North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

"NATO Post-Warsaw: Strengthening Security in a Tough Neighbourhood"

Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the Annual Meeting of Romanian Ambassadors in Bucharest
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Thank you, Mr. Minister [Foreign Minister Lazar Comanescu]. It's great to be back in Bucharest, a city I have visited many times over the years, and to address the assembled Romanian ambassadors.

In the 12 years since Romania became a full member of the NATO Alliance, it has proven, time and again, to be a valuable and steadfast Ally. And even before that, when the two of us served together as Ambassadors at NATO headquarters in Brussels in the late 1990s, Romania – then still a partner – was already making its mark as a contributor to European security.

Today, key elements of NATO's missile defence, the Aegis Ashore missile defence system, are hosted by Romania at Deveselu, helping to protect the Alliance from threats emanating from beyond the transatlantic area. Romania's commitment to NATO is most clear in Afghanistan, where not only is it the sixth largest contributor of troops, but those troops are based in one of the most hostile areas. I pay tribute to all those who have sacrificed their lives to help rid that country of Al Qaeda, and to all those who serve bravely under a NATO flag.

I've been involved with NATO, in some form or another, throughout my career, most notably as the US Permanent Representative and, of course, now as Deputy Secretary General. In all that time, what has impressed me the most about the Alliance is its ability to adapt: to look at the world as it is and to respond to whatever circumstances it finds. This level-headed and deeply practical approach is at the root of what has made NATO one of the world's most enduring Alliances. It is what has kept its people – today, almost one billion people – safe from harm, and preserved the hard-won peace for almost seventy years. The challenge today is to maintain that security and also to extend it to our neighbors.

Romania joined the Alliance during the last great period of change, when the Communist dictatorships fell, and people across Eastern and Central Europe found themselves free at last to chart their own future. Many sought to protect that new-found freedom by joining NATO and the European Union. So when once there were just 12 Allies – and just 16 when I first served at NATO in the historic year of 1991– today there are 28, with Montenegro on the cusp of becoming the 29th.

The period after 1991 was a time of great optimism and opportunity for Europe and for the Trans-Atlantic community. But sadly, much of that optimism has now drained away.

Challenges - Russia

For we have now entered a new period of change, and this one is not so positive. We face two very different but significant, long-term challenges – from Russia, and from terrorism and violent extremism – challenges that have re-shaped our view of our own security, and that will be with us for many years to come.

Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014 – its use of military force to take the sovereign territory of another country, the first time this has happened in Europe since World War Two – brought years of more positive relations between NATO and Russia to an end. But this is not only about Crimea. In the time since the annexation, Russia has continued to support separatists in Eastern Ukraine, acts in an aggressive and bullying manner towards its other neighbours, and has tried to divide and intimidate NATO Allies.

For years now, Russia has been engaged in a massive upgrading of its military forces. It has, we have to say, come a long way. In 2008, Russia's week-long war against Georgia saw it lose a number of aircraft to friendly fire. It also suffered from serious problems of tactical leadership, command and control, intelligence, logistics and organisation. Since then, however, military spending has increased substantially and its modernisation programme has transformed Russian capabilities.

The results of this are seen most clearly in its intervention in Syria on the side of President Assad. There, it was able to launch cruise missiles against targets in Syria from the Caspian Sea – around 1,300 km away – and it ran a nearly six-month long campaign of air strikes with the loss of only a single jet.

However, for NATO Allies, one of the most pressing issues coming from this modernisation programme is Russia's A2/AD posture. Anti-Access and Area Denial is the ability, through military capabilities – primarily anti-aircraft and anti-ship missile systems – to prevent Allied forces from moving freely within international waters and airspace to reinforce our own territory. With its military build-up on the Crimean peninsula and in the Black Sea – an area of particular worry for Romania – and in Kaliningrad and everywhere from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean, this is now of serious concern for the Alliance. It is a challenge we must meet in the coming years.

While we will always seek constructive relations with Russia, it is impossible to deny that its actions have fundamentally changed our relationship. Managing that relationship in the years ahead will be a crucial task for us all.

Challenges - South

Dealing with a more aggressive and revanchist Russia would be enough to keep us busy in Brussels 24/7. But we also face an equally daunting challenge from the growth and spread of chaos, violence and instability to Europe's south. While the Arab Spring briefly brought hope for a more democratic future, it has instead led to a far less stable and more violent one. In Syria, what started as a repressive backlash quickly descended into a bloody civil war. More than five years on, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, millions have been displaced, and the fighting shows no sign of ending.

This second challenge is very different in nature from the first. While the challenge from Russia is from a strong, centralised nation state, the challenge from the south is, in great part, from the absence of state power. The collapse or weakening of nation states across North Africa and the Middle East has led to the rise of non-state actors with unheralded levels of power and reach. This is seen most starkly in the rise of ISIL, with its declaration of an Islamic Caliphate in 2014 as big a game-changer as Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea that same year.

