



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

SUB-COMMITTEE ON ON TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS (PCTR)

MISSION REPORT

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This Mission Report is presented for information only and does not represent the official view of the Assembly. This report was prepared by Steffen Sachs, Director of the Political Committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations (PCTR) visited Boston and New York City from 22-26 October 2018 to hear the views of independent experts on a broad range of security issues. Among the topics featuring on the agenda of this visit were US foreign and security policy, US views on NATO and the state of the transatlantic relationship. The situation on the Korean Peninsula and in Iraq received considerable attention while senior UN officials briefed the delegation on UN-NATO relations. Visits to leading U.S. technology companies concluded the programme. The delegation was led by Vice-Chairperson Mike Gapes (United Kingdom) and comprised 19 members from ten NATO member states.

II. THE CHALLENGE OF POPULISM

2. Populism is resurging in NATO member states as well as globally. This phenomenon can be ascribed to three main trends, the delegation was informed: to modernisation - and its failure to deliver, to democratisation - and its promise to deliver, and to globalisation - which has a capacity to disrupt.

3. In the United States, the “election in 2016 produced a revolution”, as one speaker suggested. This has resulted in U.S. institutions “functioning badly” in his view, adding that “things will probably not get better soon”. However, on the positive side, he anticipated that “most of the damage can be repaired afterwards”. Another speaker commented that the society in the United States is extremely polarised, and the ‘political centre has been hollowed out’. The lack of clear, persuasive solutions to quell economic anxieties of the population has helped populist messages to spread. This phenomenon is not unique to the United States but also tangible in many countries of the Alliance.

4. Populism will not go away soon but will remain a problem for NATO member countries as traditional political parties and elites are struggling to adapt without compromising core governance principles. Even if NATO members states, and NATO as an organisation, are likely to face considerable challenges as a result of this phenomenon, the Alliance will be able to tackle with this problem successfully, independent experts suggested.

5. Some members of the delegation expressed concern about the damage that populist messaging in member countries can do to the common values that NATO stands for. This could also become a threat to the political cohesion of the Alliance, it was noted.

III. RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

6. Russia’s relations with NATO, which are at their lowest since the end of the Cold War, are unlikely to improve anytime soon.

7. NATO member states have reacted to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and to other violations of international law in a unified manner, standing up to Russian provocations. Sanctions invoked by NATO member countries and the European Union have been instrumental in meeting “the Putin challenge”. Moreover, with its Enhanced Forward Presence NATO Allies have shown their determination to defend the Baltic countries and Poland against Russian intimidation efforts and potential threats.

8. The economic and financial gap between Russia and the member states of the Alliance, particularly of the United States, is likely to increase. The Russian government will have

difficulties to maintain, let alone improve, living standards of ordinary Russians. Although the Russian population is increasingly dissatisfied this dissatisfaction has not produced large protests in Russia, in part because President Vladimir Putin is very effective at applying repression selectively. Moreover, unlike during the Soviet Union, Russians who are critical of their government are free to go abroad. This is in effect what many Russians are doing – and is detrimental for Russia as it is losing some of its most talented people.

9. The Kremlin appreciates a general trend towards a multi-polar world as it implies a decreasing global influence of “the West”. At the same time, the rebalancing of power that is taking place is not, or not necessarily, in Russia’s favour. The main beneficiaries of a global rebalancing of power are the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and India. When interests align Russia does cooperate with China but it remains to be seen how durable this cooperation is. While the cooperation between Russia and the PRC is likely to continue over the next years, it is historically more of an aberration.

10. Maintaining control over the countries to its South, particularly Ukraine and the Southern Caucasus Republics, is a priority for the Kremlin. However, it appears that the policies pursued by the Kremlin has reduced its leverage over Ukraine and other countries of the region.

IV. CHALLENGES TO THE ALLIANCE

11. Although Russia’s rhetoric and actions remain a considerable concern for NATO member states, interlocutors saw main challenges for the Alliance in three other areas: The situation in Afghanistan, low defence spending of US Allies, and public messaging about the value of the Alliance.

12. In Afghanistan, after 17 years it is time to think about a different approach that goes beyond the idea to win this war militarily. The need for a political settlement is evident.

13. Low defence spending of NATO members remains an important challenge for the Alliance, not only in terms of capability shortfalls but also in terms of public support for NATO. Although he has been more forceful in his statements on this issue President Donald Trump’s criticism of low defence spending of NATO Allies is not new. Almost every U.S. administration, including the U.S. Congress, has in the past criticised the Allies on this issue.

14. While their defence budget trendlines are positive, US Allies need to continue their efforts to meet the 2% pledge. Discussions at Harvard’s John F.Kennedy School also included a lively exchange about NATO’s 2% pledge. Some members of the delegation raised the issue of what is counted as defence investment and suggested that foreign aid is instrumental in securing the neighbourhood of NATO member countries. Some delegates also stressed the importance of looking at the actual number and not only at the 2%; in the case of Germany, spending 2% of GDP for defence would require an increase of the defence budget by some USD 70 billion.

