

## Section: Overview

### From Wales to Warsaw

#### Following up on the NATO Summit

Jamie Shea

**What does NATO's agenda look like after the Summit of 4-5 September? What are the main topics the new Secretary General has to address? Besides attention for the *crisis du jour*, what are NATO's larger goals towards the next Summit, in Warsaw?**

NATO's leaders arrived at their Summit in Newport, Wales, at one of the most difficult times in the Alliance's six decade-long existence. This is due to a mix of internal and external factors. On the internal side, this is declining defence budgets which leave the forces of NATO countries stretched to implement deterrence vis-à-vis Russia in Eastern Europe while intervening against Al Qaeda's offshoots and other disturbers of the peace across the Mediterranean. Afghanistan and Iraq have left parliaments and public opinion largely disinterested in strategic and defence issues and sceptical about the utility of armed forces.

After years when security has come to mean tracking individual terrorists across borders or making critical infrastructure at home more resilient against cyber attacks or natural disasters, it will be difficult to regain public acceptance for force-on-force conventional engagements, big military bases and large-scale manoeuvres. Allies also have different perceptions of the intensity but also the priority of the threats. As the security environment deteriorates, it may prove difficult to persuade them to engage militarily beyond their immediate national concerns or regions.

Moreover, the US has always provided those elements which converted disparate military forces into effective deterrence — the immediate response brigades, the reinforcements, the strategic enablers, the pre-positioned equipment, and the command and control, as well as intelligence and surveillance platforms — but will it, and can it continue to do so at a time when the US is increasingly committed to the Asia-Pacific and has to urgently rush forces back to a disintegrating Middle East?

#### **Hybrid threats and deterrence**

Externally, NATO has to confront new forms of warfare based on hybrid operations that combine aggressive information and propaganda campaigns, social media exploitation, cyber attacks, creeping infiltration of special forces, militias and weapons, economic embargoes and sabotage, political and business networks of influence and the exploitation of minority grievances. Hybrid warfare is not exactly new, but a Russia which is integrated into our financial, business and energy transactions, in a way that the Soviet Union never was, has far greater leverage to intimidate and divide. But how can an essentially military alliance deter hybrid threats that function by stealth, ambiguity and deniability? Russia is able to take decisions quickly, in secret, and to send forces across borders immediately. NATO's forces are more dispersed and need to be generated from scratch once an operational plan has been drawn up and agreed. So the Alliance has to anticipate probes, be

sure of the threat it is responding to, and then come to a collective decision on how, and with what it is going to respond.

Moreover, the problem is that NATO does not do economic deterrence, sophisticated civil society information campaigns or strategic energy policy. These are handled by the EU or other international organisations, or by smaller informal national groupings. How far can the Alliance engage with the EU and these other bodies to formulate coordinated responses to these hybrid challenges; and how effective will NATO's military deterrence be in protecting partner countries, such as Ukraine or Georgia? Or can it hope only to discourage Putin from trying to probe NATO's resolve on its own borders? Can deterrence be made into an adaptive concept adjustable to different types of threat or is it basically one-dimensional and military only?

In such a context it would be easy for a new leader (and NATO has just one Secretary General, not a cabinet or college of commissioners), as well as his ambassadorial colleagues on the North Atlantic Council (NAC), to be swamped by too many challenges coming from too many directions: the US' demands for greater burden-sharing, the debate between easterners and southerners over NATO's future strategic direction, tensions between those who wish to push ahead with enlargement and those who prefer to consolidate, and between those who want to limit NATO's mission to classical conventional deterrence vis-à-vis those who want to boost NATO's political and strategic role in addressing hybrid and globalised threats. This makes it all the more important that the Alliance's political and military leadership has a coherent, pragmatic plan for moving step-by-step. What could such a plan look like in practice?

