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**NATO@70: How can the Alliance continue to contribute to peace and freedom in the future?**

NATO at 70 is as relevant as NATO at 40. The security environment is different, the international landscape has drastically evolved and yet the organization has proven to be extremely resilient in the face of emerging challenges. NATO has shifted from being a mighty military block whose chief purpose was deterrence and, should need arise, large-scale conflict; to a rather multi-facetted organisation, and this is where its strength lies. Engaged in peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan, counter-piracy in the Horn of Africa, assistance and deterrence in North America and Europe; strengthened by a growing network of partnerships and alliances in every continent, NATO has successfully demonstrated it is a force for peace and freedom all around the world.

NATO continuously seeks to innovate and anticipate. This is precisely what it should carry on doing, considering the wide array of challenges it currently faces. The most important ones are arguably 1) the doubts expressed by NATO publics and leaders with regards to the organisation’s relevancy; 2) the renewed challenges in NATO’s traditional areas of interest (Europe and Asia); and 3) the increasing complexity of warfare in uncharted domains and regions (space, cyber, Arctic). As such, I believe there are some steps that, if undertaken, would strongly contribute to making NATO set and ready for today’s challenges. These holistic measures include a major public relations campaign, organisational efforts, and structural reforms.

**Engaging the public to foster NATO-civil relationships**

Public support to NATO has hardly ever been as volatile as today. Few NATO heads of States have even publicly expressed concerns regarding the organisation’s relevancy, sowing doubts amongst NATO publics. Revisionist news outlets do brand NATO as a force for evil and destruction, acting against the principles of international law and world peace. Emerging nationalist leaders argue NATO is incompatible with State sovereignty and thus advocate for its dissolution. These opinions may be misguided, but one can hardly ignore the pull they exert on NATO audiences.

This is where NATO should step up and engage the public in a major public relations campaign to ensure NATO-civil relationships remain healthy. Should such an endeavour not be undertaken, one could witness the Alliance’s legitimacy and credibility drastically decrease. **All measures should have for objective to enhance public understanding of NATO’s history, organisation and current challenges to bring about support.** NATO HQ is currently doing a satisfactory work in public relations with academia (organising panels, offering grants to fund NATO-related events etc.) and on social media. What it could do further includes:

* The opening of two NATO museums located in Brussels and Washington so as to inform tourists, military enthusiasts but most of all the general public about NATO’s role in the Cold War and beyond. The museum could host special exhibitions, display military artefacts and historical pictures. The museum would trace NATO’s origins, development, major operations and current challenges. It may cooperate with other military museums to organise temporary exhibitions all throughout Europe and North America.
* The adoption by the Parliamentary Assembly of a motion requesting the displaying of the NATO flag in front of defence ministry buildings and behind the head of States when addressing their respective nations (much like the EU flag is being displayed)
* The adoption by the Parliamentary Assembly of a motion requesting the presence of a NATO multinational contingent at national military parades (France’s Bastille Day parade for instance).
* An effort to foster relations with top European universities to organise conferences and wargames with NATO senior leaders.

It remains that more specific public relations efforts may be too intrusive and overstep State legitimacy. This is precisely why national governments, and not the Alliance per se, should undertake measures. NATO would have a role to play in talking member States into adopting measures that could include:

* The revision of history programs for secondary and high schools to better reflect the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War in Europe; the threat of nuclear war, the importance of NORAD, NATO war plans and deterrence efforts
* The adoption of a nation-wide “NATO day” celebration on April 4th every year to mark the creation of the Alliance.
* A special reference to NATO on national memorials commemorating the fallen soldiers who were operating under a NATO framework.

**Undertaking structural reforms to further foster diplomatic relations, promote peace and enhance deterrence in Europe and Asia.**

NATO faces a dual challenge. On the one hand, it is seeking to adapt to the international pivot to Asia which has extensively drawn in NATO member States (United States, France and Great Britain mostly) but also partners (Japan, South Korea and Australia). On the other hand, NATO ought to maintain a highly deterrent position in an increasingly contested Europe; the Alliance faces geostrategic and political constraints which may limit its ability to preserve peace and freedom on the old continent. These new and old challenges arguably demand structural reforms to make sure the Alliance as an organisation can effectively cope with them.