ISIL's power base is in the ungoverned spaces of Syria and Iraq, but its influence has spread far and wide, to Libya and even to Afghanistan, where it is attempting to gain a foothold. ISIL's message of Islamic fundamentalism and violent jihad may horrify most, but it inspires a few – encouraging some to fly to its aid and to fight in Syria and elsewhere, and others to commit acts of terror in its name. Of late, it has felt like hardly a week goes by without some new atrocity being carried out on behalf of ISIL. San Bernardino, Orlando, Istanbul, Nice, Paris, Brussels. These names are now linked by terror and, tragically, in time, more cities will almost certainly join them.

NATO's response – Russia

So once more the world has changed, and once more NATO Allies have had to adapt. Our immediate response was laid out at our Wales Summit in 2014. Faced with these fresh challenges, Allies realised that we needed, first of all, to invest once more in our defence. So, after more than two decades of cuts, Allies agreed to move towards the two percent of GDP guideline on defence spending over the next ten years. This we are doing. The cuts have stopped and in 2016 we expect to see a 3% increase in defence spending across the European Allies and Canada. Romania has committed to reach 2% in the next few years and it is forecast to surpass the 20% target for spending on new equipment by the end of this year.

NATO also agreed at Wales to measures aimed at bolstering the confidence of our easternmost Allies, with air and sea patrols, a greater land presence, and more frequent exercises. Through the Readiness Action Plan, we set out to significantly increase our ability to reinforce our Allies in the east and the south at short notice with a much larger NATO Response Force of 40,000 troops and a quick-reaction Spearhead Force, ready to move within days to wherever it might be needed.

Based on the Wales decisions, we set up new headquarters – including one here in Romania – to facilitate training and reinforcements in the eastern part of our Alliance. We strengthened Turkey's defences with AWACS surveillance planes and missile defence systems in the south. We have also sped up our decision-making, and developed strategies to counter hybrid threats and the complex challenge from the south. In the two years after Wales, all of these plans have been implemented in full, representing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence in a generation.

NATO also increased its support to partners whose sovereignty has been challenged by Russia – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – and has worked to help strengthen their energy security. Romania's efforts to build a gas pipeline to Moldova will be critical in reducing Moldova's energy dependence on Russia.

But if Wales represented our initial response, the Warsaw Summit, last month, set out our long-term strategy. This was based on a recognition that the twin challenges we face from the East and the South are going to be with us for the long term.

At Warsaw, our leaders decided that, with Russia's continuing military build-up and its growing A2/AD capability, it is not enough to rely on reinforcements alone. We need more forces on the ground. So at Warsaw, NATO leaders agreed to enhance our forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. The US, Germany, Canada and the UK will each lead multinational battalions in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. So, should any country decide to act aggressively against a NATO Ally, they would immediately be in a situation where they faced troops from across the Alliance, from both sides of the Atlantic, rather than just the national forces of a particular Ally.

NATO also agreed to increase its presence in southeastern Europe, and here in Romania, what we call "tailored forward presence". An existing Romanian Brigade has been offered as the framework for a multinational brigade, and it will be the focal point for extensive training of NATO forces in the region. This means more NATO forces, and more exercises and training, right here in Romania. Already the United States, Poland and Bulgaria have confirmed that they will contribute directly or indirectly, and other Allies are looking at doing so as well.

But we're not just looking at land forces. We have also asked our military planners to look at whether and how we can increase our presence and increase our readiness in the Black Sea region, at sea and in the air. We'll have a clearer idea of this when they report back at our Defence Ministers' meeting in October.

All these measures, let me stress, are defensive, proportionate and in line with our international commitments, including the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

As it stands, there is a wide gulf between NATO and Russia in the way we view the world. We see a world of free, sovereign, independent nation states, abiding by the Helsinki Final Act, with respect for borders and for the right of every state to choose its security arrangements.

Russia looks to a new version of the 1945 Yalta agreement, in which the major powers agree to divide Europe into spheres of influence and dominion, and where the big powers dictate the fate of their neighbours. These worldviews are, clearly, incompatible.

As long as Russia continues its aggression against Ukraine and attempts to intimidate NATO Allies and partners, we will do everything in our power to maintain a strong deterrence and defence. But at this time of heightened tensions, it is also vital that we maintain an open and clear dialogue with Russia. With greater military activity comes a greater potential for accidents or incidents, and for them to be misinterpreted and to get out of hand. Ensuring predictability and transparency is essential if we are to reduce the risk of this happening.

For years, NATO Allies have called on Russia to engage constructively to modernize the OSCE Vienna Document, which Russia helped to create. We need to set a lower limit on exercises that require advance notification and observation, and close the loophole for no-notice “snap” exercises. I hope that Russia will participate in the OSCE’s talks to update the Vienna Document, but so far the prospects don’t seem good.

The NATO-Russia Council is an ideal forum for discussing and making plain our differences and to work towards a more constructive relationship. We have met twice this year already, most recently on 13 July, and I hope we will continue to meet in the months and years ahead.

NATO’s Response – South

In the south, at Warsaw, NATO leaders agreed to bolster our deterrence capability against state and non-state actors, but also to increase Alliance efforts to “project stability” to our neighbours. This will include stepping up our support for the US-led coalition to counter ISIL, increasing our presence in the Mediterranean, and to significantly strengthen our support for partners in the Middle East and North Africa.

