

# NATO Night 2021:

## The Next Generation

**On the 8th of April, the Netherlands Atlantic Youth organized *NATO Night 2021: The Next Generation*. During this event, various speakers and panellists drew attention to the relationship between young adults and NATO itself. What challenges lie ahead for NATO's future generation? And what value will young adults bring to the Alliance? Former American General David Howell Petraeus kicked off by emphasizing the changing role of the Alliance.**

According to Petraeus, NATO's role has been evolving since the Cold War. Not only did NATO's biggest adversary disappear from the map, but the scope of security itself did also change. In the first place, what is considered to be within the domain of security has broadened. Besides the conventional threats such as warfare and espionage, developments such as climate change are also treated as security threats. In the second place, warfare itself has changed which is portrayed by an ever-greater focus on hybrid and cyber warfare. Nonetheless, Petraeus is still of opinion that the Alliance is in continuity with its role during the Cold War. According to the former general, the most sacred principle of the NATO – that is: the sanctity of the

member states' territory – remains intact. This mission, combined with the resolution to defend democratic values, is still highly relevant. Thus, as Petraeus argues, NATO continues to be the most relevant alliance in the world. Another continuity with the Cold War Era is demonstrated by Russia's ambitions of the last decade. According to Petraeus, the events in Ukraine and Georgia have shown that the Soviet-Union's successor is still a threat to Western security.

Not all menaces come from outside the Alliance, however. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the Transatlantic Partnership is the member states' commitment itself. Taking The Netherlands as an example, former General Petraeus states that Americans would like to see the Dutch to spend 2% of their GDP on defence. Still, the Dutch "*punch way above their weight class*", he argues. But in order to reach the desired readiness capability, Petraeus hopes that The Netherlands, and the rest of Europe, will commit to a greater expenditure. Another internal threat to the NATO is the rise of illiberalism within the political system. Although more of a task for the EU, the former general sees that illiberalism is at odds with the NATO itself, which was founded on a liberal agenda. Hence, Petraeus calls upon the European governments to make sure that undemocratic forces do not get a place within democracies. Lastly, individual needs versus collective needs form a threat to NATO. As Petraeus points out, the recent conflict between the EU and Turkey

is an example of how the collective spirit is abandoned. Moreover, the fact that certain nations develop friendly ties with Moscow, whereas Russia is collectively condemned, is another illustration.

Still, internal threats to NATO should not be exaggerated, Petraeus finds. As long as the nations that constitute NATO remain determined to the core principles, the Alliance will find a way to work together. An example of this are the Alliance's activities under the Trump presidency. Although the United States were very critical of Europe's contributions to the NATO, the NATO has been steadily improving its supply chains in Europe. In addition, it bears repeating that the US spent more on the Alliance than twice the other nations combined, Petraeus argues. One large threat for NATO would not be the lack of commitment from the US, but rather the fact that Europe cannot stand on its own feet. This, combined with the threat of overstretch, remains one of the most pressing issues for the Alliance.

### **Internal and Geopolitical Challenges**

After the former general spoke, a panel on the topic of *Internal and Geopolitical Challenges* was presented. One of the main topics was the relationship between young adults and NATO. Both Dutch Member of Parliament Don Ceder and Security Director (CEPA) Lauren Speranza argue that



An empty room at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam during the first panel (photo: Madelon Vink)

communication is key. If NATO wishes to be considered relevant by the younger generation, the Alliance should share that relevance with young adults. Moreover, Ceder argues that the NATO must think seriously about its brand image. Negative reporting or an experienced lack of relevance is not unique to NATO. Yet, NATO could be considered unique in the fact that it does too little to bridge the gap with its audience, Ceder states.

There is, however, more to gain than only the right image. As Speranza points out, the Alliance is at the same time *in need* of the younger generation. This presents itself in the fact that the younger generation has an expertise that the elder generation simply lacks. Along with this, the younger generation is also aware of topics such as diversity and climate change which are gaining in relevance, Speranza argues. Central to attracting the new generation is to point out that the NATO is relevant for each generation. But to do so, NATO must translate its relevance into career opportunities as well, Admiral Rob Bauer argues. According to Bauer, young adults do

not only seek a high income in their area of expertise but wish to make a difference as well. NATO, Bauer mentions, is the perfect employer in this matter. Aside from the fact that the Alliance continues to rely upon the conventional soldier, the 21st century soldier is increasingly a highly educated one. Moreover, NATO offers plenty of jobs which are not related to warfare in the very least.

Still, warfare – or rather the prevention of it – remains at the core of NATO. The manner in which the security of the Alliance is safeguarded, is open to debate nonetheless. Head of Security and Defence of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Annemijn van den Broek, draws attention to the fact that prevention is not only better, but also cheaper, than conflict itself. Thus, the core mission of NATO should be to tackle the root causes of conflict. In this, she argues that The Netherlands is in the position to live up to its commitment of 2%. Frequently, politicians resort to arguing that defence investments would better be spent on Healthcare, but Van den Broek calls this a false dichotomy. Instead, she argues, NATO member states are not in the position to choose their threats but should focus on each danger with full attention. *“It is not or, or, but and, and,”* she mentions.

