



From Wales to Warsaw: A New Normal for NATO?

Aylin Matlé | Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja

Key Points

- The crises on NATO's Eastern and Southern flank that have emerged in 2014 persist and have permanently changed the security environment in Europe. After the immediate measures included in the Readiness Action Plan agreed to at last year's Summit in Wales, the political guidance marks the first step of NATO's long-term adaptation to this "new normal".
- While the Alliance showed a high degree of unity in its short-term response to the trouble spots in its neighborhood, the preparation of NATO's long-term adaptation has instead seen an increasing division into an Eastern and a Southern camp. While the "Easterners" are calling for a focus on Russia, the "Southerners" do not see Russia as their greatest challenge and prioritize dealing with the instability on the Southern flank.
- The preparation of the political guidance has thus reopened the old debate between territorial defense ("Easterners") and crisis management ("Southerners") and considerably strained the cohesion of the Alliance. Reconciling both camps will remain the Alliance's core challenge if it wants to chart a clear path towards this "new normal" at its Warsaw Summit next July.
- The Alliance will also have to come to terms with the implications of changed realities for issues such as its nuclear component and the utility of its partnerships.
- Finally, while tensions are high at the moment, it should not be forgotten that NATO has found itself in this "new normal" for merely a year. An Alliance of 28 member states will necessarily experience some growing pains in building a consensus on how to deal with a fundamental change in its security environment.

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A division between an "Eastern" and a "Southern" camp is emerging in the Alliance

1. The political guidance and NATO's strategic future

At its Summit in Wales in September 2014, in response to Russia's intervention in Ukraine and its increasingly antagonistic stance towards the Alliance, NATO adopted a series of reassurance measures. The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) includes measures such as an increased military presence in NATO's Central and Eastern European Allies, more exercises in the region, better intelligence collection, and most importantly the creation of the so-called "spearhead", NATO's brigade-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).¹ All of these measures were adopted with a remarkable degree of unity and marked a considerable success for the Alliance.

At the same time, the RAP was a short-term reaction to a concrete and immediate threat. While the Allies had agreed to reassure their Eastern member states and to strengthen the core task of collective defense, which had not been regarded as a priority during the past two decades of out-of-area operations, the Ukraine crisis has not changed long-standing divisions about the defense posture of the Alliance. Allies continue to disagree about the right balance between collective defense and crisis management, between a global and a regional outlook, and between a regional focus on Eastern or Southern Europe.

In Wales, the Allies also decided that NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept remained valid in almost all its aspects and should not be revised. Experts had thus pointed early at the importance of the 2015 political guidance as a possible landmark document for NATO's medium- to long-term adaptation to changed realities: As opposed to the short-term RAP, which concentrates mainly on a few elite forces, the guidance serves as the first stage of the five-year NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP) cycle. In the absence of a new Strategic Concept, the balance and focus of NATO's overall forces in its "new normal" would be largely determined by what Allies agreed to in the guidance.

The 2015 political guidance was adopted at the end of June at the meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Brussels. Consisting of 44 pages, the document is considerably longer than its predecessors. The process leading to the political guidance, as well as the document itself, were and are characterized by tensions which reflect NATO's current security environment. The lines of division among different groups of member states run between those wanting to prioritize the challenges on the Eastern flank and those regarding the Islamic State (IS) and instability along NATO's Southern periphery as the most severe threat that the Alliance currently faces. While both "Easterners" and "Southerners" are looking at a regional challenge, the potential responses to these perils pertain to the old division between collective defense and crisis management. Particularly the "Eastern" camp attempted to use the NDPP primarily to bolster the RAP and to focus the Alliance's attention solely on collective defense in the East. Accordingly, the tensions expressed in the NDPP run along the lines of forces for territorial defense required in the East and flexible forces that can also be used for expeditionary missions in the South, with the latter advocated by those nations that don't regard Russia as the greatest challenge to the Alliance. While Allies bridged this divide on the VJTF by specifically denominating it for both sorts of missions, most of them think that collective defense and crisis management require different sets of overall forces. Due to this lack of consensus, the defense planning process – the actual purpose of the document – did not produce as much clarity about the required capabilities as was hoped for, providing little guidance to defense planners. Instead, the process ended in a "zero-sum game" between both camps, in which concessions to one side had to be matched by offers to the other.

