



STRATEGIC FORUM

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Key Points

- ◆ In July 2016 NATO leaders will meet in Warsaw to formally review whether earlier decisions on strengthening the Alliance's collective defenses are sufficient. Greater efforts will be needed, but consensus may not be easy to achieve.
- ◆ Below the surface, the cohesion of NATO is under severe strain from multiple crises including Russian revanchism, mass migration, and terrorism. Summit preparations are also taking place under the shadow of potential strategic shocks. Internal disagreements fueled by rising populism could lead to a British exit from the European Union, a disorderly breakdown of the Schengen system, or worse.
- ◆ In this context it would be a mistake to underestimate the risk of NATO fragmentation. To strengthen cohesion, U.S. leaders should consider broadening the debate beyond the immediate concerns over Europe's troubled neighborhood, fostering intra-European peer pressure on providing adequate military capabilities, and stimulating European nations to develop complementary force postures. These initiatives could revitalize the transatlantic bond, but would require patient engagement before and after the summit.

The NATO Warsaw Summit: How to Strengthen Alliance Cohesion

by Alexander Mattelaer

It is often stated that cohesion constitutes the center of gravity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Yet divergent domestic pressures and external threat perceptions are threatening to pull Allies apart and leave the Euro-Atlantic security architecture in shatters. When NATO Heads of State and Government meet in Warsaw on July 8–9, 2016, the stakes will be high. Not since the end of the Cold War has the security outlook been as bleak or the collective resources for meeting multiple threats as meager.

This paper takes stock of the existing debates on the Warsaw Summit agenda and offers a set of recommendations on how U.S. officials might attempt to foster unity within the Alliance. A cursory review of the various commentaries on the Warsaw Summit agenda suggests that this exercise will have much in common with the proverbial practice of herding cats.¹ Different Allies all want to see more of what they individually desire, while the Alliance as a whole will struggle to satisfy competing demands. Much has been written already about the delicate balancing act required for shoring up eastern and southern defenses, as well as for reconciling the needs of deterrence with political dialogue. However, coming to grips with the diplomatic difficulties of finding consensus entails acknowledging that the difficulties are as much internal as they are external to the Alliance.

This analysis proceeds as follows. The first section discusses the various issues featuring on the Warsaw Summit agenda. While individual discussion items have logical answers, these often entail significant financial implications. The principal challenge for summit diplomacy will therefore reside in maintaining unity over the inevitable package deal that reconciles competing demands for resources. Success cannot be taken for granted. The three following sections detail a set of recommendations for dealing with the challenge of fragmentation. At the level of threat perceptions, a coherent narrative can be constructed

only by taking the discussion beyond the Alliance's immediate neighborhood. This requires that all Allies articulate their security concerns and integrate these into a 360-degree approach. Concerning defense resourcing, the free-rider problem can be addressed most effectively by fostering intra-European peer pressure, including through the European Union (EU). A commitment to sufficient defense spending should be integrated into the European Semester system of macro-economic coordination. Last but not least, capability and strategy development must be reframed as a regionally inspired division of labor built on complementary force structures. This would cast those nations closest to various threats into a role of first responder and others into that of provider of reserve forces, defensive depth, and support. The concluding section sketches a practical way forward for transforming crisis into opportunity. The United States can use the Warsaw Summit as a catalyst for revitalizing the Western-led global order.

The Warsaw Agenda and the Problem of Fragmentation

At face value, the agenda of the Warsaw Summit is straightforward. The NATO Heads of State and Government will review the progress that has been made in implementing the decisions taken at the 2014 Wales Summit. These relate to a broad program of increasing the Alliance's readiness for meeting its three core tasks—collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security—and adapting it to the deteriorating security environment. After all, Russia's actions against Ukraine and the growing instability in the Middle East and North Africa prompted NATO leaders to declare “a pivotal moment in Euro-Atlantic security.”² The Warsaw Summit serves the function of determining whether the package of measures agreed upon in Wales is meeting expectations and offering further guidance as required. Many Allies consider NATO's present military posture to be insufficient. At the same time, the Alliance is short of the required means for meeting political ambitions. This leads to a fundamental mismatch between the com-

bined wish list of allied ambitions and available military and financial resources. This problem is further amplified by the broader crisis of European integration, which is not about security per se, but which cannot help but affect the defense debate in a negative way. Maintaining collective unity will therefore constitute the most important hurdle to overcome in Warsaw.

