Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

NATO & the Changing Face of Transatlantic Security

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Speech by British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Peter Westmacott at Defense One in Washington, DC.

Introduction

2014 is a year of momentous anniversaries.

200 years since the end of the last conflict between Britain and the United States – and the beginning of the closest military alliance the world has ever seen.

A century since Austrian guns began bombarding Sarajevo, signaling the start of the Great War.

Seven decades since the drama and heroism of the D-Day landings.

Twenty-five years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Each of those events represents a key moment in international security. It is no coincidence that each also catalyzed the evolving security relationship between Europe and America.

##Overlord to the Present

Seventy years ago this week, British and American forces were embroiled in heavy fighting around the French town of Caen, as they battled to break out of their Normandy beachhead.

Those landings that established that continental foothold had involved 175,000 British and Commonwealth servicemen, fighting alongside 125,000 of their U.S. comrades. The largest seaborne invasion in history.

The Brits and Americans were joined in Operation Overlord by 25,000 troops of other countries, including Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, Free French, Belgians, Czechs, Greeks, Dutch, Norwegians and Poles.

So it was not just a transatlantic partnership but a global coalition to defeat fascism, with the United Kingdom and the United States at its heart.

After the War, Britain and America were instrumental in the creation of NATO, which in turn proved vital in facing down Soviet aggression.

Defeating that threat took almost half a century. The fall of the Berlin Wall, 25 years ago this November, marked the beginning of the end of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. In the months that followed, the world once again changed utterly. But that bond remained constant.

Britain and America have since come together again and again to lead military coalitions to defeat threats to international security. Frequently, we have done so under NATO auspices, as we did on land in the Balkans, on the sea off the Horn of Africa and in the skies over Libya.

The September 11th attacks, almost 13 years ago, sparked the Alliance's largest and longest mission to date in Afghanistan. Throughout NATO's military operations, under ISAF command, British and U.S. personnel have made up the two largest contingents fighting there.

The Afghan conflict also marked NATO's development from a deterrent, defensive grouping into an active security player and a leader in counter-insurgency operations.

Present challenge

Today, we confront fresh challenges.

The contours of the conflict in Gaza are depressingly familiar. That does not lessen the urgency of finding a resolution. Israel has the right to defend itself against incessant rocket attacks but it must do so in a way that it proportionate and takes all necessary measures to avoid loss of civilian life.

In the last few days, British ministers have been engaged at the highest levels with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to urge both sides to show restraint, minimize civilian casualties and work toward a mutual ceasefire. I am very pleased that John Kerry is on his way to the region.

In other parts of the world, the nature of the challenges changes constantly. Almost by the day.

In Ukraine, we find ourselves in new and dangerous territory. The shooting down of a civilian airliner is an intolerable outrage. And it is being compounded by the continued efforts of Russian-backed separatists to block access to the crash site. Many of the bodies have started this afternoon the long journey towards being reunited with their loved ones. Tragically, others remain.

The separatists must grant immediate access to the crash site so those who remain can be identified and returned to their families.

So international investigators can have immediate and unfettered access to the scene.

So the international community can have the facts behind who was responsible for this atrocious crime.

So those who took the lives of 298 innocent civilians can be held accountable for their actions.

It looks increasingly as though the missile was shot down from a separatist-controlled area. But whatever the outcome of the investigation, it is already clear Russia has fomented a conflict it could have curtailed. President Putin has the power to bring an end to the bloodshed and to the outrages, and we believe he must do so without delay. The eyes of the world are on him.

Today's threats arise from a tangled web of failed states, regional conflicts, terrorism and cyber attacks and so on.

Some flow from state actors, as with the nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea, or Assad's horrific brutality against the Syrian people. Some states seek to use the cyber domain as another area which they can do us harm.

Increasingly, we also see significant threats emanating from non-state actors. Many can no longer be dismissed as mere fringe groups. Al Qaeda's core may have been degraded, but in Iraq and Syria, ISIL has taken advantage of weak governance to build an army, impose a twisted ideology, massacre innocent people, and try to recreate a brutal medieval Caliphate. We cannot dismiss the challenge these developments pose to our national security, because the rise of ISIL threatens to destabilize the entire region, and to unleash a new wave of terrorism against ourselves.

We can now add a third grouping to our typology of threats: what we might call quasi-state actors. We see them at work in Ukraine, in the form of the separatist groups that Russia has armed in order to undermine the legitimate government in Kiev and threaten Ukraine's internal stability and sovereignty.

This should be a source of concern for all countries, for any threat to the principle of national sovereignty poses an existential danger to the international order.

To counter this complex web of state, non-state and quasi-state threats, we need an equally comprehensive set of tools.

Our Response – Soft Power

Firstly, we must look to stem conflicts before they occur. Whether we like it or not, that requires some discreet intelligence gathering – sometimes necessarily secret – so that we

can find the terrorists before they kill innocent civilians, not afterwards.

Another part of conflict prevention, no less important, is our efforts to remedy the wider societal ills that foment conflict. The UK has established for example, an initiative to eradicate the use of rape and sexual assault as weapons of war, supported now by over 160 governments, this is aimed at changing the culture of impunity for those who commit those terrible acts, and removing the stigma of blame from the victims.

