2014 represents a strategic crossroads for NATO. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in February, the planned withdrawal of most allied combat forces from Afghanistan by the end of the year, and Washington’s ongoing commitment to ‘rebalance’ to the Asia-Pacific illustrate as much. Addressing these and other topics, NATO members will meet at the “Wales Summit” on 4-5 September 2014 to discuss the way forward for the Alliance. To encourage debate in the policy and academic communities, the Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Royal United Services Institute and NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division organised a workshop on 30 June in Brussels. In discussing present challenges and paving a way forward for NATO, the workshop saw high-level participants come together for a stimulating and in-depth strategic debate. The event showcased a special feature on NATO that was published with the RUSI Journal in advance of the Alliance's Summit in Wales.

Organised with the kind support of NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division.

Report compiled by Daniel Fiott with the assistance of Omar Hegazy and Connor Maloney.

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Photo credit: NATO / Taylor & Francis
The event started with an acknowledgment that the NATO Wales Summit on 4-5 September 2014 would not be an ordinary meeting of Heads of State given Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the troop stand-down in Afghanistan. Audience members learned that NATO will not disappear anytime soon given these challenges, and the Alliance offers its members a unique security organisation. Therefore, the purpose of the Wales Summit is not to answer existential questions about NATO. From cyber to air defence, NATO is a powerful tool that still commands strong public support. The geostrategic context and timing means the Wales Summit should be important.

“The geostrategic context and timing means the Wales Summit should be important”

The introductory session then addressed a simple, yet complex, question: what is the future of NATO? It was argued that Russian President Vladimir Putin had helped partially answer the question – NATO is primarily about collective defence and it will continue to stabilise Europe.

Responding to these points, audience members stated that NATO needs to first and foremost devise a new “transatlantic contract” that sets a high level of ambition for the alliance. Asia is on the rise but it needs to do so in a Western system undergirded by NATO, argued one participant. Another audience member picked up the point about ambition by stating that alliance members needed to understand that NATO is a political project, which requires a serious commitment on capability cooperation. Reacting to the NATO benchmark of 2%, one participant stated that the Wales Summit should focus on the quality of defence spending as well as quantity.

The point about the Wales Summit is to assist NATO members make the strategic transition from Afghanistan towards the need for a credible readiness action plan, an operationalised NATO maritime strategy, a significant step forward on cyber defence and – crucially – contingency plans for situations such as Crimea. If the Wales Summit is to become a great summit NATO members must make efforts in four key areas:

**Russia** – NATO has to think about its future relationship with Russia and, after Moscow’s actions in Crimea, the alliance needs to devise a strategy that responds to the threat of hybrid warfare.

**Capabilities** – NATO needs to develop capabilities that are responsive to 21st century conflict rather than simply aiming to fill capability gaps. There is a definitive need to be thinking about the types of capabilities NATO will require in the next twenty-five years and beyond.

**Resources** – If the Wales Summit recognises that there are serious security challenges that need to be dealt with, then a serious commitment to resources is required. The NATO 2% benchmark on defence spending is a core element of such a commitment.

**Partnerships** – NATO needs to determine how it will build partnerships over the course of the 21st century.

Introductory Session

Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Luis Simón
Institute for European Studies - VUB

Amb. Sir Adam Thomson
UK Permanent Representative to NATO
The panel session began with a debate about NATO post-Afghanistan. It was argued that the main question facing the alliance is what are the right capabilities needed by NATO moving forward. It could be high time for us to move away from counter-insurgency towards an appreciation of military strategy defined more broadly. In NATO the weakness is understanding what military strategies are needed for different types of conflict. If NATO could design a better grand strategy then identifying its capability needs could be made easier. The alliance seems to have forgotten the operational relationship between ends, ways and means and more scholarship is required to enhance NATO's strategic thinking. Participants learned how NATO should avoid getting into a conversation about another “revolution in military affairs” at the Wales Summit. We have been saying for the past twenty years that the world is increasingly dangerous, it was explained, but we have not responded well to these dangers. The strategic response to change is more important than change itself.

The conversation continued with a specific focus on the actions of Russia in eastern Europe. It was stated that Europeans are historically unsuccessful in getting Russia to do what they want. The fact remains that a Western-oriented Ukraine has marked a final humiliation for Moscow following the end of the Cold War – Ukraine occupies a special place in Russian history. Putin is a nostalgic, romantic and cynical man who is trying to create a new balance of power in Europe.

On this basis, audience participants learned that the Wales Summit should focus on re-engaging NATO with hard power challenges. The alliance needs to operate with sticks and carrots vis-à-vis Moscow, as this is the only way to de-escalate the crisis. In this regard, it was argued that NATO needs to provide effective and credible defence for its members in eastern Europe. Quite clearly, Russia believes it is fine to have spheres of influence but NATO must provide a solution for those states that do not want to enter Russia’s orbit.

Another panel presentation focused on NATO’s defence-planning process, and it was argued that the Wales Summit is important because it coincides with the end of NATO’s first defence planning cycle. This process is responsible for translating the level of political ambition into the military capabilities that need to be developed by each NATO member. Yet the paradigm that has been in operation since 2006, one built on crisis management operations, is being questioned. The calls for a return to collective defence within NATO are gaining traction.
The Future of NATO

The RUSI Journal’s special feature (vol. 159, no. 3) on NATO presents a wide-ranging collection of perspectives on the challenges, priorities and opportunities that the Allied heads of state and government will discuss in September. The Journal feature includes contributions by James Bergeron, Antulio J Echevarria II, Jonathan Eyal, Peter Hudson, Julian Lindley-French, Alexander Mattelaer, Magnus Nordenman, Luis Simón and Don Thieme.

