



**Testimony before  
The House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment**

Hearing on the Future of NATO: New Challenges and Opportunities  
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*General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.)*  
Executive Chairman Emeritus, Atlantic Council

*Views are those of my own*

Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Kinzinger, and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the future of NATO.

Thursday marks the seventieth anniversary of the NATO Alliance. While it is worth reflecting on what NATO has achieved over its history, it is also worth examining what the future holds for the Alliance. The most successful military alliance ever, NATO kept the peace in Europe and triumphed in the Cold War, essentially without firing a shot. NATO's role adapted with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as it helped to end a humanitarian crisis and defeated fascism in the Balkans. After the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, our Allies and partners rallied to our side and around the mission in Afghanistan.

It's also worth noting that NATO's seventieth anniversary is not the only occasion we are celebrating this year. This November marks thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. Last month we celebrated twenty years of NATO membership for Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the fifteenth anniversary of NATO's "big bang" expansion that brought seven other formerly communist states into the Alliance in 2004, and yesterday marked ten years since Albania and Croatia joined NATO. This year we can also look forward to the accession of the Alliance's thirtieth member, North Macedonia.

And it is precisely to look forward that we are here today. I believe NATO today is as relevant to US security as ever. But to stay relevant for the next 70 years, NATO, as it did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, must proactively meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges rather than simply react to them. A proactive NATO will always be driven by US leadership. Without it, NATO will never be the fullest version of itself and could, conceivably, unravel entirely. We should not delude ourselves into believing that this is not President Vladimir Putin's most cherished strategic goal.

As a Marine and former Supreme Allied Commander (2003-2007), I am of course concerned with the military dimension of NATO. In that sense, we have arrived at a "back to the future moment." US leadership and the European and global security architecture is again challenged by a Russia intent on changing the security environment to advance its power and place in the world. What is required again is a common US and Allied approach to strategically competing and defending ourselves with our allies against Putin's Russia intent on fracturing the Alliance and willing to threaten and damage the security of its neighbors. Make no mistake, Putin's ambitions would be emboldened by US and Allied weakness and division within the Alliance (and the EU) and the erosion of democratic values within some member states; we must remain vigilant on all fronts against Putin's aims, and proactively meet the challenge.

The Alliance has responded, and is responding, to Putin's challenge in effective ways. Decisions by the Alliance to forward station forces in the Baltics and Poland, to dramatically improve the readiness of its forces at tactical, operational, and strategic levels across all services, to step up efforts to counter hybrid threats and disinformation in peacetime, to ramp up training and exercising, and to call out Russia's INF violations, show a clear willingness of Allies to stand up with the US to Russian interference outside of its borders. Congress's decision to consistently and decisively fund the European Deterrence Initiative is critical – both in practical terms and as a clear signal of US leadership to Putin, and one that strengthened Allied resolve as well.

However, the Alliance cannot stand still or ignore some of the real challenges it faces with respect to deterring Russia. As General Scaparrotti testified last month, more needs to be done to ensure adequate deterrence for the Alliance. Many nations in northeastern Europe and along the Black Sea have responded to this reality with investments in defense budgets and capabilities and are pursuing innovative collaboration. Indeed, as Secretary General Stoltenberg recently reported, progress has been made by our Canadian and European Allies to meet their spending commitments. We have had four consecutive years of real increases in defense spending among Canada and European NATO, including \$41 billion to defense budgets. Allies have also made progress in meeting the pledge to spend 20% of defense budgets on major equipment; a majority of Allies are spending above the 20% mark now and twenty-four Allies are on track to meet or exceed that goal by 2024. We should recognize progress in these critical areas.

There are other ways in which European Allies are working innovatively to improve deterrence. The Three Seas Initiative is a geo-strategically critical effort by the nations situated between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas to accelerate the development of essential cross border transportation, energy and telecommunications infrastructure linking them and their region to wider Europe. The Three Seas nations have identified 48 transboundary projects core to regional and continental economic development. Collective prosperity, of course, is instrumental for assuring the transatlantic alliance's collective defense and sustaining the resilience of a Europe undivided, free, and secure. Strategically, full implementation will fortify the alliance's eastern periphery and blunt Putin's ability to wield energy as a weapon in the region. Operationally, modernized and integrated transportation corridors, energy linkages, and communications networks will directly benefit NATO's capabilities. The Three Seas Initiative enjoys the strong backing of the administration, and it merits Congress fullest endorsement and support. I would be happy to submit for the record a fuller description of the Initiative, its status, and requirements.

Yet, despite aggressive and innovative efforts by some countries in Europe, some nations, consumed by other priorities or feeling otherwise secure, have barely responded to Russian interventions and aggression. Unfortunately, the level of concern about the threat Russia poses to NATO is uneven across the Alliance. Part of this has to do with the fact that the defense of Europe has moved east to the Baltic States and Black Sea, where during the Cold War, defending Europe started further west. Complacency by nations who do not feel directly threatened has weakened our ability to deter further Russian action. In fact, some Allied leaders have appeared sympathetic to Moscow while others have simply been naïve about Russian intentions. This plays into Putin's strategy and must be reversed for the good of all of Europe. It is especially important in the face of Russian military modernization and activities outside their border that are destabilizing for the Euro-Atlantic area.

At the same time, the anti-access and area denial challenges posed by Russia in Europe's east – and by China elsewhere – require aggressive responses and combining new and old ways of thinking about deterrence. For instance, NATO should consider making an aggressive effort to preposition equipment forward, consider a permanent forward headquarters, and leave no doubt that we have an adequate number of rotational troops to counter the threat. Moreover, and let me blunt, withdrawing troops from contested areas, which parts of Europe are today, is a bad idea. Security vacuums will be filled – and not by actors who share the same perspectives or values we do. Where forward presence is concerned, virtual presence is actual absence.

