



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

PARLIAMENTARY TRANSATLANTIC FORUM

Washington, D.C., United States
29 November – 1 December 2021

MISSION REPORT*

050 FOR 22 E | Original: English | February 2022

* This Mission Report is presented for information only and does not represent the official view of the Assembly. This report was prepared by Paul Cook, Director of the Economics and Security Committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The annual (21st) Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum was held in Washington, D.C. on 29 November to 1 December 2021. Hosted at the National Defense University (NDU), the event brought together more than 80 members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) from 22 Allied countries and NATO partner Finland to exchange views on key topics on the transatlantic security agenda with high-level US officials and experts.

2. Held under the Chatham House Rule to ensure frank discussions, this year's Forum, which coincided with the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Riga, provided a platform for discussions of the United States' priorities for NATO and other key global challenges as well as initial discussions on the NATO PA's contribution to NATO's next Strategic Concept. US members communicated a very strong Congressional commitment to the transatlantic alliance.

3. As President Biden prepares to convene the first Summit for Democracy, a common thread of discussions was the importance of reaffirming NATO's commitment to shared democratic values. The NATO PA has called for the creation of a Democratic Resilience Centre within NATO to serve as a resource of best practices, networking and cross-fertilisation on democratic benchmarks, available to NATO members, partners and aspirant countries upon request. NATO PA President Gerald E. Connolly and former Assembly President Michael R. Turner have introduced a bipartisan Congressional resolution in support of this initiative. Delegates also welcomed NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's statement in Riga, where he identified protecting NATO's democratic values as first among five essential elements for the new Strategic Concept.

4. The threat from Russia and challenges from China loomed large throughout the Forum's deliberations. Both are skilfully using a combination of military means and hybrid techniques to undermine the international rules-based order, to sow division among the Allies and to bully their neighbours. Russia's renewed military build-up in and around Ukraine was an urgent and serious concern for NATO Allies – as made clear by NATO Foreign Ministers in Riga. In turn, defining a common strategy on China will be one of the key tasks for the new NATO Strategic Concept.

5. Lessons learned from the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan was another main topic, along with the potential consequences of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, new regional dynamics and the need to remain vigilant to the evolving terrorist threat.

6. The meeting also reviewed prospects for strengthened NATO-EU cooperation at a time when the European Union considers its Strategic Compass and NATO its next Strategic Concept, and both organisations are due to sign a new Joint Declaration later this month.

7. The participants of the Forum discussed a range of other acute issues, including developments in the Middle East and the Western Balkans as well as threats and opportunities posed by emerging and disruptive technologies.

8. The Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum is held annually in Washington, D.C. in cooperation with NDU and the Atlantic Council of the United States.

II. ENGAGEMENT AND DETERRENCE: U.S. CHINA POLICY

9. There is no doubt that the strategic, diplomatic, economic, ideological and systemic challenges posed by China now lie at the heart of foreign policy thinking in Washington. Virtually all speakers at the 2021 Parliamentary Transatlantic Forum invoked the Chinese challenge even

when discussing other regions of the world. Speakers consistently asserted that China's ambitions are now global in nature, and over the past decade, that country has grown more authoritarian and intolerant of both internal dissent and external criticism. In the words of one speaker, this is no longer Deng Xiao Ping's China.

10. Several speakers characterised Beijing's crackdown against the Muslim Uighur community as genocidal in nature. China has also struck at fundamental liberties once guaranteed by law in Hong Kong, and the scope for personal autonomy throughout the country has narrowed considerably. The Chinese Communist Party now routinely attacks business leaders who are seen as constructing alternate poles of societal and economic power. Moreover, the Party is essentially exporting this posture in its attacks on any foreign leader, company or cultural figure seen to harbour critical views of the Chinese Communist Party's rule and its ambitions. To take but one of many examples, it attacked the NBA when several of its players criticised China's crackdown in Hong Kong and has harshly sanctioned both Lithuania and Australia for statements about the situation in Taiwan.

11. China's naval build up and far-reaching claims in the South China Sea and beyond have deeply unsettled neighboring countries. China has massively increased its acquisition of naval assets and doubled its coast guard fleet in the East China Sea. This build-up is widely perceived as a direct challenge not only to the interests of regional actors but also to NATO members states and partners. China is also seeking to overturn the rules and norms of the international trading order. It has used its Belt and Road program not only to create infrastructure promoting trade along these routes – which in itself is a legitimate ambition – but has used this massive program to generate intelligence, snuff out criticism of China in these regions, create dependencies in part through debt traps, subvert democratic governance, corrupt local officials and provide a network of bases that could serve its rapidly expanding navy.

