North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Remarks

by NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană at the Hudson Institute public event “NATO and the New Decade: Assessing the Transatlantic Alliance"
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KEN WEINSTEIN [Hudson Institute]: Well, good afternoon and welcome to Hudson Institute. I’m President, CEO and Walter P. Stern Chair at Hudson Institute, Ken Weinstein. Hudson’s mission is to promote US international leadership and global engagement for a secure, free and prosperous future. And we are truly honoured to welcome the Deputy Secretary General of NATO, Mircea Geoană, to Hudson Institute for his first set of public remarks on his inaugural trip to Washington as Deputy Secretary General.

The Deputy Secretary General is here for meetings with officials in the Trump administration in particular, and met with the Vice President this morning, had a very productive meeting.

He is, of course, the first Deputy Secretary General of NATO from Romania, the first from the former Eastern bloc. He has had an extraordinary career and is someone I think we will all get to hear his . . . the insights for which he is known. He holds a doctorate in economics from the Economic Studies Academy in Bucharest. He studied along the way at the Ecole Nationale d’Administration, in France. He served, of course, as President of the Romanian Senate, as Romanian Foreign Minister, as Romania’s ambassador to Washington, and he was ambassador to Washington, which is arguably the most important diplomatic post in the Romanian Foreign Service, while he was simultaneously Romania’s youngest ambassador. And he also served as Chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Today, he will assess the state of the transatlantic alliance after the London summit. After the Deputy Secretary General offers opening remarks, he will engage in a dialogue with Hudson Institute Senior Fellow Peter Rough. Peter is a former White House and USAID official under President George W. Bush. He writes widely on defence and foreign policy issues in publications in the United States and also in Germany. Ladies and gentlemen, without any further ado, please give a warm welcome to the Deputy Secretary General. Thank you.

MIRCEA GEOANĂ [Deputy Secretary General of NATO]: Thank you so much, Ken. Sometimes when I listen to this presentation about my CV, I start wondering if it’s me or is it sort of a hologram? It’s not. I’m Mircea Geoană and I’m the newly- appointed Deputy Secretary General of NATO, as Ken has mentioned. And I think it’s only normal, one of my first trips overseas to be in the capital of the leading nation in our Alliance, a wonderful city that, when I was young and when we arrived, our kids were two-and-a-half and six months. We were scared to death, because being young is not always an advantage. We felt

inexperienced. We felt that we had too-big a shoes to fill. And Romania was nowhere. We didn't have even the most favoured nation status, nowhere.

And of course, things changed. Successive American administrations decided that the former communist countries had the right to choose their destiny, that after decades of tyranny and despotism and closed society, we could make our own decisions about where we want to belong. And we want to belong to the West. We want to catch up with the historical lost time, that our geography and the vagaries of geopolitics have forced on our nations – Romania, but all the others – to be basically living in the dark.

There's nothing better than living in the sunshine of democracy. There's nothing better than enjoying the beauty of being free to speak up your mind, to elect the leaders you want to elect, to get rid of the leaders you don't want to elect and to basically become normal societies. And the fact that I am the first, let's say, Central Eastern European, that has such an important job is also a testimony not only to my CV, there are lots of great CVs in our part of the world, there are lots of people that are probably brighter than I am. But it also a sign of recognition that we are coming to age and the last 20, 15, 10, five years since we had the enlargements of NATO, things are going in the right direction.

So we speak a lot about the values that we hold dear. And I just want to share with you the state of affairs in the transatlantic world and something that we should call as the political West, because there are democracies, our partners, America's allies, also in Asia, we have strong, vibrant democracies. We have partners and friends all around the world. But I will focus this conversation, because I'm working in NATO, about how things are in the transatlantic community.

