Belgium, June 10, 2011.

⁵ Lucie Beraud-Sudreau, “On the up: Western defence spending in 2018,” IISS Military Balance Blog, Feb. 15, 2019.

⁶ Wales Summit Declaration, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Sept. 5, 2014.

The disdain President Trump directs at the European Union (EU) is singular and has a negative impact on political cohesion within NATO given that 22 of NATO's 29 allies are also EU members. The European Union is not a foe; it is a partner, and a very important one at that. To cite just one example, the United States and the European Union have the largest trade and investment relationship in the world.

Today, there are many more factors pulling Europe apart – from the drama of Brexit to the rise of illiberal populism – than encouraging unity. These centrifugal forces show no signs of abating. Given the direct interest the United States has in Europe's future, we should strive not to be yet another factor dividing EU members.

The United States has long been skeptical of EU efforts to enhance defense cooperation. Madeleine Albright, during her tenure as Secretary of State, articulated that European efforts should not duplicate NATO's efforts or capabilities, discriminate against allies who are not EU members, or decouple Europe's security from that of other NATO allies. To date, the American reaction has focused on the risks of an enhanced EU defense role, rather than on the possible benefits. Within the EU, Britain, which along with France has the most capable European military, has been least enthusiastic about EU defense initiatives. The Brexit process has already resulted in a less engaged Britain, which, in turn, has translated into greater EU progress in this area.

NATO has long-standing, but under-developed, cooperation with the EU. The reasons for that are many and include this American and British skepticism, as well as the EU's propensity to under-deliver on ambitious initiatives. That said, the EU has made significant strides over the past year and, in my judgment, the moment for enhanced NATO engagement with the EU is ripe. As for concerns about EU defense efforts wasting finite resources on unnecessary duplication like creating an independent command structure, those concerns are best addressed by closer cooperation between NATO and the EU precisely to avoid such duplication.

Today, the European Union may be better poised than NATO to increase the political will of its members to step up their defense efforts, especially at a time when an American president, who is deeply unpopular in many European countries, is perceived as the one making demands not out of a commitment to a strong alliance, but as a condition for continued U.S. participation. That stance has fueled doubts about the reliability of the U.S. security guarantee and sparked a renewed desire for European strategic autonomy in some quarters, particularly France.

Where could more serious NATO-EU cooperation make a real difference? Take military mobility on the European continent, which is a critical concern for both organizations. At NATO's Brussels Summit in July of last year, the alliance updated its Command Structure, which now includes a new Enabling Command based in Germany to improve the movement of troops and equipment within Europe. The

goal is to ensure NATO has “the right forces in the right place at the right time.”⁷ One month earlier, in June 2018, the European Commission announced that its next long-term EU budget 2021-2027 includes 6.5 billion euros to adapt Europe’s transport network to military requirements and thus improve military mobility.⁸ This EU investment will be a meaningful contribution to a stronger NATO as well. Military mobility is just one example that suggests concrete synergies could result from joint, rather than simply complementary, efforts.

NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg champions EU efforts to increase defense cooperation, arguing that NATO needs those efforts to succeed because they can contribute to fairer burden-sharing. He has emphasized that “after Brexit 80% of NATO’s defense expenditures will come from non-EU NATO allies.”⁹ If the EU can help create the political will for its members – 22 of which, as previously noted, are NATO allies – to spend more on defense and develop new capabilities that will be good for both organizations, whether the goal is increased military mobility, a more robust response to hybrid threats or enhanced counter-terrorism capabilities. NATO will engage more seriously with the EU, however, only if Washington encourages such cooperation.

A Rising China: A Challenge for Both Sides of the Atlantic

The 2018 National Defense Strategy identifies the primary concern in U.S. national security as the reemergence of long-term strategic competition from China and Russia, both of which are revisionist, authoritarian powers. NATO has a robust strategy concerning Russia, whereas China barely features in Alliance discussions. The lead article in *The Economist’s* recent special report on NATO at 70 concluded by asking: “How can the transatlantic alliance hold together as America becomes less focused on Europe and more immersed in Asia? That is a vital question, but so far NATO has barely started tackling it.”¹⁰

The reality is that China can and should be a shared strategic concern of NATO allies. Europe and Canada also see the geopolitical challenge China poses. And if the United States wants to mount a successful democratic response to the rise of an assertive, authoritarian China, it will need close cooperation with all of its democratic allies. Allies make the United States stronger. That statement is no less true in 2019 than it was in 1949.

⁷ Brussels Summit Key Decisions 11-12 July 2018, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Nov. 2018.

⁸ “EU budget: Stepping up the EU’s role as security and defence provider,” *Press Release*, European Commission, June 13, 2018.

⁹ Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg prior to the European Union Foreign Affairs Council meeting, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Nov. 20, 2018. See also Ryan Heath, “8 NATO countries to hit defense spending target,” *Politico*, July 5, 2018.

¹⁰ “Mature reflection,” Special report NATO at 70, *The Economist*, March 16, 2019, p. 5.

China's threat to NATO allies is not a military one. But China has become a serious competitor politically, economically, and technologically. The United States, Europe and Canada need to align much more closely in terms of how they approach China. NATO allies should discuss their efforts to screen foreign direct investment in strategic infrastructure, as well as in key technology sectors. NATO should also deepen its military partnerships with allies in the Pacific, including Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

Our European allies used to look at China's rise and worry about how the growing competition between the United States and China would affect them. Now, the Europeans worry themselves about how to manage China's expanding footprint on the European continent – whether through strategic infrastructure investments by way of the Belt and Road Initiative or through critical digital infrastructure like Huawei's 5G technology. China's interest in Europe extends from the High North to Greece in the south. And China's commercial investments are resulting in political influence. That reality offers an opportunity for transatlantic coordination and cooperation.