NATO AWACS surveillance aircraft will now provide information directly to the anti-ISIL coalition. And, of course, every NATO Ally is already an active member of that Coalition, providing direct or indirect support in many different ways.

To boost our counter-terrorism and intelligence-sharing activities in the Mediterranean, we have transformed our previous maritime operation, Active Endeavour, into a new, broader maritime security operation, Sea Guardian. It can also work with the navies and coastguards of the region to strengthen their ability to fight terrorism. The idea is for Sea Guardian to actively complement the European Union’s existing activities in the Med, and we’re now discussing exactly how that will work. Sea Guardian will build on our experience of working closely with the European Union in the Aegean Sea, where we have helped to curtail illegal human trafficking. It is just one aspect of an agenda for expanded NATO-EU cooperation that was agreed on the eve of the Warsaw Summit.

At Warsaw, we also agreed to significantly step up our support for our partners in the region, helping them to better defend themselves and to fight terrorism and extremism. Building the capacity of the Iraqi armed forces is an essential part of combatting and eventually destroying ISIL. We have been training hundreds of Iraqi officers in Jordan for some time, but we will now step up and expand this work by training Iraqi security forces inside Iraq, where we had a large training mission until 2011. We will soon deploy a team to Baghdad to start planning, provide strategic advice, and support security sector reform.

In Tunisia, we are providing advice so they can establish a new intelligence 'Fusion Centre', increasing the effectiveness of their intelligence services. We will shortly begin providing support for Tunisian Special Operations Forces. And we will continue to enhance our defence capacity building efforts with Jordan, one of our closest and most reliable partners in the region.

By implementing the decisions we took at Warsaw, we will improve our situational awareness, enhance our expeditionary capabilities, and project stability beyond our borders.

Looking to the future

But there is more we could do even beyond this. Let me offer some ideas on the "homework" NATO has to do post-Warsaw. In the South, over the next 2-3 years NATO could take lead responsibility for all training in Iraq, as that country moves from defeating ISIL to long-term consolidation. We could play a key role in helping Libya to establish strong, new defence institutions if the Government of National Accord so asks. This would help them to better defend their country against groups like ISIL and to maintain stability in the long term. And we could do more to help our other North African partners, and to develop our institutional links with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League and the African Union.

NATO may remain in a supporting role in the South compared to other actors, but Allies can make much greater use of the Alliance to project stability. Right now, while NATO is more engaged than ever before in the south, it is still underemployed in the region.

There's more work to be done in addressing challenges from the East as well. Both enhancing our forward presence in the eastern part of our Alliance and projecting stability beyond our borders are long-term commitments. Fully implementing and sustaining these efforts over the long term is critical. We must generate the forces, develop the command-and-control arrangements, and support the necessary training and exercises so that our enhanced forward presence up in the Northeast, and our tailored forward presence here in the Southeast, are credible. This underlines the importance of continuing progress across the Alliance towards achieving the 2% defence spending guideline. We cannot ease up. Maintaining the momentum is vital.

At home, Allies also need to work on their resilience. They need to ensure they can withstand hybrid attacks and be able to continue to function in a crisis situation. This requires a "whole

of government” approach as it touches on infrastructure, continuity of government, defence against cyber-attacks, the ability to deal with mass civilian casualties, the ability of NATO forces to cross and operate on the territory of Allies, and far more besides.

For NATO itself, we will be doing a “functional assessment” of our command structure, which was redesigned in different times six years ago, in order to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. And we need to look at how we structure and engage with our intelligence community to support rapid decision-making. Since hybrid scenarios require making decisions quickly, the establishment of a full-time Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and Security later this year will be an important means of upgrading the role of intelligence in our decision-making and our military planning; but nations need to do better to share intelligence information with the Alliance, since NATO doesn’t collect its own intelligence, it depends on the nations.

These are just some of the “homework assignments” Allies need to carry out following the Warsaw Summit. In the coming years, with a new US administration taking office next January, perhaps it’s also worth posing the question, given our radically changed circumstances since it was agreed in 2010, whether it’s time to revisit NATO’s Strategic Concept, or other basic documents, to guide us in the coming years.

Ladies and gentlemen:

If the 67-year history of the NATO Alliance has taught us anything, it is that, when the chips are down, NATO Allies have always come together to meet every new challenge. Be it the Soviet Union, out-of-area operations like those in the Balkans and Afghanistan, or a resurgent Russia and turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East, NATO has always done what was necessary to protect the territory of its Allies and the freedom of its people.

As much as any NATO Ally, Romania understands the true value of that freedom, and the harsh reality of its loss. After throwing off decades of oppression under Ceaușescu, it was becoming a member of NATO in 2004 that cemented Romania’s transition to democracy. You knew then, as you know now, that standing together is the best way for us to protect our freedom. And the best way to stand together is through NATO.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/08/29/nato-post-warsaw-strengthening-security-in-a-tough-neighbourhood