Sometimes when I talk, especially to a younger public, from America or from Western Europe, when we start speaking about values, it sounds like a cliché. Values. We struggle with other things. It's job insecurity. It's a sense of nervousness about where the world is going. There is a sense that other things are more important just because you didn't live through the experience of not enjoying the fruits of liberty and freedom. And I would say that what really keeps North America, US and Canada and the older and the newer Allies together are these fundamental values. And a sense, that we belong together, then we have obligation to go together in. One should never take freedom for granted. Do not take freedom for granted, because history never stops. Geopolitical competition never stops. And we are witnessing today an epochal fight. For the commanding heights of how human societies are organised between us, the ones that believe that democracy and free markets and open societies are the solution, and others that do believe that closed societies, authoritarian regimes, dictatorships are the most efficient formula to govern modern societies.

We are entering a period when this epochal fight for how our societies are organised. And here, all democracies, old or new, all Allies, big or small, superpowers like America and small regional players, like many other Allies in Europe, we have to fight this fight, because this is

the fight. This is what defines. Also, for the younger people in this room: this will define also your future. This will define the way in which you will be living and your kids will be living and your grandkids will be living. And then our generation has the obligation to make sure that we leave a world for you that is safe.

And NATO continues to be the indispensable multi-level institution that is ensuring the very foundation of normal societies. Without peace and security, because that's the business of NATO, there is no economic progress. There's no social emancipation. There is no cultural identity. There is nothing, if we don't have peace and security. That's the line of business of NATO and that's who we are. And my plea to everybody across the pond: let's stay true to these values.

This was true and stated by the genius of the founding fathers of this Alliance 70 years ago. And if you have the time just to read, you know, fast forward, the Washington Treaty, which is our constitution, the foundation, the founding act of NATO, you'll see that we speak about values. You'll see that in . . . we speak about human rights, freedom and rule of law. You'll see that in Article 3 we talk about the resilience of our societies. You'll see that this is a solemn contract, to defend these values and uphold those values. And this is today more true than ever. And this is something that we will have to continue to invest into.

There are lots of challenges facing our transatlantic community and our Alliance. Almost exactly six years ago, covert Russian forces, the so-called Little Green Men, illegally annexed Crimea, part of sovereign Ukraine. It was the first time that one European country had taken part of another by force, since the end of the Second World War. This has been followed by a constant stream of aggressive actions. From daily cyber-attacks to interference in our elections, to attempted assassinations on Allied soil. Not to mention the ongoing conflict in the east of Ukraine that has cost more than 1,300 lives and displaced more than a million other people. Russia's actions challenge on our democracies are an attempt to divide us, to derail our way of life. And to put the seed of mistrust in our own values.

This is something that has to be addressed, in NATO jargon, by deterrence and defence. We stand ready to engage with Russia on our dual-track approach. But we also have to remain vigilant because what we are witnessing is indeed . . . continues to be worrisome.

The other big challenge that we have not the right to forget about is the ongoing threat of terrorism. This is still here. Since 9/11, NATO has been on the forefront of this fight with our Combat Mission in Afghanistan, the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, on which NATO and every single Ally is a member. For 20 years, all Allies and many other partners around the world, we have been standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our American friends and Allies. Blood and treasure. Sacrifice. Bravery. A sense of common mission. This is what our Alliance is all about. When somebody is in need, everybody else is at the rescue and is there to stay for the long haul.

But we have to make sure that terrorism is not coming back. And this is something that we'll have to continue to be vigilant and invest into. But these two massive challenges that I've been referring to are also happening in a moment of fantastic evolution and change, both technological and geopolitical. Probably never before, at least in recent modern human history, we have not seen so much change happening at the same time. Technological shifts, geopolitical shifts, evolutions within and outside of our societies.

We see new disruptive technologies like Artificial Intelligence, facial recognition, automation, much of it from China. Technologies that are transforming our societies with incredible speed and are also changing the character, not only of human society but also of modern warfare. These are two sides of the same coin. Technologies can be a source of fantastic progress. They can also be a source of incredible complexity and danger. These new technologies can have strategic effects. Now, we cannot count algorithms in the same way we do with warheads, but we do need more transparency and predictability also in this field. We need, for example, new codes of conduct on the military application of these new technologies. We cannot have a system of global order without trying to have some norms, some form of organisation. Not only a traditional way of organising things, but also to the new things that are affecting, impacting at such velocity our societies. And something which is very important: we may no longer be able to take our technological edge – the political West – for granted. But there is no reason why we should not retain it. Open societies like the United States and all of us, where people are free to think and explore and collaborate will always, in the end, be better, more effective and more creative than closed societies. I'm convinced that we will prevail. I'm convinced that if we understand the complexity of the challenge and we stick together, I think there is no way in which authoritarian system of organised societies can prove to be more efficient, more productive and more satisfactory to human destinies than open societies and democracies.

