

The Future of NATO: A Strong Alliance in an Unpredictable World

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Robin Niblett

May I just raise one issue – I was wondering whether it would come up in your presentation. By all means, if people would like to follow up on this question, do – this is not to take our members away from the opportunity for them to ask this question. But on the collective defence front, and you mentioned at the beginning – I had the pleasure and honour of chairing this experts' group that you convened along with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Group, the North Atlantic Assembly Group and also the Young Emerging Leaders. We all put in papers. One of the themes that emerged was this idea that collective defence may need to adapt itself to what some people call non-linear threats, some people call hybrid threats. That the experience of what's taken place in Ukraine and could potentially happen in other parts of Europe is that we may be faced with the types of risks that don't naturally give themselves to a response that might rely on prepositioned military equipment or contingency planning, military exercises, or even the NATO response force perhaps. I'm wondering how you and your colleagues are thinking about this particular issue: the kinds of risks that come from proxy forces; you did mention cyber, but cyber, information, economic coercion, etc. How do we deal with these non-linear risks? Is there more of a role for EU-NATO cooperation in this space (one idea that we put forward)? Could you say just a quick word on that and then I will draw in the many hands that are going up here in the audience.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Yes, indeed, this is the key question and a very important issue. We will address it also in the run-up to the summit. We have seen that – maybe we can call it a modern kind of warfare. It has different labels: ambiguous attacks, hybrid warfare, non-linear warfare. Whatever we call it, we see a combination of covert military operations combined with sophisticated information and disinformation operations. It is of utmost importance that we stand ready to also address such security challenges. You might also call it a full-spectrum deterrence.

We have already started work on that. It will be addressed at the summit, probably as part of our readiness action plan, because this is indeed also a part of being ready to address all kinds of threats.

Robin Niblett

Absolutely. As you said, it's a full spectrum – I like this full-spectrum deterrence. It's an important line.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Let me just add as a response to your question: yes, it will involve intensified cooperation with other organizations, because this goes beyond defence and traditional military capabilities. It will involve close cooperation with other organizations – like the European Union, but I could also think of other organizations – to address the full spectrum of threats.

Question 1

An excellent speech. May I ask though, how are you going to implement your aspirations? Obviously there isn't enough money being spent by the NATO allies and there doesn't seem to be a strong enough political will.

Robin Niblett

This issue of political will, which is then manifested in defence budgets, is something that's being discussed here a lot in the UK. You praised the UK government for a number of the steps that it had taken in recent years, but the Syria vote – let's just put it out there – was one of those issues that has caused quite a bit of political debate in the UK. Will the political will be there to be able to follow through, in your opinion, on the defence commitments that you've been asking for and you called for in your speech as well?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

I will resist temptation to interfere with domestic British debates, but answer more generally on the political will. I think the illegal Russian military actions in Ukraine are a wakeup call, a reminder that we cannot take security, we cannot take freedom, for granted. So we have to invest sufficiently in security and defence. The good news is that we have actually seen positive developments in a number of countries. Just to mention a recent announcement: Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania have now committed politically to gradually achieve the 2 per cent benchmark. On top of that, I can inform you that Estonia has already reached the 2 per cent benchmark despite severe economic crisis some years ago. I would argue if it's possible for Estonia, it will be possible for other countries as well. We have already seen encouraging movements. But the question about political will is exactly why we want to address it at the summit, because it needs to be addressed at the very highest political level.

Question 2

My question is very simple: do you have now any kind of plan to intervene in Iraq to rescue the Iraqi government?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

First of all, of course I strongly condemn the violence we have seen in Iraq, the horrendous attacks we have seen, including the taking of hostages at the Turkish consulate-general in Mosul. We call for the immediate release of the hostages.

As is now publicly known, the Iraqi government has requested, at least from one of our allies, some military assistance. I am not going to interfere with that. That's a national decision. NATO is focused on

providing effective defence and protection of all allies, and of course I had an opportunity to discuss that with our Turkish ally when I visited Ankara last Monday.