### **Re-establishing credibility**

First and foremost, NATO's credibility as a powerful, even formidable military machine has to be restored in the eyes of its members, its publics and Russia. After years of projecting its soft power side in order to attract partners and the support of local populations in NATO operations, the Alliance has to go back to being respected and even feared as a militarily strong organisation — at least by potential adversaries. If Russia attacks a NATO member, it must know beyond any doubt that it is attacking NATO. So this means that '28 for 28' — the principle that all Allies are involved in the defence of all Allies — has to be demonstrated in action and not just proclaimed. NATO's Readiness Action Plan, which was the centrepiece of the Wales Summit, must underpin deterrence with a continuous military preserve in Eastern Europe and the proven capacity to reinforce quickly.

For Allies, this will mean raising the readiness level for elements of the NATO Response Force. Currently, NATO's Response Force is not able to meet a requirement to deploy within two or three days, which is a very demanding standard to maintain. It is clear that it will take some time for NATO to define exactly what its Very High Readiness Joint Task Force will look like and how it can be delivered on a sustainable basis. So an interim solution will need to be identified, perhaps provided by those Allies with a deployable brigade-sized headquarters. There will also need to be a clear process of exercising, training, evaluating and certifying the elements of this force to ensure that it can be in the right place and at the right time and deliver the required strategic effects.

High readiness is in itself a challenge, but readiness should not be confused with responsiveness, which is the political willingness to use the force once a threat has been identified. Responsiveness would entail aligning readiness with quick decision-making at NATO and in capitals, as well as giving the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) authority to prepare and position the immediate reaction forces so that they are in the right place if the NAC decides to use them.

### **Reassuring the east**

The Readiness Action Plan must be a concrete military plan that not only provides for short-term reassurance but adapts NATO's overall posture permanently to the new geo-strategic reality. This will mean continuing the rotation of NATO forces in Poland, the Baltic States and the Black Sea region well into 2015 and devising a plan to ensure that a NATO unit is permanently present in these regions. It will also mean improving NATO's early warning surveillance and intelligence gathering along its eastern frontiers and building up, as a priority, a command and control structure in the east, so as to be able to receive and direct reinforcement forces. Stocks can be prepositioned and a regional multinational headquarters can be designated to plan and conduct Article 5 exercises and to draw up standing defence or enhanced contingency plans.

Currently the German-Danish-Polish corps level headquarters in Szczecin seems best placed for this task, supported by a national headquarters and a deployable headquarters for the immediate reaction components of the NRF. This posture, combining elements of continuous presence with over-the-horizon reinforcement, has the advantage of being flexible and scalable to be adjusted according to how the potential threat from Russia evolves. But the Readiness Action Plan is not the same as having substantial forces forward deployed along the Alliance's eastern borders to act as a tripwire. So deterrence will work only if the high readiness forces and exercises are truly delivered. There is no room for under-resourcing and risk-taking here.

### **Business as usual**

Once reassurance in Eastern Europe has been implemented, the Alliance can move on to the other tasks arising from the Wales Summit Declaration. Some of these will not come as a surprise to the reader, as NATO is as much about returning to old issues as about embracing new ones. There are certain core tasks that every NATO Secretary General, from the first to the last, simply has to perform.

The first is obviously to argue for more capabilities. If all Allies are willing to meet the NATO commitment of spending 2% of their GDP on defence, agreed in Wales, the Alliance would have an additional US\$90 billion a year to spend on upgrading its forces. But this is unlikely to happen — at least in the near term. NATO will get extra money but not as much as it needs to fill all its major capability shortfalls identified by the two strategic commanders (ACO and ACT). Thus, like his predecessor, the new Secretary General will have to pressure and encourage Allies to form capability clusters, to invest in Smart Defence and multi-national enablers, to pool and share, identify rapid response niche capabilities, use more off-the-shelf, commercial capability and to streamline R&D efforts while forming new industrial partnerships to preserve the Alliance's defence, industrial and technology base.