The NATO Readiness Action Plan (RAP) constituted the flagship of the 2014 Wales Summit.³ This plan included so-called assurance measures as well as an ambitious adaptation agenda. The former concentrated on generating a continuous presence on NATO's Eastern flank through rotational deployment of land, maritime, and air assets. The latter included the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the commitment to increase the size and responsiveness of the NATO Response Force. The VJTF was intended to create a “mobile trip-wire” and serve as “a deployable guarantee of Alliance solidarity” that could be swiftly reinforced by follow-on forces as deemed appropriate.⁴ Furthermore, the adaptation agenda was geared toward revisiting the functioning of the Alliance in all its aspects, including decisionmaking procedures, strategic communications, and ways of countering so-called hybrid warfare threats. The speed at which the Alliance could identify and react to various forms of aggression constituted a central theme in this regard. All of the above was expected to come at a cost. NATO leaders therefore agreed to reverse the trend of declining defense budgets. This defense investment pledge contained a hard commitment to halt any decline in defense expenditure as well as a softer commitment of aiming to increase defense spending toward the 2 percent target as gross domestic product grows. Last but not least, NATO defense ministers in June 2015 reinforced these decisions by issuing new political guidance that raised the level of ambition in qualitative terms.

Despite the fact that the implementation of these decisions has continued apace, various Allies complain that the Wales package is insufficient. In part, this is related to a growing realization that VJTF deployment and

subsequent reinforcement may not be as assured or as rapid as required. The antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) challenge around Kaliningrad looms large in this regard.⁵ Correspondingly, the Alliance remains dangerously vulnerable to a hypothetical *coup de main* scenario in the Baltic region.⁶ Apart from this most dangerous scenario, the Baltic States may also be the target of unconventional destabilization efforts that could result in accidental conflict.⁷ As summit host nation, Poland leads the way in advocating a permanent NATO presence to be deployed along the Eastern flank.⁸ Yet what should a “forward defense” posture look like in detail?⁹ Should the Alliance follow Russia’s example of throwing the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act overboard? Such a course of action entails committing significant combat forces that would become unavailable for other missions for an indefinite period. In addition, Germany’s minister of defense has already signaled that any forward presence will remain rotational and respectful of existing obligations.¹⁰ Yet the lack of appetite in boosting conventional defenses (combined with Russia’s saber rattling) is increasing pressure to revisit NATO’s nuclear deterrence policy.¹¹ While the assumptions on which the 2012 Deterrence and Defense Posture Review were based are obviously no longer valid, the reinvigoration of nuclear deterrence is bound to generate considerable domestic opposition within several Allies participating in nuclear-sharing, most notably in Germany and Belgium.

The second major complaint is that the RAP is overwhelmingly geared toward the East, whereas several Allies are at least as concerned—if not more so—by the instability along the Southern flank of the Alliance. As migratory flows are stretching the administrative capacities of some Allies to the breaking point and Islamist terrorists succeed in targeting the European homeland, many allied defense establishments are being called upon to perform homeland missions that have significant repercussions in terms of force readiness.¹² Nations such as Italy and Spain will push hard for getting a framework for the southern neighborhood agreed. The role of the Alliance in projecting stability overseas and mitigating

conflict fallout is therefore unlikely to diminish. While working through and with partners will be a prominent item on the summit agenda, initiatives such as defense capacity-building also require substantial resources to generate the intended result.

The yawning gap between the combined ambitions of individual Allies and the total availability of financial, material, and human resources constitutes a fundamental problem. While the security challenges on NATO’s flanks each have logical answers in terms of what is required, the combined allied force pool is insufficient for meeting all demands—especially if one takes the factors of readiness and attrition into account. It can therefore be expected that different Allies recriminate each other for not doing enough. While those Allies openly flouting even the minimal commitment of halting the decline in their defense expenditure (that is, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, and Italy) will face intense pressure to change course, it remains an inescapable reality that NATO defense expenditure is ultimately driven overwhelmingly by the largest member states.¹³ The spectacular increases in defense spending by Allies such as Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania cannot substantially mitigate the consequences of budgetary stagnation in the United States and Western Europe.

The end result of this financial context is that it will remain difficult during the coming years to resource the capabilities required for meeting the present level of ambition and shoring up allied defenses. In political terms, European Allies will experience a startlingly chilly reaction when realizing that their increasingly acute security concerns can partially be offset only by Alliance solidarity. Given that successive U.S. administrations have been complaining about ever-decreasing levels of European defense spending, this issue has real potential for becoming a transatlantic day of reckoning. This prospect has become all the more likely now that NATO burdensharing has become a theme in the electoral campaign for the U.S. Presidency.