But whatever might be the decision by individual allies when it comes to military assistance to the Iraqi government, I have to say that any assistance would only be effective if it is combined with political efforts in Iraq to ensure a much more inclusive government than we have seen in the past. We cannot dismiss the fact that one of the reasons why we now see tendencies of sectarian violence in Iraq is the fact that the government has not pursued inclusive policies. So I would encourage the Iraqi authorities to ensure a much more inclusive government as soon as possible.

Question 3

You just stated that you visited Turkey. Turkey is a NATO member. Did Turkey ask or seek any help from NATO since its general consul has been kidnapped with other consulate staff? If the situation expands to NATO allies like Turkey, do you still have the same position of not intervening into Iraq?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

First of all, NATO has not received any request for assistance. We have had consultations within NATO upon request of our ally, Turkey, so the North Atlantic Council has convened. We have had consultations on this issue. As I said, we will not hesitate to do what it takes to provide effective defence and protection of our allies, including of course Turkey.

Question 4

When NATO was established, it was a deterrent to the Soviet Union's expansion. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO itself has encroached to the territories previously occupied or controlled by the Soviet Union. Don't you think this is a provocation on the part of the former Soviet Union, now Russia, and therefore the expenditure you mentioned – 50 per cent, Russia has gone up, and NATO has gone down. Then obviously NATO has to increase it to confront the Russian expansion on military expenditure.

Robin Niblett

So in other words, have we contributed somewhat to the Russian reaction through NATO enlargement? This has been a big theme in the British press as well and been part of the British political debate, the extent to which NATO has goaded perhaps Russia into taking a more assertive stance toward its security broadly.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Yes, I have heard that before. But let me stress: NATO's open door policy is not a provocation against anybody. On the contrary, everybody – including Russia – has profited from the zone of stability, security and prosperity we have contributed to develop in Eastern and Central Europe.

First and foremost let me emphasize: in parallel with enlargement of NATO, we have engaged intensively with Russia. Actually we have created something very special, namely a NATO-Russia Council. It was established in Rome in 2002. Already in 1997, before the first of the recent enlargements of NATO, we adopted a joint document called the Founding Act, which created the first framework for a structured cooperation between NATO and Russia. It was followed in 2002 by the establishment of something very particular, the NATO-Russia Council, which since then has served as a framework for political consultations as well as decisions on practical cooperation between NATO and Russia. I think the peak of all this was the NATO-Russia summit in Lisbon in November 2010, at which summit we decided to develop a true strategic partnership between Russia and NATO.

So let me stress that we have not accepted new members of NATO as part of any aggression against Russia. On the contrary, we have for more than 20 years now tried to include Russia in a constructive cooperation.

But apart from all that, we adhere to a fundamental principle: namely, that each and every nation has a fundamental right to decide itself its security policies and alliance affiliation. Actually that's also enshrined in the OSCE Charter for European Security, which was adopted in 1999 and also signed by Russia. So Russia has subscribed to that principle that each and every nation has the right to decide itself.

So NATO's open door policy follows from our NATO Treaty Article 10, which states that we may invite any European country that is in a position to improve Euro-Atlantic security and further the principle upon which we have built our societies. Each such European country may be invited to join our alliance. These two things in combination – our open door and the right of every country to decide itself – has led to an expansion of NATO from 16 to 28 nations. That's not directed against Russia. It's based on some fundamental principles and, of course, our goal to create a Europe whole, free and at peace. We will not accept new dividing lines in Europe.

So I completely dismiss that allegation that our open door policy should be provocation against Russia. Just have a look also at economic figures, trade, investment and other things. You will see that Russia has profited immensely from that zone of security, stability and prosperity we have contributed to create in Eastern and Central Europe. Basically it's in Russia's interest, but it goes beyond my imagination how the Kremlin thinks of it.

