North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Current security challenges and the role of NATO and the European Union

Speech delivered by the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, General Petr Pavel, at the European Parliament
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Good Afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am honored today to have the opportunity to address you.

I was asked to share my ideas on the topic “Current Security Challenges and the Role of NATO and the European Union”.

I will focus on three areas. I will begin with an introduction of my role in NATO. I will then describe our contemporary operating environment – that is to say, a brief description of the things that have and have not changed in the recent past. And lastly, I will conclude with what we are doing at NATO, and more importantly, what NATO and EU could be doing collectively to ensure continued peace and stability in Europe.

To begin, some of you may be wondering exactly what it is that the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee does, and how his role fits into the NATO Headquarters here in Brussels.

The CMC is NATO’s senior military officer, serving as the principal military advisor to the NATO Secretary General, much in the same way that my colleague, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General de Rousiers, is the principle advisor to the Vice President of the Commission and the High Representative.

My role is to provide the conduit through which consensus-based advice from NATO’s 28 Chiefs of Defence is brought forward to the political decision-making bodies of NATO. So, to translate, what I really do is work with the 28 Military Representatives, 28 Permanent Representatives at the level of Ambassadors, and at the same time 28 Chiefs of Defence in NATO to provide the military perspective and advice the Alliance needs.

So, with that said, NEXT, I hope to share with you my thoughts on the contemporary operating environment.

We live in a security environment that contains, a “broad and evolving set of challenges”. The fact that we are living in an age of unpredictability, I think, is widely accepted. Established international order and norms are being challenged. Long-accepted superiorities, or power arrangements if you will, are being questioned. Both known and newly emerging actors are

constantly adjusting their strategic aims and therefore are in a constant state of metamorphosis. Subsequently, we are continually facing new and unforeseen threats to our security. The most recent and obvious challenges are the events in Ukraine and Syria, the latter causing the latest refugee crisis.

Our security environment has changed to the most complex, unpredictable, and challenging security situation Europe has seen in decades and this is unlikely to change in the near future. It is not a moment, but an era. For us at NATO and for the European region, this situation materializes through two distinct security challenges, the East and the South. There is an arc of instability surrounding much of Europe.

What do I mean by that?

Well, from the High North down to the North African coast, Europe is either bordering countries where Russia is vying to strengthen its influence or those which are to various degree fighting radical Islamist movements.

The Eastern security challenge is dominated by a single state actor- Russia. We believe that Russia's strategic objectives are to restore her international status as a world-stage player and to strengthen her influence in the Soviet successor states, or "near abroad". She wants other actors to accept that they cannot ignore Russia's views in regions where Russia's and their interests compete.

Russia is also blurring political distinctions between our traditional concepts of war and peace. Cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare supported by traditional military means and nuclear messaging are her tactics. With its effort to strengthen or expand her political and military sphere of influence, Russia has become a source of regional instability.

But our relationship with Russia is not as one dimensional as it might seem from this description. It is complex and multifaceted. A number of common interests exist between the Alliance, the EU, and Russia, as well as between our individual countries and Russia. This complexity is a reality of our contemporary strategic environment and demands a sophisticated and pragmatic approach- one that acknowledges Russian aims to undermine cohesion within NATO and amongst EU members by dividing collective actions and fomenting disunity, thereby rebalancing power and status.

However, we might need to acknowledge there are problems which will be better managed together with Russia, or at least not in direct opposition to Russia. Syria and terrorism in general may be the examples of where we find Russia not as a partner, but at a minimum an actor whose role should be recognized and whose intentions should be understood.

To close the look at the East, let me say that this "static instability" will remain a factor for Eastern and South-Eastern Europe for the near future. It appears a delicate balance has been established in Eastern Ukraine in the recent weeks in compliance with the Minsk

agreement. This will require significant monitoring, and EU foreign policy must be prepared to act with repercussions should this balance become again disturbed. We also should not forget about the illegal and illegitimate Russian annexation of Crimea.

The EU needs to have its political and economic instruments prepared in the event they are again necessary. The EU must become not only adaptive but anticipatory in her mindset, as Russia is constantly seeking opportunities to exploit to her advantage. Anticipating and denying those opportunities will be crucial.

In the South, NATO and the EU are faced with "dynamic instability" that continues to morph. The current focus on Syria should not overshadow that we are in a chain of crises. These crises, such as Sunni/Shia competition as well as weak and failed states with little ability to provide security or even basic services, depict the long-running nature of these events. But, crises offer opportunities, and I must emphasize that also here we should now adopt an anticipatory mindset. Forecasting and acting quickly and effectively will be crucial to avoiding future crises.

Now, returning to the idea of dynamic instability and constant change. The DAESH/ISIL model is an example of this dynamic instability. DAESH's expansion across a large geographical area and its ever-growing ideological expansion make it significantly different than the Russian model. It is un-ambiguous in its goal to spread a global jihadist ideology and clear in its intent to harm western societies.

The confluence of these two, apparently distinct challenges in the vicinity of Europe's collective borders, gives rise to even more complexities. Russia's aims in the Mediterranean are not limited to promoting and protecting the Assad regime and the Syrian client state. Her objectives are complementary to those in Eastern Europe – maintaining ample force presence with the ability to deploy rapidly. They are exploiting an opportunity offered by lack of coordinated and efficient Western action and our incorrect assessment at the outset of the Syrian crisis of the potential endurance of the Assad regime facing the forces of moderate opposition.