Linked to this technological change is also geopolitical change. The rise of China is a case in point. For the past 40 years, China's economic growth has lifted hundreds of millions of people from poverty. This is true. It is a potentially vast market for all companies. This is also true. But it also presents challenges, not only opportunities. This is also true. Such as its growing political influence in the world and the development of new technologies, including 5G. It is important that we fully understand these and we develop our relationship with China in the years ahead.

Yes, China has come a very long way. It is both the second largest economy in the world and the second biggest defence spender in the world. China already has hundreds of missiles that would have been prohibited by the INF Treaty and recently displayed an advanced intercontinental nuclear missile, able to reach the United States and Europe. China is not violating any arms control treaty, because it's not part of those treaties. But as a major military power, it also has major responsibilities. You cannot ask for global status without assuming also responsibilities for world order. And this is why we believe that China . . . it's high time for China to participate in arms control, alongside Russia and United States. So, it might happen

today or tomorrow, but this is an indispensable part for a world that will stay at peace. And we need to encourage China to embark in this kind of global arrangements.

These are all reasons for the nations of Europe and North America to always stand shoulder-to-shoulder. Together, NATO countries are half of the world's economic might and half of the world's military might. But most important, as I referred to at the beginning, we share the same values and the same outlook of life and democracies will prevail.

But when it comes to the bond between North America and Europe, this bond is strong, is deep and so precious. And this is why I'm so encouraged. I also can . . . also visiting US Congress yesterday, not only the Administration, I'm very happy and pleased, the meeting with the Vice-President, with lots of people in the White House, State Department, Pentagon. But I also went on the Hill, meeting probably 20 more Members of US Congress, Foreign Affairs, Armed Services, NATO Parliamentary Assembly. We will welcome them in Ukraine in the next few months. And it's so important to see the bipartisan support that NATO and this Alliance enjoys in the political establishment of this great country.

Eighty per cent of the American people support NATO. That's a . . . that's an incredibly strong number. That's a precious asset. This is the very essence of America's continuous and enduring interest and involvement with us, its natural European Allies and partners. That's a huge asset for our Alliance. And when the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, addressed the joint meeting of the United States Congress last year, he said and I quote, 'The strength of a nation is not only measured by the size of its economy, or the number of its soldiers, but also by the number of its friends. And through NATO, the United States has more friends and allies than any other power. This has made the United States stronger, safer and more secure.' This is important. And we have to treasure, encourage this and pass it to the next generations, as life goes on.

We see here sometimes a paradox. Because while some question the strength of the Alliance, the strength of our bond, we're actually doing more together than we have done for many, many years. Far from abandoning Europe, the US has increased its presence in Europe with more American troops and more exercises, as well as greater investment in infrastructure. As we speak, Exercise DEFENDER-Europe 20 is deploying 20,000 American troops to Europe, the largest such deployment in a quarter of a century. And Europe has stepped up too, investing far more in defence. After decades of falling defence budgets, after the Cold War, all Allies agreed to stop the cuts and to increase defence spending. This is what has happened. European Allies and Canada have increased defence spending for five years in a row. By the end of next year, they will have added an additional 130 billion US dollars to their defence budgets since 2016, a figure that will reach, by 2024, 400 billion US dollars. That's a considerable amount of investment.

We invest in our defence not only because it is right and fair and we share the burden of our security with our American friends and Allies, but because it is also in the national interest of

each and every Ally to do so. Burden-sharing is not only about money spent on defence, it's also about the willingness to contribute, to participate in missions and also to put your own men and women in uniform in harm's way. This is something that is burden-sharing in its complete form. And this is something that Europe is stepping up its game and we are happy to see that this will continue for the years to come.

