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NATO After the Summit

Rebuilding Consensus

ROBERT E. HUNTER

CT-331

May 2009

Testimony presented before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,
Subcommittee on European Affairs on May 6, 2009

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NATO After the Summit
Rebuilding Consensus²

Before the Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on European Affairs
United States Senate

May 6, 2009

Madam Chair:

It is an honor to testify before your subcommittee, today.

This hearing is particularly important in the wake of last month's NATO summit in France and Germany. That was properly a celebration of NATO's 60 years of service, as history's most successful alliance. The summit, along with many other steps taken by our new President, Barack Obama, also marked the renewal of US leadership of the Alliance and the regaining of the moral high ground both at home and abroad.

I believe that President Obama spoke for all Americans when he said in Strasbourg:

At the crossroads where we stand today, [our] shared history gives us hope – but it must not give us rest. This generation cannot stand still. We cannot be content merely to celebrate the achievements of the 20th century, or enjoy the comforts of the 21st century; we must learn from the past to build on its success. We must renew our institutions, our alliances. We must seek the solutions to the challenges of this young century.

That is what this hearing is beginning to do, today, and I salute you for your leadership. Indeed, what you are doing here is particularly important because of the absolute requirement that the NATO Alliance earn the support of the Congress and the American people. This subcommittee is very much on the “front lines” of that effort, as you help to set the conditions for the Alliance's success and help to make the judgments about whether it is meeting its responsibilities. And

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there is an added element. We have been fortunate throughout NATO's history that it has always had bipartisan support in the United States. On the Atlantic Alliance, as a nation we do not divide. With your subcommittee here, today, you are following in that tradition and, in a very real sense, you will be making the bipartisan determination for our country about NATO's continuing worth.

Divergence of Views Within the Alliance

I would be less than candid, Madame Chair, if I did not start by saying that NATO faces some challenges that could prove to be of greater magnitude than at many times in the past, because they relate to the Alliance's basic purposes and the degree to which each of its members subscribe to a single set of purposes or even to activities in which NATO is already engaged. During the Cold War, NATO had clarity of purpose; during the period in the decade after the Cold War, there also developed a high degree of clarity of purpose, in pursuit of the goal of helping to create a "Europe whole and free and at peace." Now most of that essential work has been done, and questions are again being raised "What next?" and even "Why NATO at all?" These questions matter in particular at this time because of the fact that the United States and many of its allies are looking at the world in some key respects in somewhat different ways.

This potential divergence of perspective and perhaps even of interest is most notable in regard to the war in Afghanistan, NATO's leading preoccupation at present. All 28 allies have forces and other security personnel deployed there. As in all its other commitments throughout its history, NATO must succeed and it must be seen to succeed.

A key to that success, not just in Afghanistan but for the future of the Alliance more broadly – including the essential political support of the governments, parliaments, and peoples of each allied state – is a common understanding that we are all in this together. And that will depend, in part, on a shared sense that the "all for one and one for all" principle that is at the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty extends to so-called "out of area" operations as well as to the obligations contained in the treaty's Article 5.

But this is not just about the threats and challenges in Afghanistan. It is also about reforging a common understanding across the Atlantic that the NATO Alliance has enduring value and future purpose that merit efforts by all the allies to keep NATO relevant to pursuit of the core interests and values of each member state. That, rather than the immediate situation in Afghanistan, is what I will address today.

As at other key moments in the past, we are in the process of revisiting the basic relationship within the Alliance between the United States and its European and Canadian allies.

Let me be direct. In regard to the proper focus of the Alliance, there are significant differences of view as between different NATO members. To oversimplify, the United States, in particular, is most concerned with threats and challenges that stretch from the Levant to the Hindu Kush. Some allies share this perspective, at least in part. But many are more concerned about developments and challenges closer to home. These include the completion of efforts to stabilize the Balkans; uncertainties about the future of Russia; and the global upheaval in financial markets and the corresponding economic recession.