European fears over NATO’s external defenses are reinforced by the combination of crises affecting the

broader process of European integration. The near-collapse of the Eurozone and the migration-induced stress on the Schengen area of borderless travel have provoked acrimonious disputes and accusations of political blackmail among Europeans. It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which political trust among these Allies has suffered. Both at the level of political leaders and their populations, the idea of solidarity among Europeans is under siege. NATO as an organization is not immune from these developments. On the one hand, both Russia and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant actively seek to foster and exploit European disunity to their strategic advantage.¹⁴ On the other hand, it cannot be excluded that allied nations may engage in diplomatic retaliations against each other's policies across different institutional frameworks.

The notion of European disintegration—if it were to take hold—cannot have but the most profound implications for Alliance management. The rise of political populism and Euroscepticism strengthens such centrifugal tendencies. This “challenge from within” may well be as dire as those NATO faces on its borders. It is not hard to see how political turbulence could result in strategic paralysis. On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom will hold a referendum on whether the country should remain a member of the European Union. The potential breakup of NATO's sister organization cannot help but undermine Western unity in the most insidious way possible. In addition, EU economic sanctions against Russia are set to expire on July 31, 2016, if not prolonged—a decision that requires European unanimity. The Dutch referendum on the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine shows how adroit Russia has become in fostering division through targeted disinformation campaigns. Last but not least, European domestic political controversy over themes such as immigration or economic affairs may well sap the Alliance of its resolve and therefore constitutes a critical vulnerability.

While the Wales Summit was widely heralded as a historic turning point, the agenda for Warsaw looks bleak. In spite of the significant progress realized over

the past 18 months, doubts over whether the RAP will meet its objectives have proliferated. Such doubts over military readiness could be addressed, but it remains to be seen whether agreement can be found on how to share the costs that this will entail. Furthermore, the military debate has been greatly affected by a loss of confidence in European cooperation and unity. The key challenge therefore becomes: how can political fragmentation be contained and Alliance cohesion safeguarded?

Broadening the Security Debate

Any meaningful consensus within the Alliance begins with a shared appreciation of the international security environment. Unfortunately, many Allies perceive threats differently. This is largely the consequence of their geographical position on the European continent. The binary choice between strengthening the eastern defenses of the Alliance and tending to its southern neighborhood arguably constitutes the biggest point of friction in terms of Alliance management. This hurdle could be overcome by zooming out and approaching the security environment from 360 degrees. Even during the Cold War, NATO strategy was informed by careful analysis of the global security context. It would be foolish not to engage in a similar discussion today. Only if every Ally—including the United States—puts forward its proper set of concerns can a balanced consensus be found.

The “East vs. South” debate is politically poisonous because it fosters a fear of abandonment in the most vulnerable Allies. The European map of defense spending patterns is revealing. In broad terms, the turning of the tide in defense spending is rolling over the European continent from east to west and from north to south. This creates the impression that some Allies are putting their money where their mouths are whereas others are not. Yet such a perception omits reference to broader political and economic considerations. Over time, the budgetary trend reversal will make itself felt in every nook and cranny of the Alliance. But even this will not offset the basic equilibrium between Articles 3 and 5 of the Washington Treaty: individual self-help and mutual aid

go hand in hand. Alliance membership does not absolve nations from the responsibility to maintain their own defenses and contribute to the common cause.

To achieve consensus, it is imperative that each Ally articulates its own set of security concerns. This inevitably means that the focus on the Eastern flank gets diluted to some extent. Concerns over the high North, the South Atlantic, the Sahel, or homegrown terrorism are all legitimate.¹⁵ In any case, these concerns will influence the strategic calculus made by individual Allies. The inclusion of such elements into the NATO debate will not only foster frank discussion and occasional disagreement, but it will also render the difficult discussion on burden-sharing more honest. Some nations may object to such a 360-degree approach and argue that the Alliance must concentrate solely on collective defense against Russia. Yet throughout its history NATO has always been a multipurpose organization, and no single-issue conception of the Alliance is likely to find widespread support.¹⁶

The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region deserves a prominent place in this discussion.¹⁷ NATO strategy cannot ignore the fact that the United States has global security commitments that include treaty obligations in East Asia. While the number of U.S. forces is of course finite, global partners such as Japan and the Republic of Korea add real value to NATO by contributing to operations and supporting the liberal democratic view of world order. Discussions between NATO and such partners could help shed more light on the logic of extended nuclear deterrence, for instance. The selection of former U.S. Forces Korea Commander Curtis M. Scaparrotti as the new Supreme Allied Commander Europe suggests that the interdependency between Asian and European theaters is becoming increasingly prominent.