The United States provided little leadership and was unable to reign in the tensions between the two camps

At the same time, the elaboration of the guidance also exposed changed political realities in the Alliance. Traditionally, NATO's larger member states would hammer out a consensus among themselves and then rally their smaller allies around it. This time however, even the big Allies struggled to prevent the Alliance from being taken hostage by some member states, especially by Poland and the Baltic States. Particularly worrisome in this regard was an apparent lack of US leadership. While in the past Washington served to discipline disputes between its European partners and wielded considerable influence in particular over the Eastern Allies, this time the Eastern Europeans were much less willing to defer to the will of traditionally more influential member states. While the lack of US leadership can be ascribed partly to internal divisions of the Administration, it remains to be seen if this political emancipation of Central and Eastern Europe will solidify. Should the US remain unwilling and unable to lead, and the "Easterners" remain unwilling to follow the little leadership provided, this would mean a fundamental change in the power structure of the alliance – and make it even more difficult to find common ground on the outlook of NATO's strategic future.

Germany finds itself in an odd position in this dispute. Like many larger Allies it is neither particularly leaning towards the Eastern nor the Southern camp. While Berlin associates itself traditionally more closely with the collective defense than with the crisis management camp, it is also traditionally associated with the pro-Russian rather than with the anti-Russian camp, which is now presenting the strongest case for collective defense. Due to its balancing role, and not least due to its current economic strength, Germany therefore has a key role to play in furthering a new consensus in the Alliance. In the East, it has already taken up responsibility: Germany has assumed a prominent role in the RAP, e.g. by providing the land component for the initial VJTF and by upgrading the Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters in Szczecin. By contrast, German activities in the South have been scarce and mostly indirect. More German engagement with the Southern Allies could thus help to bridge the divides within the Alliance and help to substitute the American lack of leadership.

2. Deterrence/Reassurance: The appropriate mix of measures?

Though the establishment of the VJTF and other measures of reassurance are appreciated by the Central and Eastern European Allies, it is uncertain whether this will suffice to deter threats to NATO territory. Clearly, the VJTF will not suffice to defend the most exposed Allies such as the Baltics in case of a major armed attack. Follow-up forces would be needed shortly after the initial deployment of the VJTF, but such forces are not at the Alliance's disposal for the time being. Especially "frontline" Allies are thus arguing that only the permanent stationing of personnel and equipment in these states would prevent Russia from encroaching on their territorial sovereignty. A majority of the Allies, however, believe that a rotational presence will suffice to deter Russia and argue that a permanent stationing of forces on the soil of any former member of the Warsaw Pact would do more harm than good. While geographically "Eastern", countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia lean towards this more moderate stance as well.

Permanent stationing remains top on the wish list of the Eastern Allies, but continues to be opposed by the majority of the Alliance

The logic behind this argument is at least three-fold. First of all, some Allies do not regard Moscow as a serious threat to NATO – at least for now. In this line of thinking, Russia draws a clear line between NATO members and non-members. Accordingly, annexing Crimea and spurring the conflict in the East of Ukraine does not constitute a direct peril to the security of the Alliance, suggesting Moscow would not dare to attack a NATO member-state.

Secondly, and closely linked to the first line of reasoning, some Allies (and NATO HQ) favor honoring the commitments of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, in which NATO assured Moscow not to permanently deploy substantial NATO forces on the territory of NATO's new members. These Allies fear that a permanent stationing of NATO troops would be seen as a provocation of Russia and foreclose a rapprochement with Moscow in the years to come. NATO needs a cooperative relationship with Russia, some Allies argue, to stabilize the Southern flank, referring to the deal with Iran as a case in point.

Thirdly, keeping forces on high alert and permanently deploying them on the new member state's territory is very costly. Given that defense expenditures have been under pressure for at least the past decade, permanent stationing would constitute a further burden on Allied defense budgets.

The dispute is not likely to be settled anytime soon – on the contrary: It seems likely that it will drag on to NATO's Warsaw Summit. Drafting long-term plans on how to deter Russia will thus be complicated by internal divisions about whether or not Moscow in fact constitutes a threat. Russia's alleged intentions to keep its activities just below the threshold of an overt act of warfare are further complicating the Allies' stance toward Moscow. It is far from certain whether and how the Alliance would react to an act of aggression that does not clearly constitute an overt attack. At the same time, disputes about if and – most importantly – how NATO should respond to challenges in the South will make it difficult to achieve a consensus on the Alliance's future priorities. With threat perceptions not likely to be converging in the near future, a first step towards preserving NATO's cohesion would be to accept the threat perceptions held by other member states – rather than constantly trying to dismiss them. Acknowledging the changed reality of agreeing to disagree on the most urgent threat challenging the Alliance could be a starting point to re-align NATO's capabilities, putting the onus on the ability of Allies to find a compromise by amalgamating different positions.