This last point is particularly instructive. We are focusing in this hearing today on NATO. But the future of the transatlantic relationship in terms of "security" is much broader, and all elements are, in political fact, part of the mix. The revised "bargain" that will help to bridge differences of perspective – even of interest – within NATO must extend beyond NATO and beyond classic security issues.

What the US and the Europeans Want from Each Other

From our perspective, we very much want and need European support in dealing with emergent and actual threats, challenges, problems, and possibilities beyond the North Atlantic area. From the standpoint of security, that includes what we hope will now be the end-game in Iraq – where we are unlikely to receive more than fledgling support from other than a few allies; it includes in particular shared efforts in thwarting and countering terrorism, where we do have clear and effective support from all of our allies and from European institutions that notably include the European Union; and – most particularly – it includes support for what we believe to be a common interest in defeating the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and in helping the Afghan people take charge of their own future. Here, we have been very much disappointed by the performance of many if not most of our allies – with many notable exceptions, including Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands. Indeed, there are elements within the US government that are beginning to wonder about the continued value of the NATO Alliance. You on this subcommittee will be better able than I to judge whether the performance of the allies in Afghanistan will be a test of the continued value of the Alliance within US politics.

For their part, what most of the European allies want most from the United States is threefold:

- To continue demonstrating that we are a "European power," ready and willing to step in to help deal with security problems or concerns on or near the Continent that Europeans on their own may not be able to cope with. More than anything else that means the future of Russia;
- To play a critical role in dealing with the current financial crisis, unprecedented since the Great Depression, and the associated economic downturn. Indeed, this is the area in which the US role in the world is currently most at issue from the viewpoint of our allies. Even with widespread European concerns about US actions such as the invasion of Iraq, the allies retained confidence that we could continue successfully to play the lead role in managing the global financial system. That confidence has been shattered; it must be restored; and
- To exercise prudent leadership elsewhere in the world, which no other country is able – or at least willing – to do. Indeed, a major reason for most allies' commitment of forces to Afghanistan in the International Security Assistance Force was not because all agreed with the US assessment of what needed to be done, but instead to preserve their security relationship with us and the vitality of NATO by being "useful" to the United States. They were also concerned to keep the US from being reduced in its capacity to exercise responsibility, commitment, and leadership in a host of other areas or, equally bad from a European perspective, from turning inward and neglecting European and well as US interests abroad.

These two perspectives, which of course do not exhaust the subject, help to illuminate the elements that need to be part of a rethinking of the transatlantic relationship and of the part that NATO will play within it. From the point of view of our securing greater support from our allies for our principal security agenda, in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, we will also need to address what the allies expect of us, not just in terms of NATO but more broadly.

Seeing President Obama's Trip to Europe in its Entirety

Thus the recent NATO summit has to be viewed in the context of all the stops on President Obama's trip to Europe. Most important from the point of view of allies and many other countries in the world was the G-20 summit in London. It did not succeed at all that was intended for it – no such summit, at such an early stage of creating a new global architecture, could possibly have

done so; but it did demonstrate that the US was again able to act effectively – and to lead – in global finance and related economics – helping to restore basic confidence in the United States and thus helping to provide incentives for the allies to respond more to what we want, including in seemingly unrelated areas.

Two other important events, relevant to the NATO summit, took place before the President went to Strasbourg-Kehl, in addition to US initiatives very much welcomed in Europe like the pledge to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. First, President Obama met with the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev – not, let us note, with the prime minister, Vladimir Putin, who has been most visible in the challenges posed by the Russian Federation during the past few years. The two presidents agreed on an agenda that includes negotiation of a successor treaty to Start I. Let us be clear. The new treaty is more important to the Russians than to us, because it provides them with a chance to be seen as a "great power," whether or not they yet merit that designation. But for the Europeans, the fact of the Obama-Medvedev meeting and the result signaled that the United States will be deeply engaged in dealing with Russia's relations with the West. It showed those countries that are most worried about Russian intentions – the Baltic states in particular – that the United States is attentive to their concerns; and it also showed those countries that do not want any form of new confrontation with Russia – and these include Germany and Italy – that the US president is beginning the process of a renewed positive relationship with Russia provided, of course, that it will reciprocate.

