



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

MISSION REPORT

**WASHINGTON, D.C., AND
CHARLESTON, S.C.
UNITED STATES**

6-9 FEBRUARY 2018

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. US policymakers delivered a loud and clear message to a delegation from the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly: The United States is increasing its commitment to NATO, and it expects increased investments in parallel from its Allies. Officials told the delegation the Trump administration would make burden sharing among allies one of its principal goals when it comes to Brussels this July for the NATO Summit. The other main priorities, deterrence and defence as well as counterterrorism, go hand in hand with Allies' responsibility to meet their defence spending commitments.

2. US policymakers also attempted to lay to rest any lingering doubts in delegation members' minds about the United States' Article 5 commitment – NATO's collective security guarantee enshrined in the Washington Treaty. As Thomas Goffus, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for European and NATO Policy, confirmed: "The United States' Article 5 guarantee is iron clad." Goffus continued by stating the United States would focus on the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) during the upcoming summit in Brussels: "Deterrence is what we do together, rather than the US-focused European Reassurance Initiative, as the EDI was previously known."

3. The visit's main focus was on the transatlantic link under the Trump administration and the administration's priorities in the run up to NATO Summit of Heads of State and Government this July; the delegation also learned about Congressional views on NATO and the questions of Allied defence investment and commitment. As officials stressed, increased investments will mean a credible defence and deterrence posture, allowing Allies to channel resources to address new security challenges from counterterrorism to counter-hybrid tactics. The credibility of Allied commitment to a modern mobile and dynamic defence and security, it was repeated, is the only way forward for the alliance in the 21st century.

4. In addition, US high-level officials relayed the United States' position on counterterrorism and arms control. Interlocutors highlighted the United States' continued role in Afghanistan as a convergence of current US priorities: continued resolve in the face of a persistent terrorism threat; an increased focus on working together with its allies to defeat this threat; and, a strong desire to maintain the United States' global security role in an era wherein it feels increasingly challenged by near-peer competitors, namely Russia and China.

5. The Defence and Security Committee's delegation also visited Charleston, South Carolina, where parliamentarians were welcomed for briefings at Joint Base Charleston, Boeing, and The Military College of South Carolina (The Citadel). The delegation consisted of 29 members of parliament from 18 Allied nations.

II. US FOREIGN POLICY AND NATO

The New US National Security Strategy and the Role of Allies

6. As US interlocutors told the delegation, the Trump administration's December 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) defines the current international security environment as one of global competition at all levels. The causes of the shift in Washington's perspective on the international security environment, said Kathleen McInnis of the Congressional Research Service, are multi-fold: assumptions of Europe becoming more whole, united, and free are increasingly challenged by an increasingly emboldened Russia and the continued destabilization of the Middle East and North Africa region by conflict and state failure, which has given rise to powerful non-state armed groups and caused a mass exodus of refugees heading into Europe.

7. She continued by noting concerns about Chinese saber-rattling in the South China Sea as well as the escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula over North Korea's rapidly-advancing ballistic missile and nuclear programmes. As such, she concluded, the United States clearly recognises the global security environment is eroding and near-peer competition to US global power is just over the horizon.

8. Ms McInnis continued by saying the new NSS paints a picture of a quickly eroding rules-based international order giving way to increasing great power competition. The NSS makes it clear the administration views both China and Russia as seeking peer rival status vis-à-vis the United States. If it is consistent with the NSS, the new US defence budget, she concluded, will show the United States investing heavily in capabilities to maintain the US's overmatch vis-à-vis both China and Russia. Heavy investment in technology to launch the United States into a new realm of defence capabilities is often referred to as the third offset strategy.

9. As DASD Goffus noted, the strategy doctrine of the United States is straightforward: compete, deter, and win. Mr Goffus outlined three key lines of effort for the United States to retain its key role in international relations: build more lethal forces, strengthen alliances, and reform the DOD for greater effectiveness. DASD Goffus particularly emphasized the role of Allies for the United States' new strategy. The DASD's remarks about the anchoring role Allies play for the United States in its international role were clearly meant to offset the remarks made by candidate Trump about the value of US alliances worldwide, which he at times derided as being obsolete and plagued by burden sharing imbalances.