12. These efforts are all part of a broad strategic plan charting a course aiming to replace the United States and its allies as the world's preeminent economic and military power. One speaker suggested that China has an advantage in this regard insofar as it actually has a plan, while western governments have been significantly more reactive rather than assertive.

13. That said, as one speaker suggested, China has also overreached. Its behavior has become so aggressive that it is increasingly seen as posing a set of daunting risks to international order and rules. Europe has undergone a rapid change in perspective in the face of the China challenge. EU Member governments felt compelled to put the recently negotiated Comprehensive Agreement on Investment on hold out of legitimate concerns that the Chinese state has systematically employed foreign investments to acquire strategic military advantages. It is noteworthy that European navies are now engaging in freedom of navigation exercises in the Far East to assert these principals in the face of China's claims that what have long been recognised as international waters are now its own. European public opinion about China has grown significantly more negative in recent years, and many feel that it can no longer be trusted. In effect, Chinese aggression has triggered broad based public skepticism about its behavior in both North America and Europe.

14. That said, in military terms, the West still enjoys significant advantage over China. China has few close friends beyond North Korea while the coalition opposing Chinese behavior is growing ever larger. It is also worth noting that the United States' defence budget is three times that of China, but the gap diminishes if seen in purchasing power parity terms. China's military build-up and the expansion of its anti-access and denial and force projection capabilities are particularly concerning. China is also rapidly building up its nuclear military capabilities. It currently possesses 300 nuclear warheads of which half have an inter-continental range. The other half of the nuclear force is regional, and, in this regard, it holds a regional advantage over US nuclear forces. Chinas

military may have time and distance advantages in the Pacific, and these will pose mounting problems for the United States.

15. China has also achieved new advantages in the area of global governance. Some interlocutors argued that this was due largely, although not entirely, to the Trump Administration deeply mistrusting international organisations and multilateralism in general. It essentially abdicated US leadership in these organisations, according to one speaker, and China filled the vacuum. The Biden Administration is seeking to revive US leadership in this regard, but it has much ground to make up, it was argued. China may also have advantages over the United States in the area of strategic planning as its unaccountable government has the luxury of undertaking long-range policy development, while the United States and Europe necessarily operate in short-term political cycles. China can also undertake policy changes very swiftly to respond to opportunities that suddenly emerge.

16. The United States military now sees China as posing the primary challenge to US security and has identified the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as a peer competitor. The PLA's ambition is to become a world class military possessing long-range strike capabilities, sophisticated anti-surface and anti-submarine capacities and a meaningful capacity to operate in both cyber space and in outer space. China is also engaged in an extensive program of nuclear force modernisation aiming to establish by 2030 a fully operational nuclear triad with at least 1000 warheads. As it makes advances in these and other military domains, one speaker warned, the risk of military miscalculation will inexorably rise. China is already making sweeping claims on international waters which the United States and its allies do not recognize. US naval deployments in the Far East, among other things, seek to uphold the principle of free navigation in international waters in direct contradistinction to the false narratives China is advancing. This US effort has both military and commercial implications and US officials see this effort as directly tied to long-term economic interest.

17. China's increasingly aggressive military posture, its espionage efforts, theft of intellectual property and state-funded acquisition of Western technology which is then funneled to the military also have direct implications for European security and commercial interests. There are new risks that China and Russia might coordinate policies so that Russian action in Ukraine might coincide with Chinese action in Taiwan – a confluence of crises that would create a range of policy dilemmas for both Europe and the United States. Europe relies on US reinforcements in times of crisis, but those reinforcements could be delayed if the United States confronted a simultaneous crisis in Asia. Europe, one analyst suggested, absolutely needs to account for this possibility in their own force planning and as resources are allocated for national militaries. The United States is also determined to develop stealthy and unmanned platforms to operate in the region. It is working on new operational concepts to fight and survive in contested spaces while nonetheless maintaining lines of communications with the PLA to manage this competition in a responsible manner.