Logically, member states are not alone as part of NATO. But NATO is also strengthened through cooperation with for example the EU, according to Van den Broek. Although many critics express the concern of

overlap when addressing NATO-EU cooperation, Van den Broek sees this as another false dichotomy. As long as the EU and NATO complement each other, the cooperation is mutually beneficial, she states. The question is, however, to what extent further securitization and cooperation actually bring more peace. Bauer designates that this is an important question. Theoretically, the world would be the safest if each and every individual nation would join NATO. In practice, however, this is not the case. In order to create a safe globe, the Transatlantic Partnership should thus consider to what extent enlargement contributes to a more secure world. In this, Bauer recalls that nations that are left out ought not to be antagonized.

### **Next Generation Challenges**

The closing panel on non-traditional challenges, such as climate change, consists of David van Weel, Karlijn Jans, Marcel Beukeboom and Bianca Torossian. The conversation started with a poll. We asked the viewers whether NATO is able to deal with non-traditional security threat. The majority of viewers thinks this is not the case. Marcel Beukeboom is surprised by the results of this poll. *“I was disappointed that Rob Bauer did not mention climate change as a major threat to NATO. He states that, whether you like it or not, for NATO climate change is there amongst the major threats NATO is dealing with. Article five could be a foundation here as*



Bianca Torossian during the second panel (photo: Madelon Vink)

climate change is a major threat to all. David van Weel believes that non-conventional threats are the actual threats that threaten us on a daily basis. They are definitely on the agenda in The Hague, Van Weel states. “My main reason to venture into NATO was to make sure that also NATO focuses on these non-conventional threats.” Van Weel argues that NATO has three main goals concerning climate change. First, awareness - what are the security implications for climate change. Second, adaptation - making sure that we are ready for more extreme circumstance and disaster relieve. Third, how can we contribute to the mitigation of climate change? Karlijn Jans claims that it is not far-fetched to say that climate change is an existential threat to newer generations and that it is increasingly important to recognize what this means to defense organizations and military posture. Bianca Torossian believes that there is a parallel between newer technological threats

and climate change in that both are often treated as threats for somewhere in the future but for her, this is just wrong as they are both on our doorstep today and should be treated as threats for the present.

The moderator asked the panelists if they think there is a risk of a mission creep for NATO when it comes to non-traditional challenges. Torossian believes this is a fair question but also states that it is a fact that conflict has become more sophisticated and complex than before and we have to ask if it is not NATO that is combating these non-conventional threats, who is? On the subject of how climate change is perceived within NATO, David van Weel states that he has the privilege to be able to combine multiple initiatives regarding climate change and he believes that there are huge opportunities for NATO to innovate. The military should not be conservative regarding action to mitigate

climate change. You would not want to be dependent on fossil fuels in the near future if the rest of the world is not. Furthermore, it would be great to be self-sufficient in terms of energy. Karlijn Jans does not think you can separate the military and civil domain. Climate change is a global threat that affects everyone. There are several consequences of climate change in the geopolitical sphere such as rising sea levels that we need to look at.

Another subject during this panel is cyber-security. Would it be an option for the intelligence communities to become a part of the military, and if so, should these intelligence communities also contribute to the 2% guideline? Torossian argues that there has to be more transparency regarding cyber-attacks. There is now a taboo on being vulnerable to these kinds of attacks but not being open about it does a lot more damage. Moreover, it is an interesting benchmark to look at the intelligence community and the integration of the 2% guideline. Jans adds that cyber touches upon all kinds of domains and that we need to realize this.

On the subject of the Netherlands and their cyber-security infrastructure, David van Weel argues that we first need to define what that means. Our modern Western society is very fragile when it comes to our internet. If the internet would be shut down for twenty-four hours everything would come to a standstill. Moreover, we are also responsible for the security of other actors, for example



The second panel (left to right): David van Weel, Karlijn Jans, Dieuwertje Kuijpers, Bianca Torossian and Marcel Beukeboom (photo: Madelon Vink)

Microsoft programs which we all use. We have to look at how we can deter these cyberattacks because at the moment we are not able to.

Usually national capabilities are temporarily placed under NATO's control. Capabilities and how to respond to threats is usually up to nations and NATO can only orient and advise. By claiming up a bigger role for NATO isn't there a risk of loss of sovereignty? David van Weel argues that the power of NATO used to be the interoperability. That interoperability has become less effective because of the changing battleground. Emerging technologies are being implemented by individual nations.

NATO still has an important role to play as the place for western nations to come together and discuss how to take back control of emerging technologies and innovation. Torossian believes the discussion surrounding national/individual action and organized/centralized action for cyber- and hybrid warfare is also very much present. Currently we have a decentralized system which results in NATO member states having separate rules and policies regarding for example autonomous weaponry. We need to change this and have a standardized rulebook.

Do we have a standardized definition of nontraditional threats? Are all member states on the same page? David van Weel believes that we need to make sure we understand important emerging technologies like AI and autonomous robots. Those developments aren't bad things in themselves but we need to know what they do exactly and what it means. Torossian concludes that we have a long way to go in terms of conversations on what exactly these innovations mean for us. Furthermore, we are now more reliant on the ethics of the private sector because that is where these innovations take place, it is not the military anymore.

*By Ezra Lodder and Otto Zürcher*

*NATO Night is an annual program of the Netherlands Atlantic Youth to celebrate the anniversary of NATO. NATO Night is organized by a team of board members of the Netherlands Atlantic Youth. This was the fourth edition of NATO Night.*