In NATO’s traditional area of operations, Europe, the steady integration of new member States has widened the scope of the Alliance. Yet, NATO still has not implemented institutional reforms to fully integrate these new member States. Structural efforts may be undertaken to further foster relations with new member States, ensure military readiness over a wide geographical area and enhance overall cohesion and resilience. One may recommend decentralising some of the Alliance and more specifically:

* Moving some headquarters further East like Enhanced Forward Presence – based in Brunssum, Netherlands – to the Baltics or Poland; and parts of Maritime Command (UK) to Deveselu Airbase, Romania – home to NATO’s missile defence systems in the region.
* Creating new headquarters in Eastern Europe. A Black Sea command in Timisoara, Romania headed by a 3-star general could, for example, contribute to better reflecting geostrategic priorities in the Black Sea.

Elsewhere, Asia reveals itself as a new area of interest to NATO. The presence of key partners there and even of member States requires the Alliance to anticipate potential needs in this region. Efforts to foster relations with regional partners and signal resolve at defending member States in the Pacific may necessitate the following steps to be undertaken:

* The establishment of an official liaison office in Melbourne, Australia – at the crossroads between the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Pacific – would facilitate the coordination of policies with regional partners.
* The appointment of a NATO special envoy to the Pacific would further signal the Alliance’s consideration of the region as a major theatre of operation.
* The creation of a diplomatic project that would entail the sailing of NATO warships to pay visits to regional partners. Ultimately, NATO could operate permanently from bases in New Caledonia, France or Guam, United States through a newly created Pacific Fleet Command.

**Creating an organisational apparatus tailored to the increasing complexity of warfare.**

NATO is a military organisation that shifted from an Alliance solely focused on conventional warfare against the Warsaw Pact, to a more balanced force capable of undertaking full-spectrum operations. There still remain military challenges that the Alliance is seemingly ill-prepared to face. Any supra-national apparatus tends to be slow to adapt to the fast-paced environment of military technology; supersonic warheads, sixth-generation fighter jets, military drones, cyber weapons etc. Likewise, these organisations struggle to adapt to the increasing military importance of new domains - cyber, electronic and space, and new methods of war - non-contact, hybrid, information etc.

In the European theatre, there is a concern that unconventional Russian actions in the Baltics may not be detected, or interpreted incorrectly. In order to effectively bypass disinformation and overcome the blur of war, there is a need for a more efficient decision-making structure at the political level. At the moment, the Atlantic Council solely respects the rule of consensus – every nation gets a veto. However, in the case of a rapid, hybrid military action, the Council may not be able to reach consensus and react in due time to prevent the adversary from making irreversible gains. One could therefore suggest to add an institutional mechanism whereby the Secretary General, upon consultation with SACEUR and the Military Committee, could call up an extraordinary Council meeting where a majority vote of two-thirds would be held to determine whether to militarily engage the Alliance.

Besides, NATO ought to better embrace the increasing military importance of new domains and regions and integrate them into its organisational apparatus. Such efforts may include:

* Appointing under-Secretaries specialised in different military areas to better supervise policy in specific areas and developments in specific domains. For instance, there could be an under-Secretary for Space and Cyber Policy, for Arctic Policy, for Weapons Development and Future Warfare etc.
* Releasing comprehensive white papers on Black Sea, Pacific, Arctic and Space policies to better guide the whole Alliance’s thinking about these non-traditional areas of interest to NATO.

**Conclusion**

NATO is undoubtedly a force for peace, but currently faces tough challenges on different levels. First of all, NATO has to deal with increasing revisionist views of the Alliance that facilitate the emergence of a NATO-scepticism. This dynamic requires the undertaking of a major public relations campaign to counter these misguided claims. Museums could be created to better inform the public, specific funds can be allocated to fostering cooperation with prestigious academies; while national programs to better shape the public’s perception of NATO can be implemented by member States.

Secondly, NATO ought to adapt to the international pivot to Asia, while maintaining a strong deterrent position in Europe. In the latter, the Alliance could implement an ambitious Atlantic Council reform to enhance political readiness in the face of Russian deniable actions in the East. Besides, the situation in Asia offers a unique opportunity to foster relations with regional partners and set foot into an area that increasingly draws NATO member States.

Thirdly, the Alliance ought to implement institutional reforms to better reflect the geostrategic realities of modern warfare, along with the expansion of military activities in different domains. Such efforts may include restructuring the Alliance’s civil structure to dedicate specific bureaus to given domains, to think more effectively about contemporary warfare.