

Prepared Statement for the Record

“NATO at 70: An Indispensable Alliance”

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Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, members of the committee – I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. This year marks a pivotal moment for NATO – commemorating landmark anniversaries in the Alliance’s history, yet also confronting fundamental questions about its future.

This week in Prague, past and present leaders gathered to celebrate the two-decade anniversary of NATO’s first round of enlargement, which extended membership to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Next month in Washington, NATO foreign ministers will meet on the occasion of the organization’s 70th Anniversary. For an alliance forged in the rubble of the Second World War to thwart Communist aggression, NATO stands today as the most successful security partnership in history. It has transformed in ways far beyond what its founders could have dreamed. While I believe a strong NATO remains essential to advancing U.S. national security interests – and is an indispensable force-multiplier for American power – we must be clear-eyed about the challenges ahead.

Debates about NATO’s purpose are nothing new. In fact, such questions stretch back to its founding. During the Cold War, the questions focused on how to stand up to the Soviet threat, the role of nuclear weapons, and how to best establish deterrence. When the Cold War ended thirty years ago, there were questions about how the Alliance would address crises in places like the Balkans and take on new missions out of area; some argued that with the Soviet threat dissolved, NATO should disappear with it. Then, after the September 11 attacks, NATO adapted to a new fight against terrorism, especially in Afghanistan. For the past five years, since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the explosion of the ISIL crisis in 2014, NATO has worked to handle the twin challenges of resurging geopolitical competition and persistent global instability.

Yet this moment is uncertain for another reason: at a time of significant turbulence at home and abroad, many are asking about whether the U.S. still believes in NATO. They watch our debates – or read our Twitter feeds – and wonder how committed the U.S. remains. It is precisely at this time that Congress has an urgent and important role to play in affirming and bolstering U.S. leadership in NATO.

A Modern Alliance

As NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, observed recently, the current moment presents a paradox. One could easily depict things only in dire terms, focusing on discord and disagreement. Yet the Alliance is also exhibiting renewed energy. This can be measured in four ways: first, in the area of territorial defense, where Member States are stepping-up force deployments, adapting to evolving threats, and spending more on their militaries. Second, it can be seen in the Alliance's commitment to some of its basic principles, such as the Open Door Policy. Third, it can be measured by public opinion, where support for the Alliance remains high in the United States. And fourth, it can be seen in the Alliance's enduring commitment to common security in places like Afghanistan.

First, NATO is bolstering deterrence and defense capabilities, doing more together than it has in years. Following the Cold War, force deployments to Europe dwindled. However, as Russia started to pose a renewed threat, Allies realized the need to bolster the defense of Europe. Force deployment – and the budgets to support it – became a new priority. In 2013, the last American tank left Europe as part of the post-Cold War withdrawal. Yet today, as just one example, there is an Armored Brigade Combat Team – comprised of 3,500 personnel and 87 tanks – deployed in Poland.

In the latter half of the Obama Administration, the U.S. increased its force deployments and spending related to European security; efforts which have expanded in the last two years. I applaud the Administration's FY2019 request for the European Defense Initiative – which at \$6.6 billion, nearly doubles the FY2017 spending level.¹ This important initiative is a primary source of funding for the European Command and works to enhance our deterrence and defense posture. In turn, this further assures NATO Allies and partners that America will stand behind its security commitments, while also improving the capability and readiness of U.S. forces.²

Non-U.S. members of NATO are also stepping up their commitment to Transatlantic Security. This is most visible when considering the deliverables from the past three NATO summits – which have steadily improved the Alliance's capacity to defend territory and mobilize its forces in response to a crisis.

At the Wales Summit in 2014, Member States stood-up the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force ("VJTF"). This rapidly deployable, multinational force spearheads the Alliance's "Reaction Force." And in a sign of our Allies commitment to burden sharing, European nations have and will continue to rotate as the "lead nation" for this brigade-sized force.

At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, Alliance members launched the Enhanced Forward Presence ("EFP"), which builds on the immediate reassurance steps the Alliance took in

¹ "The U.S., NATO, and the Defense of Europe: Shaping the Right Ministerial Force Goals," Anthony H. Cordesman, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 27, 2018

² "European Deterrence Initiative," *Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)*, February 2018

the wake of the Ukraine crisis and bolsters defense and deterrence in NATO's vulnerable flanks.³ Non-U.S. Member States are taking an important lead in this initiative – commanding and organizing three of the EFP's four multinational battalion-sized battlegroups, which are based in Estonia (led by the United Kingdom), Latvia (led by Canada), Lithuania (led by Germany), and Poland (led by the U.S.)

At the most recent 2018 Brussels Summit, NATO instituted the “Four Thirties” initiative, which aims to have 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat vessels prepared for use within 30 days' notice or less. This initiative, which was a U.S.-led effort, brings a much needed “Follow-on-Force” capability to augment the rapid reaction forces stood-up during the 2014 and 2016 summits.