A lack of consensus on whether Moscow actually constitutes a real threat to the Alliance is complicating the development of a long-term deterrence vis-à-vis Russia

3. Capabilities: What is needed to face future challenges?

Opportunities for such a re-alignment of capabilities exist even where threat perceptions diverge. The financial outlook of the Alliance has significantly improved in the last year: Since the annexation of Crimea, defense budgets in Europe have stopped decreasing and have even slightly increased in some capitals. But this positive trend could remain meaningless if discord about the primary threat to the Alliance results in these additional funds going towards national projects instead of multinational cooperation. While many capabilities are indeed specific to either collective defense or crisis management, some – such as intelligence, cybersecurity, surveillance, special operation forces, logistics, and UAVs — are required for both types of operations and yet often also areas of critical shortfall. Investing in these capabilities could be a way forward to prepare for both territorial defense and crisis management. Another critical requirement for both tasks is the ability to maintain key lines of communication and points of access in the Euro-Atlantic area. While anti-access and area denial challenges are mostly associated with the Pacific, they also pose a significant danger to NATO's freedom of action in its regional theater. Particularly questions of survivability have received scant attention in recent years and need to be reemphasized. While it may be politically sensitive to address specific regional challenges such as Russian Air-Defense or Ballistic Missile capabilities, simply ignoring them would be irresponsible and a fatal blow to a credible deterrence.

While different sets of forces are needed for collective defense and crisis management, NATO can concentrate on those capabilities required for both

To deal with those areas where the Alliance has recognized critical shortfalls, the Alliance also has to do a better job at leveraging new and emerging technologies. In its investments, NATO should concentrate its efforts not on technological innovation but on military operationalization. NATO should thus establish a *Future Defense Initiative*, aiming at those technologies that may become operational game-changers in the next five to ten years – especially in the areas where it faces critical shortfalls. At the moment, there exists a void in this timespan, as the defense planning process plans for five years and ACT long-term technological assessments center on 15 to 20 years outwards. As part of the initiative, the North Atlantic Council should be briefed bi-annually on technological risks and opportunities in this timeframe. By establishing a mechanism akin to the US Defense Science Review Board, NATO could prepare itself better for upcoming technological developments.

Despite the hard power that is needed to fend off the challenges NATO is facing in the East and South, the Alliance will also have to give careful consideration to its “soft power” and its ability to thwart the propaganda used by its adversaries. Russia’s efforts to penetrate Western societies via direct financing of pro-Kremlin organizations and tools such as the media network Russia Today have met with at least some success in several NATO countries. At the same time, IS continues to recruit disaffected youths in Europe. Developing effective counter-measures will require that leaderships put forward a clear-cut rhetoric naming the aggressors on its Eastern and Southern flanks. Spreading counter-propaganda, however, is not the way forward. Instead, European media networks should offer their services in Russian to help debunking the Kremlin’s disinformation campaigns. Similar steps should be considered with regard to the Islamic State by unequivocally informing Western societies about the horrors executed by the Islamist fanatics. Including Imams or other religious authorities on a local level in this effort could also be a way to reach out to disenfranchised young people before they fall prey to the Islamic State’s propaganda.

4. NATO: Still a nuclear Alliance?

Part of NATO’s new normal is also a return of the nuclear question. After the end of the Cold War, the salience of nuclear weapons had been markedly reduced. In some countries, e.g. Germany, they were discussed, if at all, in the context of the political sensitivity of NATO’s nuclear sharing or in the context of deep cuts in the nuclear stockpiles. This development was accelerated by President Obama’s commitment to a nuclear-free world, which provided a welcome justification for critiques of NATO’s nuclear component. As a result, the Alliance’s latest nuclear policy document, the Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR), was widely perceived as a consensus-building exercise rather than as a proper deterrence review. Instead of assessing challenges and opportunities in NATO’s deterrent posture, the document mainly tried to patch up French and German divisions by reaffirming NATO as a nuclear Alliance while at the same time emphasizing arms control and non-proliferation.