15. The delegation heard different views on the approach of the administration of President Donald Trump to the Alliance. One speaker stressed that “no U.S. President before Donald Trump has ever been so disinterested in, as well as outright critical of, the Alliance”. On the other hand, recent public opinion polls in the United States show that public support for the Alliance among both Democratic and Republican Americans is at a historic high.

16. In contrast to a widely-publicized view the foreign policy of the Trump administration is not isolationist, according to another speaker. However, the “liberal hegemony” that was the guiding principle of US grand strategy following World War II seems to be “out of the window”.

For US Allies this security policy shift does not make any difference as being subject to “US hegemony” allows US Allies to limit their defence expenditures and can offer support to smaller countries against bigger ones. Therefore, the Trump administration is “continuing a grand strategy that is based on of ‘hegemony’, even it is not a pretty nice one”, the speaker suggested. Regardless of President Trump’s sometimes provocative rhetoric the United States remains a strong security provider. If anything, the Trump administration doubled down on important security policy issues. Among others, under President Donald Trump the United States has significantly increased the defence budget and strengthened its military contribution to the defence of Europe. Moreover, the Trump administration continues US alliances as well as the military exercises with the Allies.

17. The picture is slightly different in the economic realm where President Trump appears to have a “jaundiced view” of US trade relations with its Allies as he appears to believe that United States should be “winning” its trade relationships, the delegation heard. President Donald Trump has been particularly critical of the PRC. However, his approach appears to be “unstrategic”, as he has also burdened US trade relations with partners, even though their cooperation and support is relevant when the US is dealing with the PRC, a speaker commented.

V. THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA (DPRK – NORTH KOREA):

18. US policy towards the DPRK has been “an unrelenting failure for more than 50 years”, according to one speaker. This is partly due to ‘a perennial problem of the foreign policy of the United States to underestimate and patronise adversaries’.

19. While the foreign policy of the regime in Pyongyang is unconventional it is also predictable. The DPRK is not acting to external pressures and the change in public statements towards a more conciliatory tone was always preordained by Kim Jong-un. The DPRK regime has a very keen sense of timing, as reflected in the first visit of Kim Jong-un to the PRC: Chairman Kim Jong-un had shunned a visit to Beijing for several years, but he went to Beijing before his meeting with the President of the Republic of Korea (ROK – South Korea) and President Donald Trump. While China plays an important role in dealing with the DPRK, a speaker suggested that Beijing is also ‘hostage to Pyongyang’s carrot and stick policy’.

20. In contrast to widely held belief US and international sanctions against DPRK have been neither effective nor tough, a speaker stressed. US sanctions against other countries, e.g., Russia, Iran and Syria are tougher and more numerous in comparison than are those in place against the DPRK. Moreover, the U.S. penalised Western banks doing business with Iran or Cuba, but it has not pursued a similar approach towards Chinese banks doing business with the DPRK, the speaker noted.

21. Advancing its nuclear programme is the key interest of the DPRK regime, the delegation heard. Efforts by the ROK government to reach a diplomatic agreement with the DPRK regime, and the pledges it makes, are equal to buying “fake peace”, a speaker cautioned. In this context he suggested that the implementation of sanctions against the DPRK by the ROK is weak. He added that the “attraction of the ROK”, as reflected among others by its high living standard, is an “existential threat” to the DPRK leadership. The speaker said that the domination of the ROK is the non-negotiable goal of Kim Jong-un. In this context he reminded the delegates that Chairman Kim Jong-un is only in his mid-30s.

VI. THE FIGHT AGAINST DAESH AND THE SITUATION IN IRAQ

22. The delegation also received several briefings on the “war on terror” and the situation in Iraq. Independent experts generally agreed that NATO Allies and partners have been partially successful in the fight against terror organisations. For example, while al-Qaeda has been defeated the organisation has also metastasised into more terror groups in different states, including in Africa. Daesh has been significantly reduced on the battlefield, but it has not entirely been defeated and there is still some support for the terror group in Iraq, the delegation was informed. The point that the “war on terror is a war of ideas” was repeatedly made, with one expert stressed the need to focus more on dialogue with communities from which terror groups are recruiting. However, it was also pointed out that “winning the war on the ground helps winning the ideological war”.

23. The continuing political fragmentation of Iraq remains a major challenge. The Sunni minority has still very little political influence and feels excluded from political life. As a result, it appears likely that this fragmentation will hamper the necessary strengthening of state institutions. One expert suggested that Iraq will become “a big Lebanon” where militias could become as influential as Hezbollah is in Lebanon.