At the same time, by putting the issue of anti-missile sites in Poland and the Czech Republic on hold for the time being, the President showed that he was putting this issue in a broad perspective and also waiting to see whether the Russians, who have vastly exaggerated the importance to their security of these potential deployments, will respond positively to such a US gesture.

The other event that laid positive groundwork for the NATO summit was the meeting in The Hague, fostered by the United States, to consider aid to Afghanistan. Notably, a senior Iranian representative attended – and, as we know, a US official shook hands with him. This was a minor moment; but coupled with what else the President has been doing to try changing the dynamics of the US-Iranian relationship, it helped to reassure the allies both that the United States wants to find a way out of the current dilemma that has a major focus on the Iranian nuclear program and that the US is not likely to move toward the use of force against Iran – a possibility almost universally opposed in Europe and which could strike at the heart of the solidarity of the NATO alliance.

I should mention, as well, another initiative of the Obama administration that provided a positive backdrop for the NATO summit: the President's determination to place a high priority on Arab-Israeli peacemaking, a central goal of every single European government: indeed, a major element in gaining European support for other aspects of US Middle East policies. The appointment of Senator George Mitchell as special envoy sent a strong message to the allies of the President's commitment.

What the President did after the NATO summit was also important for the Alliance: He went to Prague for the annual summit with the European Union leadership. That indicated the importance of working with that institution in helping to meet common problems. My only regret is that that summit did not take place at the same place as the NATO summit and the following day, in order to make the linkage even tighter. Only a half dozen added European leaders would have had to travel to Strasbourg, Kehl, or Baden-Baden. Then the President went to Turkey, where he both began the process of repairing damaged US-Turkish relations and made an important speech addressing the Islamic world. Again, here was a step not directly related to NATO but which has had strong resonance in Europe. Along with the president's efforts on the Palestine issue, this also relates to a cardinal requirement in Europe, with its number one internal challenge, the integration of large numbers of Muslim immigrants.

What NATO Needs to Do

Madam Chair:

This sets the framework for what I believe NATO needs to do now and especially in the year and a half or so before its next summit in Lisbon. My colleagues on this panel will cover many of the key issues. I would like to focus just on three. All of these can be subsumed in the drafting of a new NATO Strategic Concept, to replace the one agreed to at the 1999 Washington Summit and supplemented at Prague (2002), Riga (2006) and Strasbourg-Kehl (2009). As President Obama said, the process of drafting the Strategic Concept can be as important as the product. As a former ambassador to NATO, I very much agree with this view. Indeed, the new Strategic Concept itself will not be a document binding on the allies. Many of the propositions it will enshrine will, as in the past, constitute a "wish list" of what allies would like to do in common or simply diplomatic compromises that might or might not be honored by all the members of the Alliance. Indeed, the most effective elements of a Strategic Concept tend to be those which codify what the Alliance is already doing.

The drafting of this new Strategic Concept will also not essentially be about formulating new ideas for the Alliance. These already exist in abundance and pretty much include all the possibilities. Already, Allied Command Transformation (ACT), under the able leadership of General James Mattis, has completed a Multiple Futures Project – and will release the results this Friday in Brussels – which drew upon the thoughts, ideas, and experience of hundreds of individuals in dozens of research institutes throughout the Alliance and beyond. Thus the process of drafting the Strategic Concept is most importantly about two things: getting governments to agree to take steps and to make commitments that need to be taken and made and which they might heretofore have been reluctant to embrace; and fostering a process of public understanding of the interests and values of the different countries and the Alliance as a whole, and thus promoting political support for what needs to be done. Indeed, by the time the draft Strategic Concept reaches Lisbon, most of the essential work should have been done.

