

“Priorities for the Warsaw NATO Summit”
Prepared Testimony for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 23, 2016

by
Derek Chollet
Counselor and Senior Adviser for Security and Defense Policy
The German Marshall Fund of the United States

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of this committee, I greatly appreciate for the opportunity to be back before you to discuss the priorities of the NATO Warsaw Summit. The Summit next month comes at a critical time for the Alliance – perhaps the most perilous in the quarter-century since the end of the Cold War. With so many challenges testing the Transatlantic partnership – with threats from the East, the South, and indeed from within -- Warsaw must be successful. So what would success look like? I’d like to discuss briefly four priority areas.

First, the Warsaw Summit needs to consolidate the reassurance measures NATO has taken to shore up its Eastern flank, and set a road map for what can be done in the future. Russia’s aggression and reckless behavior has brought back questions about the credibility of NATO’s deterrent. Since 2014, the U.S. and its partners have taken important steps to reassure our most vulnerable allies about our common commitment to their security. Now, we must transition from reassurance to deterrence.

On that score, I believe the Alliance is on track. Before the 2014 Summit in Wales, NATO’s actions were about crisis response; today, it has taken steps toward sustained support. The U.S. has acted with a significant boost in funding to its European Reassurance Initiative and by augmenting its force presence in Europe. It is important to note that NATO allies have stepped up as well, creating a more credible deterrent force in the Baltics and Poland, with the proposal for four battalions stationed in the East on track to be approved at Warsaw. I think it is important that these front-line forces have what they need and are ready to fight. There has also been considerable augmenting of our exercising and training in Europe (as exemplified by the recent Anakonda and Baltops exercises), and improved readiness and responsiveness of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (NATO’s spearhead force) and NATO’s command and control in eight new small headquarters in the East. It is also important that NATO update its military planning.

Second, along with these challenges in NATO’s East, the Alliance must also grapple with challenges to its South, and the confluence of crises emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. I don’t think we can expect that this will ever become a NATO fight – like Afghanistan – but NATO countries have a vital role to play. And increasingly we are seeing the Alliance step-up. NATO has been training Iraqi officers in Jordan and appears close to conducting

training in Iraq. Moreover, as Secretary of Defense Carter indicated at last week's NATO Defense Ministerial, a decision will likely be taken at the Warsaw Summit to use NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) surveillance aircraft in the U.S.-led anti-ISIL campaign. Additionally, NATO's deployment in the Aegean Sea has been essential in responding to the refugee and migrant crisis. NATO is also exploring the transformation of Operation Active Endeavour into a broad maritime security operation. Furthermore, as a recent GMF Advisory Panel Report for the Warsaw Summit argued, to respond to today's challenges it is important that the Alliance continues to deepen its relationships with key partner countries -- and I welcome the announcement this week for Israel to open an office at NATO headquarters.

As NATO considers these challenges to its East and South, it cannot see these issues as zero-sum. We must avoid the danger of a split in the Alliance between the Eastern and Southern partners in terms of which priority deserves more attention and resources. We must do both. After the end of the Cold War, when the moment of a Europe whole, free and at peace seemed upon us, there were questions about NATO's future role. During this time, a common refrain was the Alliance needed to go "out of area or out of business." Today, at a moment in which we must again confront threats to Europe's security order, NATO experts and officials are embracing a new mantra: "in area or in trouble."

Third, beyond these important military steps to enhance deterrence, the Alliance must reaffirm its open-door policy. While the question of how much further NATO should expand will remain contentious within the Alliance, Montenegro's pending accession is a real opportunity to demonstrate a clear, continued commitment to the open-door. This is why earlier this week I joined with over 30 of my former government colleagues in a bipartisan open letter urging the Obama Administration and U.S. Senate to ratify Montenegro's accession protocol as quickly as possible, ideally by the end of this year. But we also must be clear that this will not be last word on the open-door; I believe we must continue to explore ways to deepen cooperation with Georgia, as well as get more member states involved in helping Ukraine enhance its security and defense reform.

Finally, and most important -- yet perhaps most difficult -- the Warsaw summit must be a moment to try to galvanize support for the Alliance among our publics -- the kind of support necessary to make the required sacrifices, whether that is deploying troops or spending the necessary resources on defense. Indeed it is fair to ask: if NATO allies will not step up now, will they ever?

The US is not immune from such pressures, as we've seen some question whether NATO is "worth it." It is important to note that NATO continues to enjoy significant support among the American people -- a recent poll by the Pew Research Center showed that 77% of Americans believed that "being a member of NATO was a good thing for the U.S." Yet, in a climate of decreased budgets and increased demands, European members of the Alliance will need to be seen as carrying their fair share of the burden.

Although we have seen some positive movement toward greater European spending since the 2014 Summit in Wales, there is still reason to be concerned. Europe remains preoccupied by its own internal struggles – whether from migration, the rise in populism, its enduring economic crisis or the future of the EU itself – which only makes it harder for European leaders to think strategically and muster the political will for shared sacrifice. And depending on the outcome of today’s vote on Brexit, this challenge may only become harder.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, members of this Committee, these are a few of the priorities for the upcoming summit. There are many other agenda items – from boosting cyber defense to possibly helping in Libya – that I would be happy to discuss further. Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning, and I look forward to your questions.

###