It remains possible to distill an Alliance-wide synthesis that puts all of these different viewpoints into perspective. Regional security challenges merit careful analysis, but they only acquire their full significance when put into a global context. This makes clear that the Alliance cannot choose to concentrate exclusively on either the Eastern or Southern flank, but will need to

prepare for handling multiple challenges simultaneously. It is important to highlight the dimension of time as a planning variable: the threat from the east could be sudden and massive whereas the south is bound to be of lesser intensity but more enduring. Both could be jeopardized by events elsewhere in the world—most notably any future contingency in the South China Sea or on the Korean Peninsula. Correspondingly, the forward defenses of the Alliance in the east need to be robust, its stability efforts in the south unfaltering, and its pool of reserve forces sufficiently flexible to cater to contingencies whenever and wherever these occur. To some extent these challenges also require different sets of capabilities and suggest an implicit division of labor.

In many ways, recently announced U.S. decisions indicate the way forward. The quadrupling of funding of the European Reassurance Initiative in the fiscal year 2017 budget constitutes a strong signal that NATO's defenses are being substantially reinforced. Most notably, this includes the rotation of armored brigade combat teams from February 2017 onward.¹⁸ This will bring the total U.S. Army presence in Europe up to three fully manned brigades and prepositioned material for equipping a fourth. Some of these units (such as the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team stationed in Vicenza, Italy) are earmarked for multiple theaters. At the same time, U.S. support to France and Belgium in dealing with terrorist threats underscores the fact that different tasks can be dealt with simultaneously. Setting such an example constitutes a powerful basis for demanding Allies to assume their fair share of building up a forward presence and maintaining sufficient reserves to offer rapid support where needed.

However, it cannot be expected that the United States alone should respond to the changing security environment in Europe. Europeans will need to look after their immediate neighborhood first so as to allow the United States to focus on the provision of reserve forces and high-end capabilities and enablers. Thus configured, the Alliance could add maximum value as a common platform for ensuring coherence across the

defense efforts of individual Allies. Of course, this requires that European nations invest sufficient financial resources and orient their defense capability development accordingly. The following two sections discuss how these aims could be furthered.

Fostering Intra-European Peer Pressure on Defense Spending

It is a longstanding transatlantic tradition for U.S. Secretaries of Defense to berate the European Allies for spending insufficient resources on security and defense.¹⁹ Yet when individual nations put forward competing demands for NATO security assurances, this trend could be replaced with Europeans berating each other for not doing enough. In particular, the requirement to maintain adequate levels of defense spending could be integrated into the framework of the European Semester—the EU’s annual cycle of macro-economic policy guidance and surveillance. While the European Union cannot substitute for the transatlantic security relationship, it might help mobilize solidarity among Europeans and embed their defense efforts into a wider policy framework, in particular vis-à-vis so-called hybrid threats. Such intra-European peer pressure would help address the financial aspects of the burdensharing debate.

Reviewing progress made toward meeting the Wales defense investment targets yields a mixed picture. On the bright side, most Allies have effectively stopped cutting their defense expenditures. Many of them project budget increases in the years ahead or are already in the process of expanding their defense outlays—some of them significantly.²⁰ Yet the budgets from the largest Allies are essentially stagnant in real terms. Future projections tend to be based on rosy-colored economic projections. The possibility that Western economies may face a new recession in the coming years is hardly being factored in. Furthermore, many Allies have postponed investment projects in past years to pay for operational outlays in Afghanistan and elsewhere. As a result, they are now facing an accumulation of force modernization bills. This “bow-wave” effect is affecting not only smaller Allies, such as

the nations with aging F-16 fighter fleets, but also the larger ones such as Germany and the United States.²¹ This means that even substantial reinvestment in defense might not immediately translate into additional capabilities, as vast sums are consumed by the mere regeneration of present force structures. For meeting the Alliance level of ambition, the pool of capabilities must become deeper, wider, and more ready. All the above unfolds against a backdrop of increasing capability requirements for meeting the Alliance level of ambition. As a result, the pressure on all Allies to spend more and to spend more wisely will grow and persist (see figure).