Russia is maximizing its system's competitive advantages: rapid decision making, no viable political opposition to decisions, and public willingness to accept military operations and even casualties for actions that are presented by Russia's official messaging as supporting Russian national interests.

NATO is concerned by the strategic consequences for the region. Russia is likely looking to build a permanent military capability to block any unwelcome political, humanitarian, or military activities in Syria and the region. In other words, she wants even in this region to make her consent conditional for any military engagement in favor of one of the parties.

What is also of great concern to EU leaders is the continued instability in the region, effects on commerce and security, and the resulting significant flow of refugees and asylum seekers

to our shores and into the European territory. But as you personally addressing these challenges, I shall move to my last point - NATO-EU cooperation.

I would like to share with you what I believe NATO and EU could be doing on top of what the two organisations are already working on in tandem. First, in order to be prepared to respond efficiently, the EU and the Alliance must remain cohesive and proactive within each organization and, better yet, even together.

NATO's new Readiness Action Plan, or RAP, answers the Alliance's call for a responsive deterrent in the face of state actors. Deterrence is achieved by having the political will, timely decision-making mechanisms, and interoperable and capable forces ready to deploy to support the Alliance's goals. With the RAP, NATO is implementing the most comprehensive reinforcement of collective defence since the end of the Cold War. Our Very High Readiness Joint Task Force - or VJTF, coupled with a more ready and responsive NATO Response Force - facilitated by our NATO Force Integration Units - send a very clear message to any potential aggressor. This is the bedrock of NATO.

Just yesterday, I got to witness the readiness, speed and capability of Allied and several partner forces during the opening day of the Trident Juncture 15 exercise in Italy. This is NATO's biggest exercise in over a decade, with more than 30 nations and around 36 000 troops participating. Trident Juncture 15 is demonstrating NATO's ability to move quickly and decisively to defend our interests and values. I am very pleased to note that the EU is participating in the exercise as well.

The EU has, besides the military as demonstrated in its missions and operation, also other strengths and tools. The very effective EU sanctions expressed the political will to put limits on Russia's actions against Ukrainian sovereignty, and have set the conditions for the Minsk Agreement. The EU is without any doubt a formidable economic power with extensive rule of law and governance capabilities.

However, while the EUMC and the NATO Military Committee work well together, in practical terms, more could be done. And we are starting to see some tangible cooperation, namely in the area of cyber defence and hybrid. Nevertheless, our military forces informally strive to deconflict and maximize opportunities, but no clear, concept-based EU-NATO cooperation is occurring for well-known reasons.

Europe's ability to leverage economic power, with a market that includes 500 million people, can open, or close "doors" on the international political stage. Coupled with a development budget of 56 billion euros, the EU has remarkable capabilities which could be used extensively to bolster EU security in complementarity to NATO's military efforts.

Let me here have a word on the comprehensive approach – an approach which is highly esteemed here in the EU as well as at NATO.

We should focus our efforts on becoming truly comprehensive in our individual countries and in the EU. By using the entirety of political means across all levels of national and organizational power, we can increase our efficiency in both analysis and actions. We have been speaking of “comprehensive” activities for many years, but we have not yet surmounted our compartmentalized approaches to our mutual discussion, deconfliction and coordination.

As EU Parliamentarians, you are uniquely suited and placed to become the voices inside your capitals and in Brussels to promote using the impressive tools of the European Union in conjunction with the complementary tools that NATO has to offer. As we look to the static instability in our east and more importantly, the dynamic instability to our south, the future must include greater EU-NATO cooperation. NATO military efforts could easily add synergy to EU development and stability efforts wherever and whenever applicable. The aim should be for the EU and NATO TOGETHER to project enduring stability and cooperation.

NATO, after two decades of deployments, training, exercises, and operations is postured to be a capable partner to the EU during this time of geo-political uncertainty. Strengthening EU-NATO cooperation minimizes duplications and maximizes cost-effectiveness. If coordinated and shaped to assist in current crises, EU and NATO assets in the same geographical areas with similar missions should be complementary.

NATO maintains significant capabilities honed in places like Afghanistan and the Balkans, to liaise, assist, or even augment EU police and security forces, if required, ensuring that you, Europe’s leaders, and more importantly our citizens receive the expected results from our military and security forces.

In short, the European Parliament is the unique venue in the EU that serves as an engine of integration. I truly believe that the ongoing humanitarian crisis to our south is the ideal opportunity for your body to initiate the sophisticated and substantial debates that will lead to closer NATO/EU collaboration in the years to come.

I would again like to thank you for our time together. I hope that my characterization of our contemporary operating environment- that is to say, our new age of unpredictability- will be helpful to your work. I also hope that my explanations of what NATO is doing, such as the RAP, but more importantly, my view on the opportunities for cooperation will be useful. I believe that we in NATO and you in the EU are ready, and the time is right to begin the process to truly promote EU-NATO cooperation. Our citizens give us their trust and support. I hope we are up to the task to give them cost-effective and efficient answers to the constantly adapting cycle of crises surrounding our continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your time.

I am happy to answer your questions.

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