Sometimes, of course, we must take a firmer line.

Nowhere is such an approach more urgently needed than in Ukraine. Until the Kremlin decides to bring an end to this senseless and destabilizing conflict, NATO will continue taking action to reassure our Eastern European partners, Europe and the G7 will continue to ratchet up sanctions, and we will continue to hold Russia to account at the United Nations.

As my Prime Minister, David Cameron, wrote in the Sunday Times yesterday, we must remember that, economically, Russia needs the West at least as much as we need Russia. Real sanctions can have real bite. That is why the UK has consistently pushed for action that reflects the gravity of the threat to international peace and security. We will do so again when European foreign ministers meet tomorrow.

Meanwhile, we will carry on working through the IMF to help stabilize Ukraine’s economy, and through the OSCE, to monitor conditions on the ground.

The progress we have made on Iran shows the effectiveness of using a well-calibrated mix of non-violent tools. Through sanctions, diplomacy and negotiations, we have made real progress. Not enough to secure the comprehensive deal I believe both the P5+1 and the Iranians would like, but enough to make it worth extending the negotiations for a further 4 months.

These are good examples of handling problems without resort to armed force. At the same time, it’s clear that in each case our credibility rests upon maintaining a strong military. As George Shultz liked to say, diplomacy not backed by strength is ineffectual.

That means thinking clearly about what kind of armed forces we need.

Our Response – Hard Power

Given all the uncertainties the future holds, our militaries must be nimble and flexible.

We Brits are investing heavily in new capabilities to make our armed services, and their equipment, fit for purpose. Working more and more seamlessly with our American allies, we are pushing the technological boundaries and upgrading our more traditional war-fighting capabilities.

Over the next decade, we will spend some $250 billion on military kit. Just last week, David Cameron announced a further one and a half billion investment in intelligence-gathering and surveillance equipment. We remain firmly committed to maintaining our nuclear deterrent.

Within the next few years, we will have a rejuvenated carrier strike capability, with two technologically advanced carriers – the biggest we have ever built – and a fleet of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters to fly from them.

A couple of months ago, I toured one of those carriers, the Queen Elizabeth II, under construction at Rosyth near Edinburgh, with my counterpart, US Ambassador Matthew Barzun, in fetching white jumpsuits and goggles.

The Queen Elizabeth's naming ceremony, with Her Majesty in attendance, took place on the Fourth of July – not this time as a declaration of independence, but as a symbol of how closely our ships, and aircraft, sailors and pilots, operate together in defence of our values and freedom.

Our most important capability, of course, is still our fighting men and women. Our troops, we believe, remain among the best in the world. We ask a lot of them, and they deliver, year in and year out, to an astonishing high level.

Despite budget pressures, the UK has committed to retaining the ability to deploy, anywhere in the world, a rapid reaction force of 10,000 personnel, and sustain that deployment indefinitely.

With so many people returning from Afghanistan, we must take more seriously than ever the pastoral obligations we have toward personnel, veterans and their families. We're funding projects like homes for disabled veterans and a mental health hotline for personnel and their families.

Shortly after the NATO Summit in South Wales in September, London will host the inaugural Invictus Games for wounded warriors from the US, UK and a dozen allied countries.

Modelled on your own Warrior Games, it will be a major celebration of our troops, their abilities, and their amazing resilience. And it will be just as good television as the extraordinary Paralympics held in London just 2 years ago.

Partnerships

In his recent speech at West Point, President Obama emphasised the importance of partnerships with other countries in delivering national and international security.

We agree with him. For as good as our diplomatic and military efforts may be, they will fall short if we don't work together.

Such partnerships can take many forms. Like the United States, Britain increasingly seeks partners beyond our traditional alliances.

In Asia, for example, we can draw on a unique range of relationships, insights and capabilities. We have strong historical ties with Hong Kong, and with Commonwealth partners like Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and, of course, India.

British Armed Forces even have a programme of officer exchanges with their Chinese counterparts.

Even the smallest of contacts is valuable, because it lessens the risk of miscommunication or miscalculation. That is vital in a region where territorial disputes persist even as military powers mature.

We are also looking to partner with fragile countries – those that are at risk of becoming sources of regional instability or, worse, staging areas for terrorist groups. It is in everybody's interest to try to stabilise these nations before they become a greater threat.

Libya is a prime example of a state that we cannot afford to let slide into anarchy. At Lough Erne last year, the G8 agreed to train more than 7,000 Libyan troops to help disarm militias, reintegrate them into Libyan society, and generally improve that country's security, stability, and governance. In this and other efforts to help Libya consign its demons to history, the UK is playing a major role.

Similar programs are under way elsewhere. British experts are central to the EU's training mission in Mali. They are providing support in the Central African Republic and working to counter the influence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. With other governments, we are actively engaged in training UN peacekeepers for stabilisation missions around the world.

The most important partnerships of all, however, are those we enjoy with our close allies. With the United States, cooperation has become routine, almost automatic.