Intriguingly, all Allies that are also members of the EU have subscribed to a multilateral system of macro-economic policy coordination and budgetary supervision that is entirely separated from national security concerns. Under the European Semester system, national governments submit their annual budget and economic reform programs for review to the European Commission.²² The latter monitors progress toward the “Europe 2020” targets for sustainable economic growth and provides country-specific recommendations for meeting those. For Eurozone countries, this process even includes the European Commission issuing evaluative opinions on the submitted draft budgetary plans. This surveillance mechanism can lead to corrective action and even impose fines. While the European Commission takes note of defense spending as a national budget post, it does so only through a prism of fiscal prudence and cannot accord any value to this.

The fact that the European Semester system is de facto security-blind has already provoked substantial criticism. Addressing both houses of parliament in the aftermath of the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, French President François Hollande declared that “the security pact will have precedence over the stability pact.”²³ In effect, he signaled that extra spending on security and defense needed to be excluded from the sovereign debt targets monitored by the European Commission. While such flexibility may be warranted in light of exceptional circumstances, it would make more sense to

The European Semester

The European Semester is the European Union's annual cycle of economic policy coordination, which is intended to ensure implementation of EU economic rules and priorities. The key stages are:

November: The European Commission issues its annual growth survey, which proposes EU economic priorities for the coming year and formulates opinions on the draft budgetary plans of national governments within the euro area.

December–January: EU member states adopt national budgets and together formulate recommendations for the euro area as a whole.

February: The European Commission issues individual country reports (one per member state).

March: EU Heads of State and Government formally adopt economic priorities based on the commission's annual growth survey.

April: EU member states present their national plans for economic reforms and sound public finances.

May: the European Commission provides country-specific recommendations for budgetary, economic and social policies.

July: EU Heads of State and Government formally endorse these country-specific recommendations.

September–October: National governments within the euro area present draft budgetary plans for the coming year to the European Commission.

Throughout the Year: The European Parliament engages in dialogue with the European Commission on the annual growth survey and the country-specific recommendations.

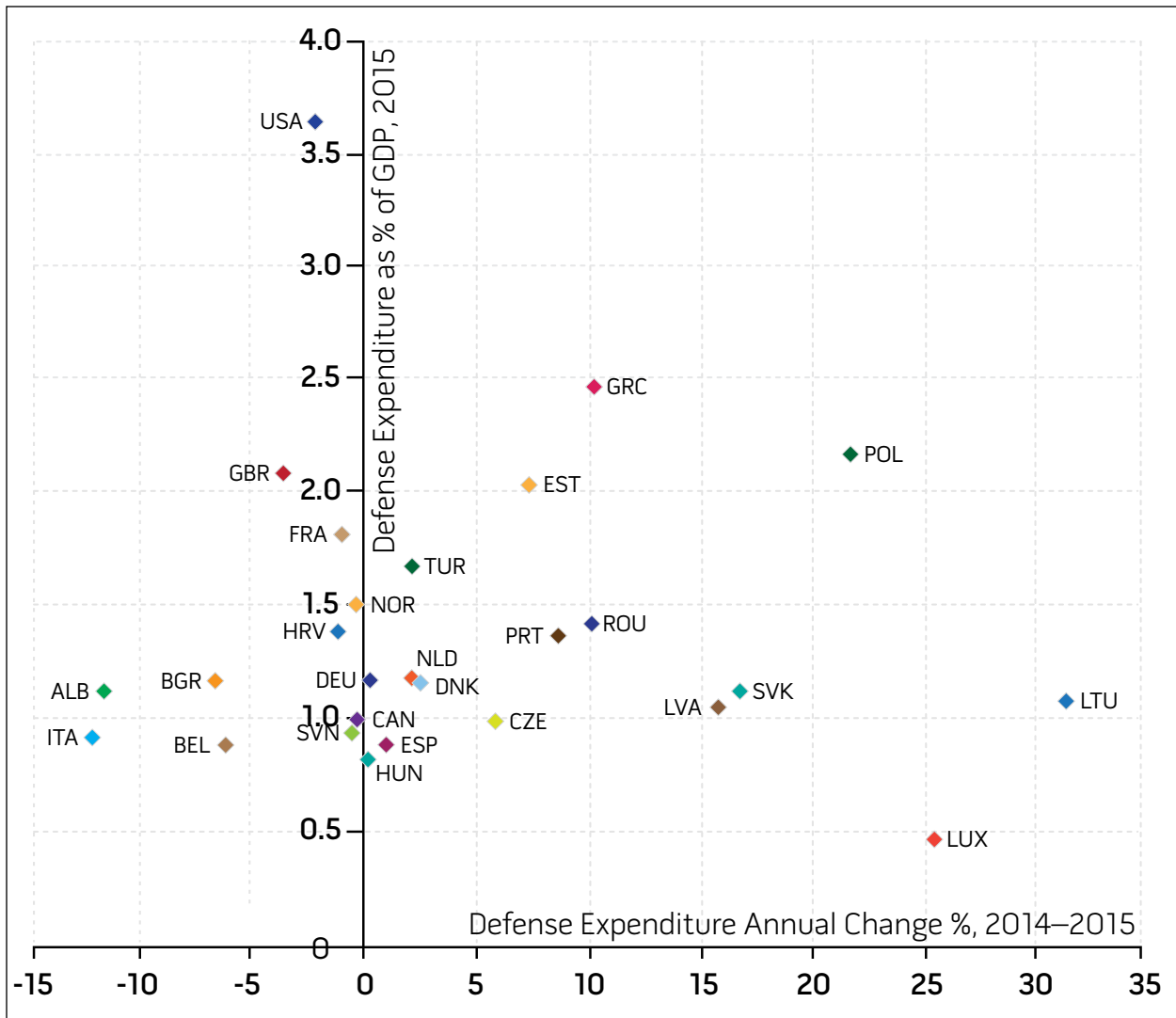
While the implementation of commission recommendations at the national level has a mixed track record, the system enables the surveillance of economic reforms undertaken by member states and includes a sanction mechanism for those that fail to take sufficient corrective action. Although it provides member states with budgetary guidance spanning all governmental functions, currently the need to invest in defense does not constitute an objective in this discussion. Thus adopting a "percentage of GDP" defense target would give defense expenditures some macroeconomic protection within the European Semester system.