Question 5

My question, I think, has been covered by you. I wanted to ask your thoughts on the situation in Iraq, but I presume you have already answered that question. I don't know if you want to say anything more.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Maybe just one thing I could add: namely, lessons learned. There is a discussion now whether we left a security vacuum behind in Iraq. Let me remind you that it was an Iraqi decision not to sign the necessary legal framework for continued presence of trainers, for instance, that could have continued training the Iraqi security forces.

I think there is a lesson to be learned, also when we are speaking about Afghanistan: namely, the need for continued presence, as we have now decided to establish a train, advise, assist mission to continue to help the Afghan forces. They will take full responsibility by the end of this year but we will continue to assist them. I think that could be one of the lessons learned from Iraq, that it is important not to leave behind any security vacuum.

Question 6

You spoke in your opening remarks about the need for strength and unity in NATO, and also within that the important role played by the United Kingdom. Of course, the UK may in the not-too-distant future not exist in its current form. I wonder if you could tell me what preparations NATO has made, what contingency planning, what discussions have gone on with the governments here and in Edinburgh in case Scotland does vote for independence later this year. And whether you share any of the concerns that have been voiced by figures such as President Obama, Premier Li and, of course, Lord Robertson.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

The brief answer is that it hasn't been discussed. It's not only the brief answer, it's also the truth.

Robin Niblett

That's a very rare combination we've heard here. That could be a first actually for Chatham House, brief but true.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

I consider it a hypothetical question. We will cross that bridge if and when we are there.

Question 7

One of the things that the recent events in Ukraine showed us was the speed with which potential adversaries, in this case Russia, could move. You've talked a little bit about prepositioning but it's not just about being able to move resources to the place that they're needed, but also to make decisions more

quickly. At the moment you have a coalition of 28. The ability to make decisions in that coalition of 28, not just in terms of doing something but the 'what' one should do, there's a lot of divisiveness about that. Have you thought about how you, as you look to NATO of the future, how you might resolve that particular dilemma?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

It is a very good question. We have also worked on that. Of course, basically you're right that it is a bit more complicated to make a decision when it requires 28 sovereign, independent nations to agree, compared to if maybe eventually only one person can make the decision. Of course it makes a difference. But I do believe that we have made progress in NATO during recent years. Just one example: when NATO took the decision in the 1990s to engage in the Balkans, it took at least six months to take that decision. When we decided in spring 2011 to engage in Libya, it took six days. Actually it demonstrates that we have improved our decision-making processes.

I will not suggest that it's easy. I will not suggest that we don't have challenges – we do. But as secretary-general now for almost five years, I can testify to the fact that when there is an urgent situation, there is also a very strong political will to make decisions urgently. And there is a strong, I would say consensual spirit within our alliance. Of course 28 nations may not always agree at the starting point, but I've come to appreciate the strong efforts from all permanent representatives and eventually all capitals to come to an agreement as fast as possible.

We have also reformed some of our internal procedures, but I have to say I don't think we can touch the fundamental principle of consensus. We are speaking about sovereign nations and we are speaking about defence and security policies. I think, at least in my lifetime, nations will preserve that as a national sovereign responsibility. But we can improve and reform our internal decision-making procedures, and we have done so.

Robin Niblett

It's an interesting point – you gave the Libya example. There is an example where there were some very strong differences between member states, as reflected in the UN Security Council decisions, and yet you were able to act quickly. So just as a quick coda, I think it's a good point.