Last July's Brussels Summit also brought other achievements. Member States committed to increasing military mobility across Europe and made several important changes to its command structure to address the shifting threat environment – standing up the Joint Force Support and Enabling Command in Germany and the Joint Force Norfolk Command, which will coordinate military movements in Europe and protect lines of communications across the Atlantic (respectively) in the a crisis.⁴ Moreover, NATO maintains a steady pace of major military exercises – for example, last year's Trident Juncture, hosted by Norway, was the largest since the end of the Cold War.

While these achievements are important, popular debates on NATO often fixate on the goal for all Member States to spend 2% of total GDP on defense. This priority is not unique to the current Administration. In fact, Acting-Secretary Shanahan is the 6th consecutive Secretary of Defense to prod NATO allies to spend more on their defense – thus far, we can claim modest progress.

In 2014, only three NATO Member States spent more than 2% of their total GDP on defense. In 2018, that number rose to nine countries.⁵ By 2024, NATO reports that a majority of Member States have plans in place to meet the “2%” spending goal. Even countries who will not hit the mark by then have significantly increased in their defense spending.

Yet we need to be clear: the 2% goal alone is not a recipe for NATO success. It is also imperative that these defense dollars are invested wisely – with at least 20% of new defense spending going towards major equipment, including related Research and Development. In turn, these investments will ensure that increased spending will boost critical military capabilities – such as Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, NATO Airborne Warning & Control System, and cyber defense – that directly contribute to Transatlantic defense. And it is important that NATO countries invest in the other tools of national power that remain vital to the organization's mission, such diplomacy and development.

³ “NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence,” *NATO*, February 2019

⁴ “Brussels Summit Declaration,” *NATO*, August 30, 2018

⁵ “NATO Members Drive Fastest Increase in Global Defence Spending for a Decade, Jane's by IHS Markit Reveals,” *The Associated Press*, December 18, 2018

Second, it is good news the Alliance continues to live-up to its commitment to Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty – known as the Open Door Policy. In 2017, Montenegro became the organization’s 29th Member State. And with the naming dispute with Greece resolved, NATO nations have signed onto an accession protocol for North Macedonia – paving its way to become the 30th member as early as December.

Third, it is notable and positive that despite all the turbulence in discussions about NATO – and a lot of loose talk about whether Alliance partners have taken advantage of the U.S. – American public support remains resilient. In 2017, Gallup reported that 80% of Americans support NATO, a figure that stood at 64% in 1995.⁶ In another recent survey, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 75% of Americans support maintaining or increasing the nation’s commitment to NATO.⁷

Finally, eighteen years after Member States invoked the NATO Charter’s Article V clause of mutual self-defense to support the U.S. NATO allies remain a vital component of common security efforts in Afghanistan. Non-U.S. allies and partners contribute nearly half of the 17,000 troops deployed as a part of the Resolute Support Mission. Every day, these forces increase the effectiveness and accountability of Afghanistan’s security forces and institutions.⁸ These forces run programs that increase fighting capabilities, confront corruption, provide mission support through operations planning, budget development, logistical sustainment, and civilian oversight. In a further positive sign of NATO’s shared commitment to the mission in Afghanistan, Member States recently extended funding to Afghanistan’s National Defense and Security forces through 2024.

From increased defense capabilities to the Open Door to Afghanistan, NATO continues to show that it is a unique asset to the United States. None of this was inevitable. Over four years ago, in Wales, NATO leaders met at a moment of great uncertainty. Just months after Russia’s war against Ukraine started and as the Islamic State crisis exploded, there were many concerns about the ability of the United States and Europe to face these twin challenges. From that perspective, the collective response must be considered a success: Putin has been stymied, and the Islamic State’s “caliphate” is nearly routed.⁹

Hard Work Remains

Yet NATO faces no shortage of challenges. I will focus on several: first, threats from rival powers; second, emerging threats like cyber and hybrid warfare; third, enduring challenges along NATO’s southern flank; and fourth, internal tensions that undermine Alliance unity.

⁶ “Most Americans Support NATO Alliance,” *Gallup*, February 17, 2017

⁷ “America Engaged: American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy,” Dina Emltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, Craig Kafura, and Lily Wojtowicz, *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, October 2, 2018

⁸ “Resolute Support Mission: Key Facts and Figures,” *NATO*, December 2018

⁹ See Derek Chollet, “Why isn’t Trump bragging about his NATO successes,” *The Washington Post*, July 4, 2018

First, as a defensive alliance, NATO is tested every day – particularly from Russia. Moscow makes no secret of its disdain for NATO, and one of Vladimir Putin’s core goals is to divide and weaken the Alliance. And recent history provides an abundance of examples. Starting with the occupation of Georgia in 2008, Russia’s revanchist behavior increased in scope and size. In Ukraine, it has continued to illegally occupy Crimea since 2014. In Moldova, Russia threatens territorial integrity and sovereignty by supporting the breakaway region of Transnistria. In the skies above the Baltic Sea, NATO fighter jets regularly scramble – 110 times in 2016 alone – to confront aggressive and reckless Russian incursions of airspace.¹⁰ In Latvia, Russia’s military interrupted the nation’s mobile communications network as a part of the annual Zapad exercises. Beyond these territorial threats, Russia continues to exert its influence over NATO allies and partners through election meddling and disinformation campaigns that exploit societal and political cleavages.