We also need to understand that our security is strengthened when we also work together with partners, not only Allies. And this is important to NATO. We work in institutions like the United Nations, with European Union, with the African Union or the OSCE.

As we speak, we are preparing, at the request of the UN, our contribution to training peacekeeping missions in Africa. It's a UN-led operation, we are also helping. As we speak, we talk to European Union about how to best support our partners in the Middle East. With the OSCE, we are talking, within the OSCE, how to modernise the arms control in the Vienna Documents. With the African Union, we just signed three months ago a new, updated version of our partnership with the African Union. We need these partnerships.

NATO has today more than 40 country partners from Asia Pacific to South America to North Africa and the Gulf region.

Events in Iran and Iraq at the start of this year brought the Middle East into our sharp focus. President Trump has called on NATO to do more in the Middle East, and we are looking at what more we can do, especially working with our partners. There are ongoing discussions among Allies, including next week at the defence ministers meeting in Brussels, as well as with our partners in the region, including the Iraqi leadership.

We welcomed at NATO, the King of Jordan, and we continue to engage at the political level with our valuable partners in these parts of the world.

We see a potential for a bigger NATO role in the region. NATO has the structures to ensure political consultation, military command and control, oversight and transparency.

And especially for parts of the world, speaking of the fight against terrorism, it is indispensable for us, all of us, to be able to build resilient national institutions. Because we cannot substitute the very foundation of functional societies in many of these areas. NATO is very able and we are doing a very good job in building military institutions. Minister of Defence, security organisations. And we call on our partners to bring our resources together and make sure that we do the best possible job, in a unique framework that keeps all Allies in Europe and North America onboard in this continuous fight against terrorism.

As part of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, NATO AWACS aircraft patrol patrolled the skies over Iraq and Syria. NATO's Mission in Iraq trains local forces to ensure that Daesh never comes back. And individual Allies contribute significant assets to the fight against ISIS.

As we speak, the French Charles de Gaulle carrier group patrols the eastern Mediterranean.

And there is a lot more. In Tunisia, we are helping to develop their cyber defences and their ability to counter improvised explosive devices. We are working with Jordan to improve their defence capabilities. And NATO works to build stronger defence and security institutions with all our partners in the Middle East and North Africa.

And one final word about adaptation. Because no organisation can resist, in time, if you don't have a certain agility, a capacity to adjust, to adapt to a changing environment. This is probably the strength of this Alliance, that over 70 years we've been able to adjust and to get through difficult moments. We need to continue to adapt. Adaptation in face of dramatic change is more important today because, as I mentioned earlier, today we face the most complex security environment, geopolitical unravelling and technological disruption, at the same time. We need and will continue to adapt.

In December in London, NATO leaders took decisions that would continue to shape our Alliance, to keep it fit for the future. As part of the biggest adaptation of our collective defence in a generation, we have increased the readiness of our forces through the NATO Readiness Initiative, with Allies committing 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat ships, available in 30 days – as we call, in our jargon, 'The Four Thirties.'

Allies also agreed on a common approach to the protection of our telecommunications infrastructure, including 5G.

And a new roadmap on disruptive technologies, to make sure we keep our technological edge.

We have declared space as the fifth operational domain for NATO alongside land, air, sea and cyberspace, because so many of the modern state competition takes place also in space. This is a vital necessity to focus our nation on the next generation of technologies.

The US have also asked the Secretary General of NATO, my boss, Mr Stoltenberg, to strengthen NATO's political dimension. NATO already has a strong political voice, but with greater cohesion and coordination will make our strong Alliance even stronger.