At the very least, NATO's defence planning process has to shape the long-term investments of Allies rather than merely record their existing plans and inventories. It must not only look at forces on paper but at readiness levels and the capacity of Allies to actually deploy these forces. The recent reports in the German and other European media highlight how lack of spare parts and basic maintenance have grounded between 30% and 50% of the jet fighters and helicopters in the European inventories. To make progress, the Secretary General and his staff must divide their time between lobbying Allied governments for more spending and smarter defence, and working behind the scenes to broker multinational capability programmes, as was done in the past for NATO's AWACS fleet, Allied Ground Surveillance drones or the C17 airlift consortium. At a time of public scepticism regarding the cost-effectiveness of major capability and equipment programmes, NATO has to demonstrate not just success in multinational cooperation, but real savings and efficiencies as well.

A second unavoidable task for NATO's leaders post-Wales is to make the public case for defence and the link between armed forces and the interests, diplomatic objectives and values of Allied societies. What do armed forces do that the other security agencies of the modern state cannot do? Which armed forces do we need rather than which can we afford? Beyond public sympathy for the sacrifices of individual soldiers in Afghanistan, NATO's societies need to be exposed to strategic debates through parliaments, the media, NGOs and the academic community. Russia, after all, will continue to use its own massive state propaganda organisation to discredit NATO and everything it does. NATO has to be able to engage in and win this information war at the elite decision-maker and opinion former levels rather than simply raise awareness of its existence and activities among a global public. The return to collective defence is an opportunity for the Alliance to rebuild a solid bipartisan base of political support, but it will not happen automatically. It will need better NATO strategic communications.

### **Capacity-building**

Beyond these well-known tasks, others loom. One is defence capacity-building. The more the Alliance can be involved in training and mentoring local military forces in North Africa and the Middle East, the more the southern Allies will feel that NATO is receptive to their concerns and the less worried they will be about a shift to the east. But defence capacity-building will not be easy to transform from a Summit initiative to the reality of NATO missions on the ground. Some Allies may prefer to do capacity-building via the EU or existing national training programmes.

Some countries (Libya springs to mind) may be too chaotic and violent to be able to host a NATO mission. Troops trained need a proper state level structure to fit into or they drift off into the (numerous and often better armed and paid) militias. Recipient countries have to be serious about defence reform and NATO has to be serious about helping them (which means adequate personnel and resources and a sustained programme of work). But, at the same time, helping the current US-led coalition to roll back the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and keeping Al Qaeda and its off-shoots at bay in the Sahel or the Mashrek are now NATO's first line of defence. Many of the countries in these regions would welcome a NATO role and the current shortcomings of the Iraqi army in facing the Islamic State certainly argues for Iraq to move to the top of the defence capacity-building agenda. Ukraine has arguably a need for military assistance and armed forces restructuring as urgent as Iraq.

Georgia and Moldova are already on NATO's defence capacity-building list, alongside Jordan. At the time of writing, a NATO team is in Tampa, Florida at the U.S. Central Command headquarters exploring ways in which NATO could help the current coalition in areas like airlift and surveillance and with the training of Iraqi forces fighting Islamic States.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships fall into the same category. They have been a success story, with 24 non-NATO countries contributing to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Partners have become used to the close involvement in NATO consultations that a contribution to a NATO operation brings. The danger here is that post-ISAF, this closeness to partners — largely driven by operational needs on both sides — will begin to fade, especially if partners perceive an Alliance focusing on Article 5 core business and narrowing its vision to the European hinterland. Partners come in many shapes and sizes; they require individual attention, and a sense that NATO genuinely cares about their problems rather than seeing them mainly as force providers.

The new Secretary General may not have time to constantly travel to all 40+ current NATO partners; but he will need to maintain the relationship with the most willing and able, and make sure that the promises of the Wales Summit are fulfilled: to create an “interoperability platform” with the 24 troop-contributing partners and offer a close consultative relationship to those high-value partners that participate most in operational planning and exercises. As Georgia and Ukraine have shown, partnership has to mean something when a close partner of the Alliance, especially with a future membership perspective, is the victim of aggression or intimidation. It cannot be either Article 5 or nothing. Without extending security guarantees, NATO has to think creatively about how it can help partners respond to aggression and be more resilient, especially against hybrid warfare.