10. DASD Goffus sent a strong message of support for all US alliances and the myriad benefits they deliver to the United States at the military, political, and economic levels. As Mr Goffus noted, the NSS underscores Washington's desire to remain active in Europe as it states quite clearly: "A strong and free Europe is of vital importance to the United States." The NSS also says the United States 'expects' allies to fulfil their defence spending commitments but stops short of making US support conditional.

11. The most important factor for stronger alliances, Mr Goffus continued, is to increase interoperability, "As NATO adaptation continues, the United States will push for more effective allied interoperability, from training, planning, and communication to combat" Goffus told the delegation.

US NATO Policy

12. US policymakers also attempted to dispel any lingering doubts in delegation members' minds about the United States' Article 5 commitment during the Defence Committee's most recent visit. As Thomas Goffus confirmed: "The United States' Article 5 guarantee is iron clad." Goffus continued by stating the United States would focus on the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) during the upcoming summit in Brussels: "Deterrence is what we do together, rather than the US-focused European Reassurance Initiative, as the EDI was previously known." Still, Goffus stressed, the United States' European Allies in NATO need to refocus, reinvest, and demonstrate a solid recommitment to the Alliance.

13. The United States recently announced a planned allocation of \$6.5bn to the EDI in 2019, a \$1.7bn increase from last year, and \$3.1bn more than allocated in 2017. As the DSC General Report highlights more thoroughly, the ERI/EDI has funded a significant increase in US presence in Eastern Europe, which supports more exercising, infrastructure, equipment prepositioning, and partner capacity development efforts. In many ways, the proof of US commitment is in the \$10+bn already spent or planned to reinforce Allied defence and deterrence in Europe.

14. Briefers at the Pentagon sounded a positive note about the progress of the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) initiative in Poland and the Baltic States. As they noted, with over 12 nations, plus the host countries, contributing, the Alliance is sending a clear and effective deterrence message.

The EFP is bringing the Alliance closer as well, they also stressed, as it is helping with Alliance learning in the form of better interoperability. As such, Allies operating in the EFP are strengthening their capacity for communications and intelligence collection, which is helping develop one common picture across the EFP multinational battlegroups. The positive message this new initiative is sending is clearly not lost in Washington.

15. Finally, as the delegation learned from its interlocutors at Congressional Research Services, strong bi-partisan support for NATO continues and has clearly been growing over recent years – the large number of support mechanisms for NATO can be seen as testimony to this. As CRS Analyst Paul Belkin said, we are witnessing the highest level of congressional travel to Europe in recent memory, keeping the issue of European security challenges front and centre on the minds of many congressional members. Still, members of both sides of the US Congress are clearly focused on the question of Allied defence spending – not just how much is spent, but also how it is spent. The consensus is more spending will be an absolute gain for all members of the Alliance.

US Views on Burden Sharing in the Run-up to the 2018 Brussels Summit

16. Donald Trump's November 2016 election is dramatically accelerating the burden sharing debate. Rhetoric out of Washington is increasingly presenting US contributions to the Alliance as a *quid pro quo* transactional relationship. During his campaign, candidate Trump called NATO 'obsolete', asserted that European countries "owe massive amounts of money" to NATO and pointed out the unfairness of 'free-riding' towards US taxpayers, sharpening previous American leaders' criticism. During his reassurance of American commitment to NATO Allies, US Secretary of Defence James Mattis also warned the US might "moderate its commitment" if Allies do not shoulder more of the burden.

17. US policymakers also delivered a loud and clear message to a delegation from the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly: The United States is increasing its commitment to NATO, and it expects increased investments in parallel from its Allies. Officials told the delegation the Trump administration would make burden sharing among Allies one of its principal goals when it comes to Brussels this July for the NATO Summit. The other main priorities, deterrence and defence as well as counterterrorism, officials stressed, go hand in hand with Allies' responsibility to meet their defence spending commitments.