include minimal defense spending targets into the European Semester system. If the NATO defense investment pledge is to be given real meaning for budget planners, this would be a logical way forward. Budgetary consolidation and adequate levels of defense spending must go hand in hand; one should not serve as a smokescreen for ignoring the other.

Integrating some sort of defense investment pledge into the European Semester system would yield impor-

tant benefits. First and foremost, it would avoid potential contradiction between uncoordinated budgetary targets set by NATO and the EU. In addition, such a Europeanized defense investment pledge would be more meaningful because it would be mainstreamed into the overall budgeting process of European states and coupled with a supranational sanctioning mechanism. Integrating defense investment targets would also give the European Semester system greater legitimacy by incorporating security

Figure. NATO Defense Expenditure Data



Source: *Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2008–2015)*, Press Release 11 (Brussels: NATO Headquarters, January 28, 2016). It should be pointed out that the percentage of gross domestic product spent on defense constitutes only a crude metric for measuring burdensharing.

goals—a key function of government. Most fundamentally, it would give a recognizable procedural face to the idea of intra-European solidarity in the field of security. A defense-sensitive European Semester would help channel a debate that has already begun among Europeans in a productive direction. Thus it would offset the centrifugal forces that EU budgetary discussions have unleashed in the recent past.

Many objections could of course be raised to this proposal of introducing defense targets in the European Semester. Neutral EU member states could object to introducing formal NATO defense spending targets in an

EU setting. Even allied nations might think twice about transposing what some consider to be only soft NATO guidance into more binding EU defense spending targets. Germany in particular will remain adamant that fiscal discipline should not be thrown overboard. The combination of these factors may well lead to a European “watering down” of what was agreed at the Wales Summit. At the same time, it is precisely by linking different policy arenas that grand bargains become possible. While it is likely that nations would only sign up to less ambitious defense spending targets when these become genuinely binding, the European Semester system could

add realism and contribute to more efficient spending. It could provide significant incentives for increasing multinational cooperation in the field of defense procurement, for instance. More importantly, it could help shelter defense spending when the next economic downturn arrives by directly feeding security considerations into the debate over macro-economic policy.