While nuclear proliferation remains a concern for NATO, its primary challenge in the nuclear domain today is Russia. Developing a deterrence posture that is firm but does not further deteriorate NATO-Russia relations will be challenging, yet it is unavoidable if unity on the issue is to be preserved. Russian nuclear saber-rattling is mainly a result of Russian nuclear and conventional weakness and attempts to scare the US and NATO back to the negotiation table on the basis of an accepted status quo. Overreaction would thus play into Russian hands. Allegations about a

Developing a deterrence posture that is firm but does not further deteriorate NATO-Russia relations will be one of the biggest challenges for the Alliance

potential breach of the INF-Treaty have to be taken very seriously, but at the moment there has been no fundamental change in Russian nuclear policy, posture and deployment, which demands an immediate reaction. However, NATO would do well to discuss early on the consequences of such deployments to avoid surprises.

While the DDPR remains an insufficient document, it seems unlikely that NATO Allies will want to initiate a major nuclear debate by the time of the Warsaw Summit – both because the Eastern Allies place higher priority on conventional deterrence and because the White House will avoid having Obama’s farewell Summit overburdened with nuclear issues. Primarily, NATO thus has to start to think about nuclear weapons in a more systematic manner. Since the 1980s, NATO has been treating nuclear weapons as a completely separate category, and there is little integration of conventional and nuclear war planning. This is problematic as other countries, including Russia, have a much more integrated understanding of nuclear weapons. More frequent exercises in which Allies can go through their possible decision-making in times of crisis are thus direly needed. Other actions, such as raising overall readiness or discussions about country-specific targeting, would appear useful, but may have too many repercussions in some member states. Finally, a simple but firm declaratory policy leaving no room for doubt that NATO will defend its members by all possible means would certainly strengthen NATO’s deterrence.

5. Partnerships: A focus on interoperability and security assistance

2014 marked a decisive year for the future of NATO’s partnerships by bringing about two fundamental changes in NATO’s business: First of all, in 2014 ISAF came to an end. While the follow-on mission, Resolute Support, is still ongoing, it is clear that one of the most important pillars of NATO’s partnerships is gone. More importantly, however, the reemergence of the Russian threat in the East and the instability in the South mean a fundamental change from global back to regional threats. If NATO rebalances its emphasis between the first two core tasks outlined in its Strategic Concept, this cannot remain without consequences for cooperative security, the third core task of the Alliance. The changed security environment will require NATO to also focus its partnerships on reacting to regional threats. In the North, this will be done mainly by further improving relationships with Sweden and Finland and in ensuring a maximum of interoperability. Elsewhere, this will largely come down to Building Partner Capacity and offering assistance in Security Sector Reform. The Alliance has reframed these activities at the Wales Summit as the *Defense and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative*. But NATO has to do a better job in finding its niche in the large community of organizations involved in this business, and in better defining Alliance vis-à-vis bilateral member states activities. As NATO’s regional partnership forums such as the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative continue to underperform, cooperation with its members will have to be conducted mainly bilaterally with those countries most interested in a real partnership - building on the Berlin framework. Particularly in the Middle East – where NATO will hardly be engaged in any direct crisis management – NATO should at least try to strengthen its relationships with regional organizations – that is where NATO as an organization can add the most value. At some point this could also come down to lending direct operational support to such organizations – which so far would seem the most feasible route of engagement in the South.

NATO will have to come up with mechanisms how to work around the underperforming partnership forums such as the Mediterranean Dialogue.

At the same time, NATO would be foolish to abandon the partnerships around the globe it has built during its age of operations – if only because it can never exclude that it will require these countries again at some point in the future. Apart from keeping the structures the Alliance has developed – such as the Political-Military Framework – and taking the interoperability initiatives seriously, NATO should also continue to engage in regular political consultations with these countries.

6. Recommendations

Despite the outlined suggestions throughout this paper, a number of specific policy recommendations could be discerned, delineating tasks both NATO in general and Germany in particular should be undertaking in order to address the Alliance's future challenges:

