
Gen. Petr Pavel:

THE CHALLENGES FACING NATO TODAY

During the March 2017 NATO Transformation Seminar (NTS) in Budapest, the officers of Allied Command Transformation, in concert with the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee, discussed the key challenges facing NATO in the 21st century. Simultaneously, these Alliance scholars, politicians, military leaders and practitioners also agreed on some potential solutions to these complex challenges, both in the short and long-term. Just as the U.S. President Harry Truman voiced during the founding of the Alliance in 1949, NATO today remains the underpinning of our common security as well as our common devotion to human dignity and freedom. Furthermore, as the U.S. President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg shared in April during their meeting in Washington, “every generation has strived to adapt the NATO Alliance to meet the challenges of their times”. At the NTS in Budapest, today’s Alliance members did just that.

In order to frame their debate, NATO’s senior leaders first were required to define their strategic environment. Recently, the catch-phrase “arc of instability” has become a popular descriptor for the security situation currently confronting Europe. This metaphor captures the transition from the period of relative stability following the Balkan Conflicts of the 1990s until those days just prior to the Arab Spring. Used in this context, instability is a very broad term, which encompasses the span of security challenges from the East, where our Alliance is facing Russia as a single opponent or competitor, to the South, where a plethora of challenges exists.

MODERN INSTABILITY

At the NTS, our leaders confirmed the “arc of instability” as a descriptor, providing some additional clarity. Today we find that strategically the situation in the East has not significantly changed since the annexation of Crimea in 2014; however, the circumstances on the ground remain far from stable. We could characterize this as *static instability*. In contrast, our South (the region stretching from Mauritania to Afghanistan) suffers from various degrees of *dynamic instability*.

This dynamically unstable region includes a multitude of “wicked” problems/challenges. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIL/Daesh) continues to occupy vast swaths of territories and find ideological support throughout the region. Iran’s sphere of influence continues to grow in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. The Assad regime, on the verge of collapse in 2015, has been resurrected. Our ally, Turkey, seated well within this zone, attempts to collaborate and coordinate with her southern neighbours and the entirety of the Arabic world. Russia has again become an important player in the region. The Israel-Palestine issue remains a hot spot, yet somewhat diminished in relation to the mounting Sunni-Shia conflict. In fact, the Sunni-Shia divide underlies nearly all of the conflagrations in the region.

This potent mix of state and non-state actors, interwoven with migration, organized crime, autonomy issues, traditional rivalries and the combination of explosive demography, and insufficient economic growth, have created a series of dynamic security challenges.

This vast array of complex issues and dynamic instability on Europe's southern borders appears to be an enduring plight.

NATO'S CORE TASKS IN THE MODERN ERA

NATO's Core Tasks remain valid and relevant in the face of the two aforementioned challenges - static and dynamic instabilities. Since its publication in 2010, NATO's Strategic Concept has been underpinned by the communiqués from each biannual NATO Summit. The March 2017 NTS also pointed to the enduring fact that NATO must fulfil its three core tasks: collective defence, crisis response, and cooperative security no matter the challenge.

In the East, NATO is focusing its collective defence posture on deterrence. The various Allies are leveraging the instruments of national power, with NATO's security blanket serving as merely one, albeit critical, component. This deterrent military component is based predominantly on responsive and mobile high-readiness forces in addition to a semi-permanent rotational forward presence on the very soil of those NATO Allies which border the Russian Federation. This deterrence posture serves to reassure those nations in geographical proximity to Russia. However, this conventional military land forces' posture does not thwart any effects below the threshold of open aggression. These hybrid actions, strategic communication, cyber warfare, and other means within the borders of our open societies promote the interests of Russia as a competitor.

The relationship between states is no longer binary. Russia, for example, can simultaneously be a competitor, adversary, and partner, often with partially compatible foreign policy interests with the EU or NATO, depending on the theatre or conflict in question. Deterrence, competition, and engagement, therefore, are not mutually exclusive factors. This demands a flexible, adaptable political approach and military posture. Avoiding miscalculation in spite of the ongoing competition remains crucial. Understanding the effects desired and achieved by modern state actors to shape the political and informational space for expanding their influence through non-conventional means is vital for any modern state actor. The thin line between competition and confrontation requires dialogue and understanding by all parties involved.

The challenges in the South are fundamentally different to those faced in the East. These problems emanate from the weak and failed states throughout the region, which can neither preempt nor prevent transnational terrorism in the region or beyond it. Nor can these states provide the basic conditions to allow their populations to remain and thrive; spurring the migration crisis we now face in Europe. Additionally, the symptom of terrorism is fed by the dramatic mismatch between demography and economic growth – a generational and strategic challenge that has, thus far, only seen tangential and tactical responses from national governments or intervening forces, international bodies or charity organizations.

WHAT ANSWERS?

In Budapest, the Alliance's strategic thinkers reinforced the findings of the NATO Heads of State and Government from the Wales Summit in 2014 and the Warsaw Summit in 2016. In Budapest, our leaders determined that in a complex world, there is an ever-increasing requirement for innovation and agility, as well as improved readiness and effectiveness. Addressing the root causes of both of the complex challenges along this modern "arc" requires the utilization of the entirety of the instruments of power and influence in a coordinated manner

over an extended period. This far-reaching application of means will help create long-term political stability rooted in societies in which the individual is empowered to contribute to the nation's wellbeing and continued advancement. The NTS provided some answers to the challenges that NATO faces, but more importantly, our work in Budapest identified areas for continued effort and improvement.

Two World Wars and a Cold War have taught Europe and North America that long term stability requires cooperation. In Budapest, NATO leaders pledged to explore enhanced cooperation with a variety of partners. NATO must continue to embrace the European Union, the United Nations, and other key actors, such as non-governmental organizations, to leverage the expansive political, diplomatic, economic, judiciary, law enforcement, and military tools. Only when these forces are harnessed together, while respecting the principles of inclusiveness, local ownership, host-nation solutions, and tailored cooperation the maximization of local capacities will NATO again achieve long term stability in the pan-European space and beyond.