The European Commission and the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy have signaled their willingness to deepen cooperation with NATO and to get more involved in security matters. Their recent joint communication on countering hybrid threats suggests growing awareness about the security challenges in the EU's neighborhood and calls for stepping up NATO-EU cooperation in areas ranging from situational awareness and strategic communication to crisis prevention and response.²⁴ The notion of hybrid threats could serve as a means of unlocking EU support in a wide range of areas contributing to improving collective defense. This could include the mobilization of significant financial resources for modernizing Europe's defense transportation infrastructure and supply systems, for instance.²⁵ Given that the Warsaw Summit may well feature a NATO-EU joint statement, several opportunities for deeper cooperation could be identified. Exploring the ways in which NATO-EU budgetary policy coordination mechanisms could be synchronized would stand out as a promising avenue for realizing a major breakthrough.

Toward Complementary Force Postures

The cohesion of NATO remains critically dependent on its collective defense commitment. Unfortunately, the present gap between available resources and military requirements casts doubt over the credibility of NATO's defenses. As this growing gap is the result of both an increased threat level and the progressive hollowing out of many allied militaries, it would be unwise to assume that the turn of the tide in defense spending will be sufficient in addressing the problem in the near

to mid-term.²⁶ Allied defense planners will thus remain under pressure to shore up NATO's deterrence posture with insufficient resources. The Warsaw Summit may call for addressing this issue through increased multinational cooperation, technological advances, and institutional adaptation. Yet in the end, NATO commanders will need to be given real capabilities. When under stress, NATO may need to revert to an explicit division of labor in terms of which Ally provides what type of warfighting capabilities and where. For this to be possible, European defense establishments need to be nudged toward developing complementary force structures. These could be geared toward regional areas of responsibility that match the national interests of the nations involved.

At present, NATO's available military capabilities fall short of what may be required if a collective defense scenario materializes.²⁷ Over the past years, Russia's armed forces have trained and honed their skills for conducting large-scale combat operations.²⁸ To have a credible conventional deterrence in place, analysts suggest that NATO would need to be able to surge some 13 brigades into the Baltic States to deter Russian aggression by denial (based on a 1:3 force ratio).²⁹ Even when adding up those forces deployed in theater and rapidly available follow-on forces, such troop numbers are not easy to come by. Furthermore, such quantitative calculations make abstraction of the geographical and infrastructural advantages that Russia can exploit, for instance, by resorting to A2/AD tactics. Moreover, since Russia is not the only actor posing a threat to the Alliance, some resources will inevitably be tied up elsewhere. For example, it is hard to see how NATO could fail to accommodate a Libyan request for assistance. Last but not least, several nations have national commitments and responsibilities that preclude making all their forces available to the Alliance. Homeland operations to deal with internal security and refugee management loom particularly large in this regard. The combined pool of forces at the disposal of the Alliance is therefore inadequate in terms of readiness and may even lack sheer numbers when facing the prospect of combat attrition.

The hardest question for NATO defense planners is how to convince individual Allies to fill the required force pool in the most efficient way possible. In recent years, the Alliance has struggled to address the longstanding capability shortfalls taught by operational experience. Similarly, the widespread expectation that intensifying multinational cooperation would offset the impact of national force reductions has not been borne out. This suggests that the post-Cold War defense planning system—overwhelmingly geared toward the conduct of expeditionary crisis response operations—has failed to keep allied militaries fit for the future. As collective defense has returned to the foreground, the question may be asked whether the military division of labor within the Alliance needs to be revisited.

During the Cold War, the continental European Allies were tasked to provide the hard core of land forces and tactical air support, whereas secure air and sea lines of communication were the responsibility of the United States and United Kingdom. Through the provision of its nuclear umbrella, the United States acted as the underwriter of the collective defense system, ready to risk its own national security on behalf of its Allies. This stands in stark contrast to the trend that has been established in the aftermath of the Cold War. During the past two decades, European militaries slowly attempted to develop expeditionary capabilities as were required for stabilization operations in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The Alliance committed to the notion of capability-based planning, which decoupled force planning from specific geopolitical threats. As a result, individual Allies often struggled to recognize their national interest in the capability sets they were assigned.