As I mentioned at the beginning, for my country and for the region I'm coming from, I believe that we are witnessing one of the most decisive moments of recent history. This combination of challenges, sometimes the self-doubt about ourselves and our own strength, is giving sometimes the impression that we are questioning our capacity to continue to be the kind of societies and the kind of alliances, and the kind of like-minded nations that could prevail in the 21st and the 22nd Centuries and beyond. I say this not because I'm coming from a country that has suffered so much, but I'm here to tell you that if we stay united, if we understand that together, we are stronger; if we realise that our foes, rivals and adversaries will not hesitate to amplify and to create divisions amongst us; if we stay together; if we continue to invest in these values that we hold dear, and; if we understand that the future is

ours, I know that this Alliance will endure far more than another 70 years and the bond between America and Europe will continue to be strong.

As Senator Todd Young said right here, at the Hudson Institute in November, 'NATO is America's . . .' – and I quote the Senator – 'NATO is America's most important strategic asset.' Let's keep it that way. This is why I'm here in my first public appearance, Ken you're right, not only because I have a personal friendship with you and your team. I see here, Seth, I see here, Peter. I've seen Craig, lots of other friends. We've been together for the last decades in making Europe whole and free. We are here to say to the younger generations that we must keep the world open and free.

From myself, from the Secretary General of NATO and from all of us and my team, from NATO, please that these are not just words for a public speech. These are things that really are part of our heart, part of the DNA of this Alliance. And if we sometimes speak emphatically that this is the most successful alliance in history, it truly is. And this is why we have the obligation, the interest and, in a way, no other option than to continue to invest in this wonderful, cooperative proposition of democracies and open societies. Thank you very much and God bless this great country of United States.

PETER ROUGH [Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute]: Thank you. Thank you very much for that very impassioned and terrific speech. I think I speak for Ken and everyone at the Institute to say that that friendship is certainly reciprocated. We appreciate it. We look forward to partnering with NATO to ensure that the next 70 years are as great as the past 70 years.

And since you mentioned, I think this is your third day here in Washington, some of the people that you've met across the aisle, maybe we'll just start by asking you how some of those conversations have gone? Maybe you can take us inside your meeting with the Vice-President and share some secrets and just generally tell us what's on the mind of American policy-makers. It's great to hear that there's a bipartisan appreciation for the Alliance, but what specific issues have come up and have been on the minds of Americans?

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: I always love the off-the-record conversations with the media. Full transparency. No, on a serious note, it is so important to see that the American top leadership are committed to this Alliance. Of course, there're issues that are very much on the forefront of our attention.

We discussed about the NATO presence in Iraq. We discussed about where NATO could do more and should do more in Iraq and also in . . . in that region. We discussed about the need to continue to be together and be as united in Afghanistan as we have been for the last 20 years. We discussed about burden-sharing. We discussed also, of course, about the issues that are related to global competition, these rapid technologies and things like that. But I would say that the mood of the conversation was very constructive, very positive. Met wonderful people with . . . with great professionalism. This is also true for the Administration; this is also true for the very dedicated members of the US Congress, both sides of the aisle,

Republicans, Democrats, they all care about NATO. And I think it's our obligation not to disappoint and to deliver, as I think we have done for the last many, many years.

PETER ROUGH: So, from the minds of American decision-makers, maybe to the minds of the Secretary General and your own - in December, Secretary General Stoltenberg announced a strategic review of NATO. Can you give us a little bit a sense of where that stands, what the thinking there is, where you would like to see it proceed, how it will unfold?

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: We had a few, in the history of NATO, we had, I think three times an effort to have what we call a strategic review. The last one was in 2014. What we are starting, and we decided in London by the leaders of the Alliance, is to start a reflection process, not a strategic review, per se. This will eventually come on the later stage. But for the time being, the Secretary General will ask a number of highly-qualified personalities from North America, from Europe, to advise him in a way that at the next NATO summit in 2021 – because that's when we will have a proper summit – the Sec Gen, the Secretary General of NATO, with the help of this advisory group, he will come with some suggestions to the leaders of the Alliance, mainly on the political cohesion, mainly on the political consultation, not questioning the fundamentals of the Alliance. So that's an effort that was approved by the leaders in London. And in the next few months, we'll have a group that will be assisting the Secretary General of NATO. We count on their wisdom. We count on their foresight. We count on their sophistication. But in the end, the Secretary General will be the one that will be incorporating their advice and present his conclusions at the next NATO summit in 2021.