As the process goes forward, Madam Chair, I encourage you and this subcommittee to play a central role, helping to vet ideas and possibilities as they develop, in order to ensure that they meet US political and well as policy requirements.

Three Headlines on the NATO Agenda

My three areas of focus, today, are the following:

First, an agreed recognition and mutual commitment, expressed both in general terms and in specific actions to be taken, of a revised transatlantic compact, in which the Alliance as a whole will agree to be engaged in some areas outside of Europe – although, to be clear, this will not include the creation of a “global NATO”: there will be no basis in common interest among today’s NATO allies for going too far afield. There is already serious discussion about whether Afghanistan has been “a bridge too far.” One important criterion for determining where and how NATO as an Alliance should be engaged “outside of area” needs to be that the US government, the Congress, and the American people believe that we can place serious weight on NATO as a partner in achieving critical US foreign policy and security objectives – in other words, that NATO will continue to be of major use to the United States in pursuit of our national interests.

Indeed, Madam Chair, may I suggest that developing parameters for making judgments in this area be a major task for this subcommittee

A second important criterion is a clear perception that, when NATO does agree to become engaged in a mission, all the allies are prepared, in some politically-significant measure, to share

risks and burdens. Of course, not every ally will take part in every NATO military operation; indeed, this is already true even where all allies fully support a mission. Some allies may not have the required capabilities: nor does this just pit the United States and a few others against the rest. In some areas, such as aspects of peacekeeping, a number of European allies have capacities and experience that the US lacks. The essential point is that there be a sharing of risks and burdens overall; and there be a means for deciding on what this means, within a political framework and process that will ensure that all the allies continue to believe that membership in the Alliance retains fundamental value for them and that each conveys to the others it is, in a relevant way, willing to “pull its weight.”

At the same time and as a necessary element of this compact, the United States would demonstrate its continued commitment to concerns that are close to the hearts of European allies, as it is already doing in regard to Russia, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and seeking non-military ways of dealing with Iran. So doing would help to create incentives for allies to meet US requirements elsewhere; indeed, it could help get allies to do more in Afghanistan. Among other areas of value are the following:

- Renewed willingness of the United States to treat the North Atlantic Council as truly the principal forum for strategic discussions across the Atlantic and also to include in those discussions the full panoply of US and allied strategic interests and concerns worldwide, even where NATO is not and would not become engaged;
- Commitment to retain significant levels of US military forces deployed in Europe and at sea near Europe. There are currently plans to reduce the size of these forces. While of course US force posture abroad needs to be assessed in terms of overall global requirements, I firmly believe that the US needs to keep significant forces deployed on the Continent, not only for use there (as with the Partnership for Peace) and elsewhere, but also as a potent symbol of the continuing US commitment. That may not seem rational; but it is a political fact, in my judgment. These deployed forces are also needed for training and exercises, for keeping the integrated military command structure vibrant, and for garnering influence for the United States in other areas – a principal reason for the deployment of US forces in Europe since the inception of the Alliance; and
- Willingness to review and where appropriate revise US strictures on the sharing of high technology with allied countries. This is particularly important for the Alliance to preserve the essential capability of member nations to undertake military operations together, using compatible equipment, especially in the area of so-called C4ISR (command, control,

communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance). It is also important for defense industry on both sides of the Atlantic, especially with dwindling markets in Europe, to be able to provide the best and most effective, interoperable equipment for allied armed forces and to help sustain European political support for defense spending.