A new approach would merge both of these historical experiences. It is increasingly clear that the frontline states of the Alliance need to shift the focus of their national defense plans and corresponding force structures. The Baltic States, for instance, need to transition from light to mechanized forces. Similarly, Poland may focus on combining local defense forces with reconnaissance-

strike capabilities and deterrence assets.³⁰ A country such as Italy, in turn, would naturally focus its efforts in the Euro-Mediterranean basin and tailor its force structure for leading crisis management and cooperative security efforts there.³¹ The resulting picture is that those nations closest to the various threats the Alliance faces would need to ready themselves to act as first responders. They would do so out of sheer necessity borne from self-help. In turn, the Allies less geographically exposed must commit themselves to developing and maintaining those capability sets needed to offer effective aid and assistance to those in need. Practically speaking that could mean the Franco-German axis provides the internal backbone for strengthening Europe's defenses in the south and east, respectively. Relying on its maritime-centric expeditionary capabilities, the United Kingdom could maintain a flexible posture ready to assist where needed. As always, the United States continues its role as underwriter of the Alliance system and provider of those capabilities that are out of the reach of individual Allies.

Such a division of labor organized around the “compass rose” that the Alliance carries in its emblem would clarify what is expected from each Ally. It also meshes well with the foreign policy ambitions of the nations involved. The distribution of military tasks on the basis of regional orientation and proximity would help ensure domestic support for shoring up national defense efforts. This is a key argument to counter the foreseeable objection that regionalization risks cementing Alliance fragmentation. While such a division of labor to some extent dilutes the notion of “all for one,” it is far more likely to make the required financial and material sacrifices politically acceptable. As such, the added value of the Alliance needs to be found in the overall coherence it could bring to various regional plans and national efforts that would otherwise unfold without the required coordination. Through its common funding and standardization efforts, the Alliance could add the overarching capability sets and interoperability skills that benefit all nations simultaneously, such as an integrated command structure. Streamlining and facilitating the efforts that all nations

engage in for their own reasons toward the collective good—is that not what an alliance is all about?

Conclusion

In the run-up to the Warsaw Summit, NATO needs a sustained effort in building common threat perceptions, consensus about investment needs, and a distribution of military tasks and responsibilities. The constant flow of worrisome news coming from NATO's volatile neighborhood suggests that such an effort would need to be maintained for the foreseeable future. Summit agendas have the tendency to be derailed by events, and nobody is served by setting high expectations that could not be fulfilled. A patient commitment to plowing ahead even in adverse conditions and on all levels of government might serve the Alliance best. Even without any unexpected drama, the discussions at Warsaw will be difficult enough.

At the same time, every crisis presents its own set of opportunities—provided it is managed well. For the first time in a generation there is the prospect of a genuine trend-reversal in European defense spending. This could help put NATO's defense on a more sustainable footing and meet the longstanding expectation of Europeans becoming more credible security partners—both in their own neighborhood and beyond. In turn, this offers a unique window for revitalizing the broader Western-led global order that has come under siege from authoritarian powers.³² What is at stake is not only the NATO agenda, but also the future of the free world. Economic prosperity and security must go hand in hand. All the turbulence plaguing the European continent has at least served as a reminder that neither can be taken for granted. As a result, domestic support for overhauling the policies of the past is on the rise. All of these developments are to be welcomed as long as they are channeled into a coherent direction that reflects the interests of all Allies.

Throughout its history, NATO has been able to overcome major challenges and headwinds. Achieving unity has never been easy. Yet it has never been impossible to strike the required grand bargains on what needed

to be done. The Warsaw Summit constitutes an opportunity to continue this tradition. Working out a compromise package among the largest nations, and gradually expanding this consensus to include all 28 Allies, is the most pragmatic way forward. Rebuilding NATO's military readiness to realize the agreed political objectives will take time and effort, but progress is being made. As always, showing some grit will go a long way.

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Notes

¹ Compare, for example, Karl-Heinz-Kamp, *The Agenda of the NATO Summit in Warsaw* (Berlin: Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, 2015); Trine Flockhart, *An Agenda for NATO's 2016 Warsaw Summit: Back to Basics or Just Backwards?* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, August 2015); Rainer L. Glatz and Martin Zapfe, *NATO Defence Planning between Wales and Warsaw: Politico-military Challenges of a Credible Assurance against Russia* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2016); Job C. Henning and Douglas A. Ollivant, "Radically Rethinking NATO and the Future of European Security," *War on the Rocks*, March 24, 2016; Michal Baranowski and Bruno Lété, *NATO in a World of Disorder: Making the Alliance Ready for Warsaw* (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States, March 2016); Hans Binnendijk, Daniel S. Hamilton, and Charles L. Barry, *Alliance Revitalized: NATO for a New Era* (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, April 2016).

² *Wales Summit Declaration* (Newport: North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], September 5, 2014).

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