18. Michael Murphy, Director of the Office of Security and Political-Military Affairs at the Bureau of European Affairs, told the delegation, "the Wales Pledge is at the forefront of US officials' minds in the run-up to Brussels." The 2014 Wales Summit saw NATO member states' Heads of State and government pledge to invest at least 2% of their nation's GDP toward domestic defence institutions by 2024, 20% of which must be dedicated to research and development. Mr. Murphy insisted all Allies must be able to present credible plans to get there, to which he added only approximately 13 were currently on track to do so. "If these numbers are still present at the summit, this will be problematic – please carry this message back to your governments and constituencies," he added.

19. When mentioning the Wales Summit defence spending pledge, DASD Goffus told the delegation the United States is seeking to shift the focus of the discussion to Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, which notes Allies' responsibility to maintain and develop their ability for self-defence. The spirit of Article 3 for Secretary Mattis, he continued, says much about the push behind the US insistence on increased Allied defence spending. DASD Goffus told members of the Defence Committee that each Ally, if they are not already spending 2%, at least needs to have a credible plan to get there by 2024. "While we understand the dilemmas of governance shifts in parliamentary democracies, we still want to see an annual evaluation of how nations are progressing on capability targets."

20. DASD Goffus reminded the delegation: “We have already been at 2% back at the turn of the century – the threat environment is substantially more difficult today than it was back then. It makes sense, therefore, to get back to appropriate defence investment and capability development.”

21. Throughout the visit, a key message on the burden sharing question rang clear: the environment has clearly shifted, and the Alliance is adapting to respond, but the necessary investments to complete the new tasks, man the new divisions and centres, and to train and equip new mobile and effective deterrent forces is not following: the only way forward for the Alliance is to reinvest to fund the new and necessary adaptation.

22. Briefers at the Pentagon told the delegation the United States has three broad-based priorities for the July Summit in Brussels: burden sharing, an enhanced role in counterterrorism for the Alliance, and strengthened defence and deterrence posture, which can also be broken down into three subsequent parts: quick political decision making capability; adapting the NATO command structure capable of handling the reality of today’s threats; and, force readiness – modern forces capable of moving quickly and across borders and territory efficiently. On this last issue, briefers stressed, parliamentary assistance is essential: NATO member state parliaments can assist greatly with speeding up the necessary diplomatic clearances to expedite equipment and personnel transfers across Europe.

23. The diverse range of the July Summit’s issue items confirm this; from defence and deterrence in the East to new initiatives in the South and then all of the ways and means necessary to combat and mitigate the threat of hybrid threats, the Alliance needs new funding commitments across the board. New investment and political will, one briefer noted, is the only way to make the Alliance ‘fit for purpose’ in today’s international security environment.

III. COUNTERTERRORISM

24. Interlocutors from both the State and Defense Departments reminded the delegation they felt ISIS and AQ will continue to be the principal terrorist threat.

25. They noted there would be an expectation from Washington for Allies to work together to find the ways and means to align a strong NATO policy to combat globally-distributed groups like ISIS going forward. Dr Gregorian at the State Department’s Counterterrorism Bureau noted there were quantitative and qualitative differences between AQ and ISIS, but that both remained critical threats.

26. Experts told the delegation that the United States and its Allies have expended a great deal of effort at all levels to counter the problem of global radical Islamic-inspired jihadist groups. Unfortunately, the noted, ISIS’s decline in recruitment to the battle zone has led to an even trickier problem of dealing with the rise of ISIS-inspired lone wolf attacks across Allied territory – something ISIS is actively encouraging. As such, we are now witnessing various attacks throughout Europe, increasingly seeking soft targets – hotels, theatres, malls, airports, with varying levels of responsibility and direction from ISIS.

27. Dr Gregorian also reminded the delegation that ISIS should not be our only focus, noting that AQ has not gone away. He said there are still 1000s of AQ or AQ-affiliated fighters now operating in Syria, and they will seek ways to continue fighting abroad again.

28. “The ultimate defeat of these groups,” he continued, “will require solutions to the conflicts that continue to sow the grievances and perceived injustice that drives their causes.” Officials at State and Defense said they were keen to see the Alliance marshal a range of resources to counter these groups at all levels – meaning a whole-of-Alliance at the political, economic, and military levels.