Question 8

Can I pick up on the point about smart, nimble thinking? You actually used two phrases there about little warning, and also about Ukraine being a wakeup call. We're talking about new threats which are emerging incredibly quickly. Quite apart from the business of making decisions, it's actually the business of assessment – threat assessment and perception of what is happening over the border from Estonia, over the border from Poland. That very distinct perception, certainly as an outsider, that really during Ukraine there was a lack of understanding of what was happening in the Kremlin. You've just conceded the difficulty of understanding the Kremlin. But the business of really how much NATO is sensitized to this,

how smart it is, how nimble it is to understand. I was at the German Marshall Fund meeting at the end of March and there General Breedlove really gave an impression, sitting publicly for the first time, that this had all come as an amazing shock and NATO was really struggling. So can I ask you to give us an idea of what it's like in the North Atlantic Council and behind closed doors in the military committee when it's about assessing very quickly in real time what is happening, and therefore what the threat is to NATO.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

That is a key question. Obviously there are many lessons learned from what we have seen. To be quite open with you, we have seen a dramatic change in the Russian way of conducting military operations from the Georgian war in 2008 to the Crimea operation in 2014. They react much faster and in a much more sophisticated way, let's face it. That's exactly why we are preparing what we call a readiness action plan. I think the title itself indicates what we are aiming at. I also mentioned, as one of the strands at work, improved intelligence, better early warning and situational awareness. I don't think you would expect me to go into details.

So we have several options but I can tell you that the North Atlantic Council has seized on the matter and we discuss this on a very regular basis in depth.

Robin Niblett

Do you think there's been a decline in the capacity to understand and assess Russia among the member states, maybe within NATO? I don't want you to criticize member states but the point is there has been discussion that people just stopped looking. We looked at the Middle East, we looked at Afghanistan. Teams tend to cluster where they go. Do you think we've lost some of our feel for our ability to think about European security in the way we did before?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

It's not a big surprise. For more than 20 years we have considered Russia a partner, with whom we could cooperate. We even decided in 2010 to develop a true strategic partnership. Then obviously you reallocate your resources. So it's not a big surprise.

But I have to conclude that after what we have seen in Ukraine, we have to adapt to the dramatically changed security situation in Europe. Of course, it also includes reallocating resources to improve intelligence and early warning.

Question 9

We have evidence from the Russian Ministry of Defence that Russian military troops are relocating towards the border of Ukraine yesterday and today, and Russian troops are preparing to enter Ukraine. From the intelligence and information you have, could you confirm that Russian troops are actually

gathering and going back towards the border? This is the first question. The second question is: what will be the NATO reaction if Russian troops enter officially Ukraine?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

Firstly, yes, I can confirm that we now see a new Russian military buildup along the Ukrainian border. At least a few thousand more Russian troops are now deployed to the Ukrainian border. We see troop manoeuvres in the neighbourhood of Ukraine. Of course, I have to say that if they are deployed to seal the border and stop the flow of weapons and equipment from Russia into Ukraine, it would be a positive step. But I also have to say that's not exactly what we are seeing. So I consider this a very regrettable step backwards. It seems that Russia keeps the option open to intervene further into Ukraine.

You asked me what would be the consequences. I do believe that the international community would have to respond in a firm manner if Russia were to intervene further in Ukraine. That would imply deeper, broader, more profound economic sanctions against Russia, which would have a very damaging effect on the Russian economy. So it would isolate Russia further internationally if Russia were to intervene further.

As far as NATO is concerned, we are focused on providing effective defence and protection of our allies. We have taken immediate steps, including enhanced air policing, more naval presence in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, more exercises. We will not hesitate to take further steps if needed to reassure our allies and ensure effective defence and protection of our allies.

Question 10

First of all, I wanted to thank you for a very enlightening presentation, particularly that statistic which revealed that Russian defence expenditure increased by 50 per cent and NATO's declined by 20 per cent. But in absolute terms, obviously, NATO's expenditure is still quite enormous. I would put it to you though that the real question or the real power and the real leverage Russia has is its position as a key gas supplier to Europe. Indeed, I would have to respectfully put it to you that a far better use of resources by Europe and particularly the European Union would be to invest heavily in shale gas production. Indeed, I would suggest to you that it would be far easier to sell that notion – let's face it, the shale revolution is a technology and a triumph of innovation. To spend money on that would give a far higher return than defence expenditure. Just a footnote: Mr Putin on one occasion actually lectured Germany about the environmental hazards of shale, so he's well aware of the strategic value of the shale revolution.