When it comes to operations, we are joined at the hip, as we have seen in Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq. But it doesn't stop there. Across our armed forces, we enjoy a unique level of integration.

Hundreds of British defence personnel are today stationed permanently in the United States alongside their American comrades, flying US aircraft, helping crew US ships, providing liaison. And the same is true the other way around with US personnel in the UK.

As we approach the end of combat operations in Afghanistan, we're looking seriously at how we will preserve our relationship when we are no longer actively having to fight side by side. Last month, the Joint Chiefs met their British equivalents in London for only the second time since World War II. Peacetime military cooperation was top of the agenda.

Meanwhile, the UK is building closer partnerships with other NATO Allies. With France, for example, we are developing a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, which we expect to be fully operational by 2016.

NATO Summit

Which brings me to the NATO Summit in September. It comes at an important moment.

Just a few months ago, people were asking why we even needed a Summit. “The Cold War is over,” they said. “Europe’s security is assured. No need for a transatlantic Alliance.”

Nobody is saying that any more. On the contrary: there’s pretty much universal acceptance of the importance of the alliance today as in the past.

The Summit will focus on threats present and future. It will revolve around three key themes.

First, Afghanistan. As the last combat troops prepare to come home, we will use the Summit to recognise their hard-won achievements. Afghanistan today is not perfect. But it is far from the terrorist launchpad that it was back in 2001.

Afghan troops are providing security across the country, including counter-terrorism missions. Unprecedented numbers of girls are going to school. Most pregnant women receive antenatal care. Over 40% of Afghans use mobile phones.

All this would have been unthinkable under the Taliban. And all of it contributes to an Afghanistan that is far more secure today – and far less of a threat to our own security – than at any time since the Taliban took control all those years ago.

The turn-out in Afghanistan’s Presidential elections showed that Afghans want to decide the future of their country. Thanks to Secretary Kerry’s indefatigable efforts, both candidates have agreed to a process that will give Afghanistan a constitutional, peaceful transfer of power. Which we hope will lead to the formation of a government of national unity.

NATO will go on supporting Afghanistan’s development. Thanks to the pledges we made two years ago in Chicago, the funding is there. This year’s Summit is an opportunity to look at how we will deliver that support.

Second, European security, and the longer-term implications of Russia’s actions in Ukraine. We need to strengthen NATO’s ability to respond quickly to threats, bringing together conventional military responsiveness with the communications, intelligence and planning needed to tackle the kind of hybrid warfare Russia is engaging in. Crucially, we must consider how to deter further Russian aggression. Last week’s events underscore just how urgent the situation is becoming.

Finally, future-proofing the Alliance. We need to ensure NATO has the capabilities it needs to address the challenges to come.

Allies must commit to smarter investment in their forces. As well as modernization, that means maintaining and developing complementary capabilities. A frank discussion on this is long overdue. We should be open to the idea that collective security means just that – a system in which Allies share the burden of security by pooling resources in a coordinated manner.

Clearly, this requires all Allies to pull their weight. That includes those Member States whose defense spending has fallen below the agreed threshold of 2% of GDP. The United Kingdom has committed to staying above that threshold, because we believe that security is well worth the price tag. As one of only 4 countries to have met the NATO target, we will be urging our allies to take this opportunity at the Summit to follow suit.

In parallel, we will continue NATO's efforts towards building the broadest possible security network by celebrating and strengthening our partnerships with countries like Sweden, Finland, Australia and Georgia.

Partners outside the Alliance accounted for 10% of the air campaign in Libya, and almost half of the nations participating in ISAF. We owe it to them to look for new ways of integrating them into the Alliance's decision-making.

During the Cold War, NATO acted as a powerful deterrent against aggression, and the ultimate guarantor of freedom, democracy and prosperity in Europe.

The Alliance needs to show that it can be equally effective in its new role as an active player on a constantly-changing global security stage.

Conclusion

Together, the United States and Europe played a leading role in designing the international system that has held sway since the Second World War – NATO, the UN, the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions.

That system has been a great success. Human beings are more prosperous than ever before. More countries are democratic than ever before. Around the globe, more and more societies are emerging from poverty.

At the same time, the security picture is more complex than at any time in living memory.

The Brits, Americans and others who landed in Normandy 70 years ago did so to combat a clear, unified, state-based adversary.

The next two generations faced a similarly obvious foe.

Today, the mosaic of threats is far more fragmented and complex. Not only nation states, but also terrorists, extremists, insurgents and cyber-warriors all pose a threat to our national security.

To deal with it, we need strong traditional militaries, and we are working to achieve that. But we also need a subtle array of alternatives. We need hard power and soft power. We need intelligence, diplomacy and sanctions. And we need development and military partnerships.

NATO, as the world's pre-eminent Alliance, must again adapt to the new realities, as it has done repeatedly over the past quarter-century. I am confident that, come September, world leaders will show that NATO remains strong, united and ready to meet and defeat any threat.

As we continue to adapt, we should bear in mind the words of Abraham Lincoln, who wrote 153 years ago:

The struggle of today is not altogether for today – it is also for a vast future.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nato-the-changing-face-of-transatlantic-security