### **Towards Warsaw 2016**

It is easy in today's Alliance for all the senior civilian and military leaders to be fully consumed by the *crisis du jour* or the weekly agenda of the NAC, NATO-plus-partners meetings to chair, documents to issue, foreign visitors to receive, speeches to deliver or trips to undertake. But, as the new Secretary General contemplates the (likely) five years ahead of his mandate, it may be worth aiming for some larger goals as components of NATO's next Summit in Warsaw in 2016. They could usefully include three issues.

#### *Uniting the Allies behind a new policy to deal with Russia*

Russia is no longer a partner and is unlikely to become one again for years, even decades if Putin's regime survives him. But do we want Russia to become an implacable enemy, like the Soviet Union? As Harmel taught us 50 years ago, defence and deterrence also need détente and dialogue — and mutual understandings, hot lines, arms control and inspections at the very minimum. If the NATO-Russia Council and business 'at 29' are now in indefinite abeyance, what should replace them? Can NATO have a transactional relationship with Russia which balances strategic competition in Eastern Europe with cooperation elsewhere, say in Afghanistan?

The fact of the matter is that NATO has to have a relationship with Russia. The issue is: What relationship? Figuring out a new common system of arms control and conventional and

nuclear stability in Europe would seem to be the starting point in the same way that NATO used arms control to mediate its relations with the Soviet Union, and in far more adversarial circumstances.

### *NATO-EU Relations*

NATO and the EU are now in the same boat, whether it be hybrid threats from Russia, the assistance to Ukraine and the countries 'in between', the Balkans and the blowback from the Arab Spring. Their interests are overlapping, their policies largely identical and their instruments complementary. But how can this relationship be operationalised between NATO and the EU in the same way that EU member states constantly chart their strategies and harmonize their actions? The new Secretary General will need to reach out early on to the new EU leadership team (and not only to the High Representative) and set up at the staff level mechanisms for daily information-sharing and policy/activity coordination.

Of course, a full NATO-EU institutional dialogue would be the optimal solution. But as the Libya and Ukraine crises as well as Kosovo and the Gulf of Aden have shown, there is much that can be done at the informal or staff levels. Moreover, an EU increasingly preoccupied with defence and hard power issues will per force show more receptivity to cooperation with NATO. So there is an opportunity to be seized.

### *NATO in the US*

The Ukraine crisis has been good for US leadership in the Alliance. The US was the first to send troops to Poland and the Baltic States, bring forward exercises and deploy ships in the Black Sea. But in the long run, the transatlantic relationship has to change. The US cannot indefinitely support the burden of reassurance in eastern Europe, nor pay 73% of the total Allied defence budgets. As a global power, the US will need to disperse its forces around many corners of the globe and will be increasingly stretched to do so. So the Alliance will need a mental road map to adjust to a world where the Europeans will need the structures, capabilities and political will to do hard power. Can, for instance, the Europeans do regional deterrence without the US? Where do they have to duplicate US assets to have guaranteed availability and where can they continue to rely on US capabilities? If the US contributed less to NATO militarily in the future, how can NATO be made more attractive for the US? For instance as a forum for political consultation, a hub of global security partnerships or a toolbox and command structure to enable coalitions of the willing — in which the US does or does not participate?

Many of these questions have been around for decades and have no ready answers. Yet if we are to believe Bob Gates' valedictory speech in Brussels three years ago, Europeans should not be complacent in thinking that Washington will always grumble but that ultimately nothing ever changes. The Ukraine crisis may be less of a game changer for Washington than for Brussels. As the hero of de Lampedusa's *The Leopard* famously put it, "things have to change to remain the same."

Dr Jamie Shea is the Deputy Assistant Secretary General at the Emerging Security Challenges Division of NATO. The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone. They do not represent an official position of NATO.

Would you like to react? Mail the editor at [redactie@atlcom.nl](mailto:redactie@atlcom.nl).