Second, a significant effort to reinvigorate the NATO-Russia Council, to the extent that the Russian Federation is also ready to play its part. Indeed, this is the only element of the original concept of a “Europe whole and free” that has still not been largely accomplished. A potential agenda for discussion and possibly joint activities has been thoroughly discussed in the past. Indeed, in both the NATO-Russia Founding Act of May 1997 and in the decision at the Rome NATO-Russia summit in May 2002, there is a long compendium of possible areas of cooperation. Thus there is no lack of issues. What will be needed is the political will to move forward and most of that depends on decisions to be taken in Moscow about a desire to become a full participant in the future, not just of European security but of other major areas of potential cooperation, extending into places like the Middle East, Central and Southwest Asia, as well as into functional areas that include energy, the environment, and climate change. It will also depend on calculations in Russia that respecting the full sovereignty of its neighbors in all dimensions must be part of its own integration into the outside world. That includes, at the moment, fully honoring its commitments in regard to Georgia, demonstrating that it has no ambition to encroach on Ukraine or the Baltic states, and showing that it will be a positive partner in devising a regime in hydrocarbons, especially natural gas, that will benefit all parties. In return, the Russian Federation should be accorded a full voice in the NATO-Russia Council on all issues of its own concern. Indeed, as NATO develops its Strategic Concept with a central section on relations with the Russian Federation, the NATO-Russia Council should develop a parallel Basic Concept that can set out a framework within which critical issues can be dealt with and the means for doing so. This can include discussion of Russian ideas concerning the overall structure of European security.

Third, emphasis, as always, on the capabilities of individual allies and of the Alliance as a whole to undertake successfully all operations to which it commits itself. Again, as always, much of this requirement will be denominated in military terms. Increasingly, however, situations in which the NATO Alliance is most likely to become engaged include a heavy premium on non-military efforts. This became very clear in both Bosnia and Kosovo, following the success of the NATO-led air campaigns and the deployment of the Implementation/Stabilization and Kosovo Forces. Success in counterinsurgencies and also in aspects of counter-terror operations depends on an integration of instruments of power and influence. Thus, in Afghanistan, it is generally accepted that success

will be a combination of military effort and other, non-military activities, especially in fostering good governance and undertaking reconstruction and development.

In NATO parlance, this combination of different tools to achieve a common end is known as the Comprehensive Approach. It is still in its infancy, in terms of the extent and pace of development that will be required. This needs to be a central feature of NATO activities in the period immediately ahead and also a central theme of the next Strategic Concept. There is a significant debate, however, whether NATO should seek to create all the needed non-military capabilities within the Alliance itself or to draw upon the capacity and the expertise either of individual nations or of other institutions. It is my belief that NATO will be best served by focusing primarily on what it has historically done best, while working with other institutions – including the United Nations, the World Bank, and especially the European Union – to provide the bulk of non-military instruments and activities. Indeed, as already being done in Afghanistan, as in Bosnia and Kosovo, there is high potential also for non-governmental organizations, within a framework that makes sense for both parties.

In my judgment, this is the area of NATO activity that most needs to be developed; and not just as NATO, but in league with other institutions. Within that rubric, the most important step that needs to be taken is the forging of a solid, complementary relationship with the European Union, especially its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). As we know, for a number of years, the emerging relationship between NATO and these EU-based institutions has faced a number of difficulties, not least perceptions on each side that the other would somehow not respect its prerogatives. Recently, however, these concerns have been reduced, aided by a number of factors, of which France's return to full participation in NATO's integrated military command structure stands out. Indeed, the impending appointment of a senior French officer as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in Norfolk could facilitate what I believe to be an important initiative: that command's becoming an adjunct of the European Union as well as of NATO. Certainly, ACT should develop civilian as well as military tools and means of integrating them.

Madam Chair:

I have introduced a few issues today that I believe will be important for the NATO allies to address in the period just ahead. They relate to the transformation of the environment within which the Alliance functions; to the changing nature of threats, challenges, and opportunities; and to new requirements especially in regard to the relationship of military and non-military instruments and activities. Most important, I believe that these issues and the way they are dealt

with by allies on both sides of the Atlantic will in major part determine whether the NATO Alliance can continue to meet the central strategic and security requirements of its members – indeed, for NATO to *have* a future, once again showing that it can rise to the occasion of major historic change.

Thank you.