China has proven to be adept at dividing Europe. On March 23, Italy became the first G7 member to sign a memorandum of understanding with China's Belt and Road Initiative; 13 smaller EU countries had already done so.¹¹

In the immediate run-up to Chinese President Xi's visit to Rome, on March 12, the European Commission issued a strategic communication laying out 10 proposals for dealing with Beijing that EU leaders later endorsed.¹² The *Financial Times* called the document “a turning point in EU attitudes towards Beijing.”¹³ For the first time, the EU identified China as “an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.” The document stated that “the EU and its Member states can achieve their aims concerning China only in full unity.”¹⁴

In that spirit of unity, French President Macron invited German Chancellor Merkel and European Commission President Juncker to join him on March 26 in Paris for the final day of the Chinese President's visit to France. Macron enjoined Xi to “respect the unity of the European Union and the values it carries in the world.”¹⁵ The next opportunity for the EU to showcase a united front will be at the EU's Summit with China on April 9. Overcoming individual national interests with regard

¹¹ Lisbeth Kirk, “Europe shifts gears to balance relations with China better,” *euobserver*, March 13, 2019.

¹² Hans von der Burchard, “EU slams China as ‘systemic rival’ as trade tension rises,” *Politico*, March 12, 2019.

¹³ “EU must show unity in its relations with China,” *Financial Times*, March 29, 2019, p. 10.

¹⁴ “Commission reviews relations with China, proposed 10 actions,” Press Release, European Commission, March 12, 2019.

¹⁵ “Xi, Merkel, Macron and Juncker meet in Paris,” *DW*, March 26, 2019.

to China will not be easy for European countries. The United States needs to engage regularly and actively in discussing China's strategy with its allies, because the American voice carries significant weight in these intra-European discussions.

The security implications of China's increasing presence in Europe are clear. Chinese investment in strategic infrastructure – from ports to tunnels – means that European efforts to screen with greater care foreign direct investment are urgent. European reliance on Huawei's 5G technology could facilitate surveillance by China's security services. For 70 years, the superior quality of allied military power has rested, in part, on the technological edge the United States has held globally. Thus, how NATO allies manage the ongoing technological revolution has direct implications for NATO's strength. These issues need to rise to the top of NATO's agenda. NATO-EU consultations on how to engage with China should follow closely.

Congressional Leadership on NATO: More Valuable than Ever

Congressional engagement matters, both at home and abroad. Our allies have grown increasingly concerned about mixed signals emanating from the Administration about NATO's value. They had believed that the alliance was an enduring strategic commitment, rather than a shifting arrangement based on transactions.

Many Members of Congress share these same concerns and have become increasingly active in voicing their support for NATO. As the lead nation in the alliance, what the United States says matters immensely to the other allies. Recently, Congress has stepped forward to reinforce U.S. leadership in NATO. In February, over 50 Members of Congress, from Senate Judiciary Chairman Graham to Speaker Pelosi, attended the Munich Security Conference – the largest Congressional delegation in the over 50-year history of this annual, high-level gathering. Even more recently, in a valuable expression of bipartisanship, House Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader McConnell invited NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, to address a Joint Session of Congress. Stoltenberg will be the first NATO Secretary General ever to enjoy this privilege tomorrow. This rising Congressional engagement with European counterparts, strengthened by the re-establishment of the Senate NATO Observer Group last year, goes a long way to reassuring our allies about U.S. commitment.

Ever since last July's NATO Summit in Brussels, rumors have been flying that the President wants to pull the United States out of NATO. Again, Congress has sought to reassure the Allies. In the immediate run-up to that Summit, the Senate voted 97-2 to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to the collective defense of the Alliance. This January, the House of Representatives passed the NATO Support Act by a bipartisan vote of 357 to 22, thus "reject[ing] any efforts to withdraw the United States from NATO" and prohibiting any use of federal funds for that purpose. Also, in January, a bipartisan group of Senators reintroduced a joint resolution requiring the President to seek the advice and consent of the Senate to withdraw the United States from

NATO. The strong show of bipartisan congressional support for NATO at this time of deep political polarization speaks volumes. Our allies have noticed.

Congressional leadership on NATO has advanced trust in the U.S. political and security commitment among U.S. allies. Congress's oversight role and power of the purse are significant. Congressional support for increased funding for the European Deterrence Initiative has enhanced our deterrence and defense posture in Europe, making real that security commitment. The most immediate challenge to NATO continues to be deterring further Russian aggression in Europe's East.

Alliances depend on shared interests, common values, and trust. Trust has taken a beating recently. A strong, bipartisan majority in Congress has been steadfast in emphasizing the enduring commitment of the United States to its allies. As Ranking Member Menendez said eloquently in Brussels this February, "the United States is stronger, safer, and more prosperous when we work in concert with our allies in Europe."¹⁶

Congress's engagement could prove to be the critical variable for unifying transatlantic partners around a shared goal of strategic responsibility. Congress can and should articulate a bipartisan vision of NATO's future that can serve to strengthen alliance cohesion. Having European military forces that are more effective, efficient, and capable is in the interest of every alliance member. It is hard to imagine future scenarios in which Europeans will not be called on to take greater responsibility, especially in their neighborhood. Anniversaries are not only for celebrating. Remembering past achievements can inspire, but neither nostalgia nor hope is a policy. NATO members need to unify around a common sense of purpose and recommit their countries to investing more in credible capabilities. The reason to do so is not because the United States is asking; it is because the current strategic reality demands it.

¹⁶ Keynote Speech by Senator Menendez on "Transatlantic Relations in a Changing World," Feb. 18, 2019, hosted by GMF in Brussels, Belgium (www.gmfus.org).