Question 11

I'm glad you mentioned that you're eradicating terrorism from Afghanistan, but don't you think you are driving them from Afghanistan to other parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, to reform and take root again?

Question 12

My question is: where do you see, in the new current situation, NATO relations with the European Union becoming perhaps deeper and more profound? Would you prefer to see the current prime minister of Denmark as head of the European Commission or the former prime minister of Luxembourg?

Question 13

The *Financial Times* this week, and indeed Lord Stirrup yesterday talking to MPs, suggested actually Britain's defence expenditure is on course to fall below the 2 per cent benchmark. How concerned are you by that? When you say it's time for the cutting to stop, does that also apply to the UK?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen

First, on gas and energy, it is indeed a very important element in the overall security. Energy security is of utmost importance. Of course, this is not primarily NATO business. There may be NATO aspects, such as protection of essential infrastructure, etc., but we do have consultations among allies on energy security. But actually first and foremost I think it's an EU business to improve or contribute to improved energy security.

Of course, a better energy security requires a reduced dependence on imported oil and gas from Russia, and in general a much more diversified supply of energy, which also includes the construction of new pipelines that can make Europe more independent. But it also involves a better functioning European energy market so that one single energy supplier is not able to blackmail one single nation, because nations help each other in that case, and it includes development of new and alternative energy sources. But in general – I will refrain from involving myself in discussions whether you should develop shale gas or not, but in general, obviously the more diversified the energy supply, the better the energy security.

But I have one additional remark on shale gas, because I have met allies who can report that Russia, as part of their sophisticated information and disinformation operations, engages actively with so-called non-governmental organizations, environmental organizations working against shale gas – obviously to maintain European dependence on imported Russian gas. That's my interpretation. So it adds a new aspect to this information operation.

On terrorists, I think we have to face the fact that the fight against international terrorism is more or less an enduring task. We can't state at a certain state that now that fight is over. You may be right that if we get rid of terrorist roots in one country, terrorist networks may move to other countries. So it just emphasizes how important it is to continue to develop a strong international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Recent events in Iraq, of course, testify to that. So I think, in conclusion, we will have to continue the fight against terrorism. It may find new forms and we have to be ready to address that.

On NATO-EU, first of all I'm not going at all to engage myself in the discussion on leadership of European institutions. That's for the EU to do. I have a sufficient number of battles already. But in general, I would appreciate to see an even stronger cooperation between NATO and the European Union. We get along quite well on a daily basis when it comes to our interaction in theatres where we operate together, like in

Afghanistan and Kosovo. We have also improved our cooperation on development of capabilities so that we can avoid duplication and waste of resources and make the most efficient use of taxpayers' money.

But when it comes to political consultation and cooperation, there is still an unused potential, I would say. Without going into a lot of details, basically the problem is the unsolved Cyprus conflict. I think the key to reach the full potential of NATO-EU cooperation would be to solve the Cyprus dispute.

Finally, on UK defence spending, I know from my interaction with the UK government that it is strongly committed to the 2 per cent benchmark. So I'm confident that the UK will stay above 2 per cent defence spending.

Robin Niblett

That's an answer that will give some impetus perhaps to them sticking to that standpoint. You're confident they will stick to it, so there we go. Secretary-General, you took an enormous amount of questions – my apologies to those people I didn't get to. You gave direct, specific answers to all of them. This is a moment that reveals the difficult job of Secretary-General: you have to combine the tactical intelligence knowledge of what's going on, day to day, minute to minute, as you had to answer in a lot of your questions, but at the same time you're trying to sustain that sense of strategic purpose which was at the heart of your speech. It is quite a challenging task and one that you clearly relish and are doing a great job at, and we wish you every success, and to the member states, for the Wales Summit. Please, a very strong hand to the Secretary-General.