24. Several speakers reminded the delegation that the influence of the U.S., and of NATO member countries in Iraq is limited. In this context they pointed out that Iran, which shares a 900-mile-long border with Iraq, has considerable influence in its neighbour and that the political leadership in Tehran “knows how to push and when to push back”. However, while Iranian influence in Iraq might be “more dominant than that of the U.S.” the Iraqis resent being under the tutelage of any other nation and want to protect their independence.

VII. NATO-UN RELATIONS

25. Briefings on NATO-UN relations, particularly the exchanges with senior UN officials were a highlight of the visit.

26. While NATO-UN relations are good on the working level, there is considerable untapped potential for a closer cooperation between the two organisations, including also on the political level.

27. Senior UN officials noted the good working relationship that NATO and the UN have developed since the signing of the UN-NATO declaration on cooperation in 2008. The UN representatives expressed appreciation for NATO’s support to UN peace keeping operations (PKOs) and noted that both organisations share similar security concerns in a number of regions, including the Middle East and Northern Africa and the Western Balkans.

28. NATO-UN cooperation on the ground is generally working quite well and there are areas where NATO could provide additional value added to the UN, and UN PKOs in particular, according to the UN officials. The list includes, among others, information sharing, cyber security, and best practices. Information sharing would help improve situational awareness for UN peace keepers while generally making preventive diplomacy more effective, the delegation learned. Moreover, as cyber security is becoming increasingly important for international security, the UN could also benefit from NATO’s assistance in this area, the UN representatives explained.

29. At the same time, political constraints continue to hamper the deepening of the relationship, the delegates learned during the visit. Many UN member states, including Russia and China, but also non-aligned countries, hold a sceptical, if not outright suspicious, view of the Alliance. This is unfortunate as NATO member states have the abilities, as well as the political will, to provide additional assistance to the UN. A possible way for the Allies to overcome this political gridlock could be to stress more actively the important assistance NATO provides to many partner countries, including some of those expressing reservations in the UN context.

30. Another challenge to international security is a tendency among UN member nations for a “multilateralism a la carte”, one UN representative noted. The speaker warned that the “international rules-based system as we know it is under threat”.

31. Germany, which is second largest donor to the UN system according to 2016 figures, will join the UN Security Council again in 2019 as a non-permanent member nation. During its two-year term as UN Security Council member state, Germany wants to focus on four topics in particular: women’s issues, security and climate change, human rights, and conflict prevention.

32. Briefings at Akamai Technologies, a leading content delivery network (CDN) services provider for media and software delivery and Endeavor Robotics, a ground robot company and supplier of unmanned ground vehicles UGVs, offered the Sub-Committee the opportunity to learn about the impact of rapidly changing technology for international security.

33. The latest law enforcement and counter terrorism technologies were discussed during a visit to the Lower Manhattan Security Initiative (LMSI) while briefings at the Emergency Operations Center of the New York Police Department offered valuable insights into the responsibilities and procedures of New York City's emergency management plans.

OVERVIEW OF INTERLOCUTORS

Experts at the Center for Strategic Studies/International Security Studies Program, Tufts University

- Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Shelby Cullom Davis Professor of International Security Studies, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
- Dr Monica Duffy Toft, Professor of International Politics and founding Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
- Dr Christopher Miller, Assistant Professor of International History, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
- Dr Sung-yoon Lee, Kim Koo-Korea Foundation Professor of Korean Studies and Assistant Professor, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

Experts of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT):

- Barry Posen, Ford International Professor of Political Science and Director of the MIT Security Studies Program
- Owen Cote, Principal Research Scientist and Associate Director
- Roger Petersen, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science
- Richard Nielsen, Associate Professor of Political Science

Harvard Kennedy School of Government:

- Ambassador Nicholas Burns, Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard Kennedy School

Council of Foreign Relations

- Dr Richard K. Betts, Adjunct Senior Fellow for National Security Studies

Representation of Germany to the United Nations

- Ambassador Dr Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

NATO Liaison Office to the United Nations

- Michal Miarka, NATO Liaison Officer to the UN
- Martin Stenvert, NATO Liaison Officer to the UN

United Nations Headquarters

- Rosemary A. DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs
- Lieutenant General Carlos Humberto Loitey, Military Adviser and Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations

Lower Manhattan Security Initiative, New York Police Department (NYPD)

- Robert Sirignano, Counterterrorism Bureau

**Watch Command/Emergency Operations Center, Office of Emergency Management,
New York City Office of Federal Affairs**

- Joseph Esposito, Commissioner of the New York City Emergency Management Department

Akamai Headquarters

- Liz Borowsky, Vice-President, Platform Engineering
- Brian Sniffen, Director, Security Research and Architecture/Chief Security Architect/Fellow

Endeavor Robotics

- Sean Bielat, CEO
- Rob Birmingham, Director for Integrated Logistics and Product Support