NATO Allies are also discussing ways they should respond to the growing military competition with China. It remains unclear how NATO should address the rising Chinese military threat, yet it is a positive sign that European partners acknowledge its priority.

Which brings us to a second set of challenges: those posed by emerging threats such as cyber and hybrid warfare. The Alliance made some modest progress in these areas. For example, NATO established the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Estonia – which bolsters cyber defense by facilitating cooperation and information sharing. Furthermore, the Alliance is standing up a cyber military command center to directly confront cyber-attacks – to be opened in 2023. Despite these positive developments, emerging threats pose unique challenges, and NATO leaders concede that more needs to be done.

Third, NATO needs to maintain its focus on challenges on its southern flank. Instability endures along the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. In these areas, state failure, violent extremism, and refugee flows pose the primary threats to Member States. NATO is stepping up its efforts to respond to these challenges. Following up on its participation in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, NATO deployed AWACS to support the anti-ISIS mission in 2018. NATO is training the Iraqi security forces in areas such as C-IED, civil-military planning, maintaining armored vehicles, and providing medical services. And at the 2018 Brussels Summit, NATO leaders endorsed a “Package on the South,” which will strengthen the Alliance’s deterrence and defense posture in the Middle East and North Africa, and improve the organization’s ability to manage and respond to crises and security threats emanating from the region.¹¹

The fourth challenge is perhaps the most worrying: NATO is facing a growing crisis within its ranks. NATO is about much more than armaments and military capabilities; it

¹⁰ “NATO: Russian Aircraft Intercepted 110 Times Above Baltic in 2016,” Damien Sharkov, *Newsweek*, January 4, 2017

¹¹ “Brussels Summit Key Decisions: 11 – 12 July 2018,” *NATO*, November 2018

is an Alliance rooted in common values. The preamble of the Washington Treaty stipulates that members states are “determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.”¹²

Yet democratic backsliding and nationalist politics are on the rise in too many places. This makes it harder to maintain allied unity, and raises questions about common commitment to NATO’s future. These ills are seen throughout the Transatlantic space, including, I regret to say, in the United States.

Across European capitals, and in Washington itself, people are wondering whether the United States would fulfill its Article V commitment to collective defense. It did not go unnoticed that in his recent letter of resignation, former Secretary of Defense Mattis singled out his disagreements with the President’s view of alliances generally, and NATO specifically, as a key reason for his departure.

For this reason, Congress has an especially urgent and important role to play in maintaining U.S. leadership in NATO. Continued support for funding of the U.S. military efforts in Europe will remain essential. So will the continued willingness of so many Members of Congress to travel to NATO Headquarters and other European capitals to show support for the Alliance and press for its continued reforms. And your legislative efforts are indispensable, whether it is your continued support for funding of U.S. efforts in NATO, or the recent passage of the bipartisan “NATO Support Act.”

Remembering the Past to Imagine the Future

We must recapture the spirit that helped energize U.S. leadership in NATO in the first place – and also recall that sustaining this leadership has never been easy. We would be wise to remember history’s lessons.

Almost exactly 68 years ago, a similar debate about European security gripped Washington, and specifically the U.S. Congress.¹³ In early 1951, some political leaders claimed that deploying American troops to Europe to support NATO was not in the nation’s best interest.

The nascent alliance was still taking shape, and it fell to General Dwight Eisenhower to create a military command structure, prod European nations to rebuild their militaries, and galvanize American support to send troops to Europe. The question of whether the United States should assume the lead in NATO and deploy significant forces proved politically explosive. Many leading members of Congress and major political figures remained skeptical.

¹² “The North Atlantic Treaty,” *NATO*, April 4, 1949

¹³ The following paragraphs draw on Derek Chollet, “Republicans threatened NATO once before. Dwight Eisenhower stopped them.,” *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2019

With Eisenhower's unique credibility and stature, it was his task to push back against this formidable wave of opposition, and in February 1951 he came to Capitol Hill to make his case. Speaking before both chambers of Congress, Eisenhower passionately argued for what he called the "enlightened self-interest" of American leadership in NATO.

Eisenhower was not blind to the war-weariness of the American public or the skepticism about overseas commitments. He stressed that this was not the United States' problem alone. The Europeans needed to step up as well, so the United States was not "merely an Atlas to carry the load on its shoulder." Yet Eisenhower believed the U.S. had arrived at its "decade of decision" and had a unique role to play. As he argued before Congress, Eisenhower asked "what nation is more capable, more ready, of providing this leadership than the United States"?¹⁴

This episode came at a pivotal moment for the Alliance. If Eisenhower had faltered and other political forces prevailed, it is hard to see how NATO, then so new and fragile, would have sustained enough U.S. political support to survive.

Back then, Dwight Eisenhower won the argument. Today, we must wage the battle anew, with some echoing the exact arguments used against NATO. As we approach NATO's 70th anniversary this spring, we must again look to Congress to embrace this mission as it did seven decades ago.

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¹⁴ "Text of Eisenhower's Speech to Senate and House of Representatives," Dwight D. Eisenhower, *New York Times*, February 2, 1951