PETER ROUGH: You covered a lot of different theatres of the world. Maybe one to bring up that wasn't in your remarks is the ongoing offensive in Idlib, that the Syrian regime forces have launched since, with support of Russian airpower and Iranian proxies. The other day, the Turks, which is, of course, is a NATO member, reported nine casualties in a shelling operation. How does NATO think about events in Syria and the ongoing offensive in Idlib?

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: NATO is not involved in Syria. This is . . . doesn't mean that we are not exceptionally attentively watching what's going on, because these things are interrelated. We cannot just have silos. Everything has a consequence. Everything in theatres or the geopolitics in this big region has an impact on everything else. But we are not, per se, involved in Syria. We are encouraging all sides to continue to try to use the UN framework that could eventually bring a political solution to the situation in Syria. There's no other way than a political solution. And what we do, we are trying to encourage, to follow the UN mandate, which does exist for Syria, and, of course, consultations, diplomacy, and not only military means. That is the only way for having, in a country that suffered a lot, a country that has millions of its citizens either dead or wounded or displaced. And this is also where Turkey, as an immediate neighbour, is also witnessing that thing – there's no other country in the Alliance that's suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey. And there is no other country in Europe that have been hosting more displaced person and migrants coming from that region.

So we hope that Syria will find a political answer. And UN is the key in addressing, politically, the situation in Syria.

PETER ROUGH: So, from the south-east border of NATO, maybe to the far north to the Arctic, I found that to be a topic that, in all the delegations that come through Hudson Institute from NATO member countries, seems to come up time and again, especially once they've visited the White House or the State Department, which I think suggests – and this is almost certainly true – for all the turnover in the National Security positions in the Administration, everyone, including, I think, the Vice- President and President, have put a focus on the Arctic. Where does the Arctic sit in NATO strategy? How do you think about the Arctic?

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: Of course, NATO has – and this is something which is only normal for an organisation like ours – we have what we call a 360 degree view of things. We just cannot . . . and we could probably add in space, probably even more than 360. We are not, per se, involved in the Arctic, but Allied countries are: the US and Canada and Denmark - also the portion of Greenland that is in part, our . . . our Allies in Iceland, they play a significant role into this. And we continue to look very attentively. We just had a couple of briefings last week in NATO. Also, on the western side of the north, looked from the perspective of the US and Canada, and also coming from Norway, coming from Denmark, let's say more to the east, and also, Russia operates massively in the Arctic. But explicitly we don't have a policy towards the Arctic. But we are always in consultation with the Allies that have a say, it's the Arctic Council, as you know. And we only hope that the Artic will not become a place for military competition and try to make sure that we concentrate our resources on the more immediate threats coming from the east and from the south.

PETER ROUGH: Well, I have a dozen more questions. But I spoke with your staff beforehand, I know your schedule is incredibly tight. If everyone could just do me a favour and remain seated and we'll thank the Deputy Secretary General for his remarks and then you'll be on to your next appointments. Thanks so much for your extensive remarks, which made it a bit easier, because there weren't as many areas I had to probe on. But we really appreciate having you here. And as I said, I feel very fortunate to have your friendship and your support.

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: And also, I will leave my . . . my coordinates with Peter, so if there's any need for you to continue to engage with me, with us, when you come to Brussels, don't hesitate to visit with us. We have a fantastic Public Diplomacy team. We have a fantastic think tank operation going on. And the fact that I was a little bit scarce with my time is not a sign of lack of desire to continue to invest. And also my email will be with Peter. Don't bombard me with too many mails. But if there is something really important, especially for the careers for the young ones.

PETER ROUGH: And unlike my . . .

MIRCEA GEOANĂ: I meant what I said from the podium, so hope this was an interesting opportunity for you all and thank you for taking the time and being present in such a large number. Thank you. Thank you very much.

PETER ROUGH: Thank you. Appreciate it. Thanks. Really Great. Appreciate it.

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