And while I noted some progress on defense spending, I recognize the debate around burden-sharing is increasingly tense and politicized. Make no mistake, there is merit to the debate. When Allies make commitments – like the Defense Investment Pledge in Wales or in Prague in 2002 – with no visible actions that follow-through on their commitments, the credibility of the Alliance suffers, the solidarity of the Alliance is strained, and ability of the Alliance to deter is weakened. Equally, when targets that were set to improve readiness or increase capabilities are not implemented, there are legitimate questions about the political willingness of Europe to take our collective security seriously.

To that end, we should recognize the EU is an important security actor, even as our preference will always be to work through NATO in the first instance. Refusing to engage bilaterally with the EU, or prohibiting cooperation between NATO and the EU, is counterproductive and fails to recognize and empower genuine efforts to increase European capabilities.

The United States is right in asking that Europe do more. But that imperative is not credible without a genuine conviction that United States is invested in NATO for the long run and willing to fulfill its Article 5 obligations. Statements to the contrary are counterproductive to the leadership role the United States must play to move the Alliance forward. Such statements also damage the perception of NATO among the American public, something I know members of Congress must think about with respect to constituent opinions.

I hope that all of you believe as I do that NATO is an indispensable strategic asset to the United States, that we have an economic imperative to ensure the peaceful integrity of the Euro-Atlantic for fundamental economic reasons, and that we have a security imperative to meet threats forward and to protect the community of democratic nations in an increasingly unstable world drifting toward authoritarianism in some quarters. We recognize that having like-minded friends with common values, invested in the US-led global security architecture, makes us safer in general while also giving us more options when confronting a crisis. Institutions like NATO help normalize expectations around rule of law, collective security, and free and open economies in ways that promote enduring stability for the US – as the last 70 years have shown. NATO is a significant investment, but it is an investment in ourselves, and one that provides us with these practical advantages. We must all do our part to ensure the American people understand this – because the threats of the future will require NATO more than ever.

I'd like to address two ways in which NATO must act to be prepared for the future. First, as has been well-documented, activities to Europe's south in the form of war, civil unrest, migration, terrorism, and trafficking have significant implications for European security. The Alliance is making progress in addressing such issues, but in relative terms, NATO's southern strategy remains hollow and under-resourced. NATO must be active in addressing these threats, for instance, in terms of training and capacity building in Africa to shore up security and governance as a means of preventing crises that affect European security. The same might be said of NATO's role in the Middle East. Creating security

conditions in neighboring regions as a means to enable better governance and increased commerce is a component of NATO's southern strategy that must be further developed.

To that end, NATO's network of partnerships globally is a source of its vitality and something the Alliance must pursue with focus. Of course, NATO's door should remain open to any democracy willing to meet the requirements of membership and I am gratified by the agreement between Greece and North Macedonia that has the latter on the path to join the Alliance. NATO's foundational partnerships in Europe, as well as those in other regions of the globe, provide the Alliance with insights and options in an uncertain world. I find recent speculation about NATO partnerships in Latin America worth discussing and, in light of indicators signaling the centrality of the Indo-Pacific region to the global economy, NATO's partnerships in Asia are growing in importance. I believe that NATO could be of great assistance to our Arab friends as they consider ways to offset Iran's strategic ambitions in that region.

This brings me to the second action NATO must take to effectively navigate the coming decades. Simply put, our European allies must come to grips with the global ambition of China. While Europe is just awakening to the strategic implications of Chinese investments in everything from transportation infrastructure to digital technology, the approach to China across the region is uneven and muddled. Italy's recent decision to accept a significant Chinese investment in maritime infrastructure ignores the reality of Chinese ambitions. Skepticism across Europe about the dangers of Chinese technology for 5G networks should be a wake-up call for those of us concerned about transatlantic security and the interoperability of the Alliance. Ceding access to China to key Italian ports is a mistake of strategic proportions, one that Italy will regret.

Since divergent approaches to China across the Atlantic have the potential to unravel Alliance unity, NATO should start serious consultations about the short- and long-term security implications of Chinese investments and actions immediately. At a moment when the United States is demanding more resources from Allies, China is investing liberally across the continent. This is a dynamic that can exacerbate the existing divergence of views and shadow over the fact that China does not share the values that bind the community of free nations nor does it abide by global commercial norms and standards. Trying to appease our "competition" is a very flawed strategy.

What should NATO do? It should deepen its existing partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, including those with India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia and work an Asian presence mission into its repertoire of NATO exercises. While China does not present an immediate military threat to Europe, Beijing's challenges to the rules-based international order is a transatlantic concern. It stands among the more significant long-term challenges in a world that is increasingly globalized.

Let me finish by underscoring that for NATO to be as relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was to the 20<sup>th</sup>, US leadership remains the essential ingredient. If the US is not committed to NATO, if it does not invest in NATO, if it does not set the agenda for what NATO should do, NATO will gradually fade into irrelevance...full stop! Members of Congress have a heavy responsibility, to be sure, in ensuring that our commitments and investments are executed. We all have a critical role in explaining the value of NATO to the American public. If we do that effectively, NATO will remain active, adaptive, and indispensable to the advancement of American interests and security.

Thank you for inviting me to appear today to offer my thoughts on the future essentiality of America's commitment to NATO, and NATO's essentiality to our national security. I look forward to your questions.

James L. Jones  
General, US Marines (Ret)  
Executive Chairman Emeritus, The Atlantic Council

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