- While this paper centered on the Political Guidance and therefore on the period after the RAP, this does not mean that work on the RAP is already completed. Germany has a big role to play in finalizing it. NATO but even more so Germany still has to spell out the details of the Headquarters in Szczecin, which is supposed to serve as a coordination hub for the VJTF. A link between NATO's force integration units and Szczecin has yet to be established beyond the existing agreement on paper. Tying in with this necessary step to implement and further strengthen the VJTF, the host nation support capabilities on the territory of exposed Allies have to be improved. This could again be a task for Germany since Berlin has consented to contribute largely to the establishment and maintenance of the so-called "spearhead force". All these measures would help bolster one core task all Allies have agreed to: collective defense.
- Regarding capabilities, Germany has a central role in promoting multinational integration. It has to act more decisively in implementing its own idea of the Framework Nation Concept (FNC) – a cooperation body to foster multinational projects between NATO partners. Despite having identified 16 clusters that are fit for cooperation and 16 nations wanting to participate, it still remains unclear whether the FNC is supposed to be a multinational unit led by Germany in every area or if the concept will serve as a platform for cooperation being commanded by different nations in different fields. Answering this question would help putting principles into practice. Ramping up efforts regarding the FNC could contribute to both collective defense and crisis management since the concept is first of all designed to facilitate further defense integration. Since no nation – apart from the US – will be able to carry out most missions on its own over an extended period of time, it will be of utmost importance for NATO members to intensify and coordinate defense planning and measures.
- While it has contributed its fair share to reassurance in the East, Germany must also do more to alleviate the concerns of the "Southern" camp in NATO. A premier opportunity here would be a stronger engagement in the Alliance's Defense and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative. While Germany does provide some security sector capacity building, primarily through the export of military equipment, its capabilities in this regard need to become both more robust and more coherent. Particularly the first area of the initiative, support in defense reform and institution building, deserves more attention from Berlin. Germany should make sure that NATO's activities in this regard are in line with the Enable and Enhance Initiative (E2I) of the European Union. Most importantly, if a security assistance mission in Libya is ever to be established under an EU or NATO format, Berlin should not stand by passively – no matter the German history on the subject.

- It is expected that Germany might attempt to launch a renewed security dialogue with Russia once it assumes the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2016. Berlin should be careful not to tie such attempts to a limitation of NATO exercises in general and in states neighboring Russia in particular. Although Moscow will have to be engaged again at some point in the future, this must not come at the expense of the Alliance's unity. Thus, the practice of exercising should be continued regardless of efforts to pursue a rapprochement with Russia.

- Finally, moving from Germany to the Alliance, it remains to be seen whether adapting to NATO's "new normal" will require a more fundamental rethink of policy. Though it is highly unlikely that NATO's member states will commission a new Strategic Concept anytime soon, the Alliance is in dire need of finding a compromise in how they view the changed geopolitical realities NATO should be responding to. Having to deal with two hot spots at the same time, NATO is suffering from a lack of consensus on its concrete strategy in dealing with these challenges. In this regard, Allies should not completely ban considerations about a new Strategic Concept. Acknowledging Russia's aggressive and uncooperative behavior in an adjusted Strategic Concept would pave the way for a temporary suspension of the NATO-Russia Founding Act – and thus provide the basis for a permanent stationing of troops on the soil of former Warsaw Pact states. The suspension should be explicitly tied to a change in Russian behavior with the possibility of a re-appreciation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act if the Kremlin returns to adhering to the principles of the document again.

1] *For an assessment of the outcomes of the Wales summit and of NATO's Readiness Action Plan, see Matlé, Aylin and Scheffler, Alessandro, "After the Wales Summit: An Assessment of NATO's Strategic Agenda", in: Facts & Findings, No. 162, November 2014, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_39528-544-2-30.pdf?141112155636.*

The authors

Aylin Matlé is an Academic Assistant at the Chair of International Relations and European Politics at Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg. She holds an M.A. in War Studies from King's College London and is a member of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Young Foreign Policy Experts Working Group.

Alessandro Scheffler Corvaja is a Research Associate and Academic Coordinator at the University of the German Armed Forces in Munich and the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. He holds a Master of Letters in International Security Studies from the University of St Andrews and is a member of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Young Foreign Policy Experts Working Group.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

Contact:

Dr. Patrick Keller

Coordinator Foreign and Security Policy

Department European and International Cooperation

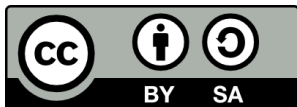
Phone: +49(0)30/26996-3510

E-Mail: patrick.keller@kas.de

Postal address: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, D-10907 Berlin

Contact concerning publications:

publikationen@kas.de



www.kas.de

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Cover picture:

Secretary General
Jens Stoltenberg (middle)
in company of high ranking
military and Ministers of
Defence watching the display
during the Distinguished
Visitors day on 18 June 2015
in Zagan, Poland during
exercise Noble Jump;
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