Participants learned that a new level of ambition is required but getting the balance between quality and quantity in military capability development is challenging. Real harmonisation on capability development within the alliance needs long-term planning beyond a ten-year period. NATO will need to look at air and maritime surveillance, but it will also have to develop transparent alliance defence planning and respond to the need for common funding. Finally, growing capability specialisation across the alliance runs counter to the Washington Treaty, which calls for NATO allies to have a wide spectrum of capabilities.

“What does this mean for NATO? It was argued that Europeans should be moving towards a new transatlantic security agreement under which Europe would facilitate the US’ pivot to Asia. In concrete terms this would mean that the Europeans should take on more responsibility in their immediate neighbourhood. While there is less of a role for the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy in eastern Europe, the EU should certainly focus on a “from Senegal to Somalia” strategic horizon. A more Europeanised NATO would greatly ease strategic tensions within the alliance.

However, audience participants learned that the Europeans are unlikely to be able to provide security in and around Europe without the US. Europe’s lack of cohesion poses a dilemma for NATO, and thus the US remains the key factor in binding the West together. This being said, the need for Europeans to focus on their eastern and southern neighbourhoods should not result in any neglect of Asia. What happens in Asia does not stay in the region and Europe has legitimate security interests to protect there. In this regard, the US pivot to Asia is in European interests.
The panel began with a general discussion about strategy. All of the panellists agreed that NATO is moving on from Afghanistan to again think about collective defence. The audience heard that NATO must make a distinction between the enduring nature of warfare – to impose one’s political will over an adversary’s competing will – and the characteristics of warfare – which change throughout history from hand-to-hand combat, through to nuclear weapons, to cyber warfare. The point was made that NATO must not become too endeared with the present characteristics of warfare and subsequently lose sight of the nature of war itself.

This point was built on with the argument that Russia’s actions in the Crimea are not a one-off phenomenon, and that Russia has returned as a hostile power that calculates exclusively in terms of military power and geopolitics. Its heavy investment in its military and its audacity to challenge norms advanced by the Western system means that Russia is a revisionist power. The US has understood Russia’s game and it takes it seriously, but the key issue for the US is not Russia per se but how Beijing reads American reactions to the Ukraine crisis. China must understand, heard the audience, that the US is serious about using military power and underwriting the international order through organisations such as NATO. In this respect, it was argued that the West should really give up on the narratives of soft power and globalisation and again focus on the enduring relevance of geography.

Another panellist picked up on the issue of the US pivot and it was argued that it is a bad concept. The danger with the “pivot” is that NATO will need to keep devising a new strategic concept each time US strategy towards Asia evolves. In this regard, it was stated that NATO should re-engage its strategic concept; the enduring question is what role Europeans should fulfil in the alliance. NATO’s comprehensive engagement in crisis management operations is still required, but the alliance needs a conceptual renewal based on the context of less money and an evolving security environment.

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On this basis one of the panellists called for NATO to revisit the meaning of Article 5, as it is certainly not useful for action against
unconventional types of warfare (cyber, economic, etc.). If Article 5 is to mean anything it needs to be completely revised to take account of hybrid threats.

“The West should really give up on the narratives of soft power and globalisation and again focus on the enduring relevance of geography”

Returning to the role for Europe within NATO, participants learned that from the perspective of capabilities and strategic thinking Europe does not really exist. It was argued that NATO is perhaps not the best forum to answer fundamental questions related to European defence. Europe must be able to outline its ambition for defence without the US. Participants learned that the EU is taking steps in the right direction regarding defence, even if the continent remains fragmented on strategic vision and capabilities.

There was also a call by one panellist for NATO to look at what lies behind capability development; namely, defence-industrial cooperation. Indeed, NATO’s ability to defend and deter rests mainly on technological progress. Innovation in defence systems is what should give NATO an edge over its rivals, yet the technological and industrial angle to NATO’s work has been greatly ignored. The Alliance still overwhelmingly relies on legacy capabilities but the characteristics of future warfare are increasingly defined in the cyber, bio, unmanned and nanotechnology domains. The Wales Summit should grapple seriously with the issue of defence and technology, especially as European countries are insufficiently investing in defence R&D.

Finally, it was argued that if Europeans are serious about playing a role in NATO they should address defence market fragmentation and the high costs of producing capabilities in Europe. What is clear is that while Europe remains a capability dwarf, the potential power of the EU’s internal market to re-shape defence markets in Europe should not be overlooked by NATO. The EU has in recent months repeatedly called for closer cooperation with NATO on defence-market issues, and so the Wales Summit might be a good occasion to explore ways to enhance defence-industrial cooperation in Europe for the benefit of NATO and the EU.

About the event organisers

The Institute for European Studies is an academic Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence and a policy think tank that focuses on the European Union in an international setting. The Institute advances academic education and research in various disciplines, and provides services to policy-makers, scholars, stakeholders and the general public.

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