29. Officials in Washington were quick to say they understood the Alliance already has a well-proven track record in the counterterrorism domain. As one official at the Pentagon said: “NATO has been since 2001 and continues to be so – NATO has a 38-point action plan to prove to President Trump they have been and will continue to respond to such threats – from projecting stability, CBRN, biometric information sharing, etc. So we understand the Alliance is thinking about it constructively; now it's time to put even more effort and action behind it together.”

IV. AFGHANISTAN

30. At the State Department, the delegation was briefed by Ambassador Wells, Senior Bureau Official for the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, on US-South Asia strategy. Ambassador Wells reminded the delegation Allies have a mutual interest in building a stable and prosperous Afghanistan that can never again serve as a wellspring for terrorism. She continued by saying a stable Afghanistan is the most effective means of guaranteeing regional stability; as such, she strongly endorsed support of NATO's train, advise, and assist mission *Resolute Support* in Afghanistan. She noted the mission's positive impact on the ground through building local capacity to protect citizens and territory. “This is a different war today than the one we entered in at the beginning of the century,” she told the delegation. “Today, the war is being fought by Afghans. We are providing the hands-on capabilities for the Afghans to take on the spectrum of combat missions.” About 6,700 Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) died fighting last year – this sacrifice has allowed for the country to continue to move forward.

31. Ambassador Wells told the delegation there is a clear attempt to reverse Taliban gains by ANDSF forces. The United States is also helping the Afghan government with its fight against ISIS. As a result, she continued, momentum is shifting back toward the favour of the ANDSF and coalition forces.

32. Ambassador Wells was also quick to remind the delegation of the significant accomplishments that have been made since the fall of the Taliban; she cited the great strides in youth access to education, the return of women to civil society, greater access to health care, increased life expectancy, greater freedom of information via news and TV, and the anchoring of participatory democracy. Ambassador Wells noted she was also encouraged by the country's ability to move forward with parliamentary elections. Addressing a delegation member's concern about persistent pervasive corruption in the country, Ambassador Wells said the United States is working in partnership with the government in Kabul on anti-corruption measures, particularly through biometric data control and anti-corruption justice centre.

33. Regarding the peace process, she continued: “The only group that has refused to engage in peace talks is the Taliban – all other groups have come forward. The slate of bombings is a message by the Taliban they do not have to come to the table still; which is all the more reason to sustain the pressure on them.” As DASD Goffus told the group at the Pentagon, “the revamped RSM is not complete, an approximately additional 4,000 billets need to be filled in the coming months. This gap in operational fill is a concern for [Defense] Secretary Mattis.”

34. Dr Seth Jones from The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) brought up the recent shift in U.S. policy toward the region and its role in the ongoing violence in Afghanistan. He singled out the new US policy toward Pakistan, stating that a difference between Trump and predecessors is that the current administration moved quickly from frustration to open criticism and action in the form of sanction of US military aid. He warned that relations could deteriorate even further, wherein the United States could, for example, suspend Pakistan's role as non-NATO ally to even designate Pakistan as a state supporter of terrorism.

35. Dr Jones noted a continued willingness on Capitol Hill to support the efforts in Afghanistan. He said there is a shift of attention and resources to empower US SOF in the Afghan theatre. Addressing the potential for peace negotiations, Dr Jones said there is insufficient foreign presence in Afghanistan to win the fight on the battlefield, which means there will have to be a political settlement. Dr Jones told the delegation to be less focused on the shifting numbers of who controls what percentage of the country at any time, he said talking about the number of districts under control is not very important. Instead, he said, attention should be paid to control of the population, which says still greatly favours the government in Kabul. Further, he said, poll after poll indicate the Taliban is not really gaining any ground in popular support either. Dr Jones concluded by telling the audience that the reality on the ground is still uninspiring – “The Taliban will not win in the near future, nor will NATO – it will a prolonged stalemate.”

36. Upon leaving Washington, the delegation made its way to Charleston, South Carolina for a visit to Joint Base Charleston, The Boeing Company and The Military College of South Carolina (The Citadel).