18. According to several speakers, this altered strategic environment makes it all the more important that NATO and the EU work more closely together, particularly as the challenges China poses are not simply military in nature. Both Europe and the United States, for example, will need to reassess supply chain dependencies on China and make essential adjustments to reduce strategic vulnerabilities across a range of imported products, materials and technologies so that China is not positioned to blackmail the western community of nations. The pandemic in particular has revealed a range of over-dependence on Chinese products, including pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment, inputs and raw materials. Efforts are needed to address these vulnerabilities and to reinforce supply chains which are proving less resilient than previously thought. Members also suggested that it is important for the West to uphold an alternative to China's Belt and Road approach to international trade, which is turning out to be far less beneficial to participating countries than originally envisioned. Europe and North America need to engage

their Asian partners in these efforts, although this does not mean that a NATO-like structure is essential for this highly diverse and expansive region. This also does not mean that avenues of cooperation with China should be blocked. This is not realistic, one speaker suggested, and NATO should consider opening a structured dialogue with China to identify areas of cooperation and to clarify and manage outstanding differences.

III. NEW APPROACHES TO THE MIDDLE EAST

19. Although the Biden Administration assumed the reins of government without identifying the Middle East as a top priority of its foreign policy, it, like its predecessors, cannot ignore this troubled region. One speaker suggested that President Biden took office significantly more focused on domestic matters and particularly the COVID-19 crisis. As suggested above, China quickly emerged as the primary focus of Biden's foreign policy. Rebuilding damaged alliances was also a key priority. It is worth noting that the President had no direct conversations with leaders from the Middle East during the first five weeks of his administration. One speaker suggested, however, that the Middle East has a way of imposing itself on US Administrations even when officials have expressly lowered the region in their list of foreign policy priorities. In this sense, the Biden Administration has not been an exception.

20. The outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas fighters in Gaza in the spring of 2021 marked an important change. That crisis revealed several important shifts in US policy. The Administration welcomed the role Egypt played in mediating despite ongoing concerns about the human rights situation in that country. The Biden Administration has since established several ambitions for its policy in the Middle East. It seeks to rebuild ties with the region with the goal of helping to create conditions for peace, security and prosperity. It is engaged in efforts to fight corruption and seeks to help the region cope with challenges like climate change and COVID-19.

21. The Administration continues to support efforts to defeat ISIS and sees the stability of Iraq as critical to the region's future stability. US forces conduct a range of missions in Iraq including support for NATO's training mission there. It is now primarily playing an advisory role to help stand up Iraqi forces. The US supported the recent elections in Iraq and the administration has conveyed that it looks forward to working with the new government. It will support programs aiming to defend the freedom of expression, the peaceful assembly of citizens, the rights of women and minority communities and judicial accountability. It has also supported Iraq's COVID-19 vaccination program and renewable energy efforts. On the military front, the Administration's ambition is to help Iraq develop a capacity to stand up for itself. This would, among other things, allow it to conduct a more balanced relationship with Iran which has used Shia militia groups to exert influence in that country.

22. Iran has managed to impose itself on the Biden Administration in unwelcome ways. It has developed a significantly more aggressive posture since the Trump Administration withdrew from the JCPOA, according to one analyst, and has since conducted their own policy of maximum pressure. Iranian leaders are now ramping up their nuclear program, denying the IAEA access to its nuclear facilities and enriching uranium up to 60%. In this sense, they have crossed the very thresholds that the JCPOA was explicitly structured to impose. The rockets Hamas fired during the conflict with Israel were a clear demonstration of Iran's forward defense strategy. The Biden Administration now needs to undermine Iran's regional strategy while thwarting its nuclear ambitions. This demands a broad approach, involving diplomatic, economic, military and intelligence tools. Coalition building will be essential. But some positive engagement could be helpful, one speaker indicated. Offering Iran support to fight COVID-19 and climate change might, for example, point to the benefits for Iran if it were to adopt a more accommodationist posture. But this needs to be combined with a strong assertion that the United States, its allies, and its partners

are unwilling to countenance the emergence of a nuclear Iran. The US can communicate this, at least in part, through military exercises with Israel and with its Arab partners.

23. The Abraham Accords between Israel and several Gulf, Middle Eastern and North African states, which were initially orchestrated by the UAE, represent a significant change in the region's security and diplomatic equation. These accords have been premised on a strategic convergence on the nature of the Iranian threat and were built on years of covert cooperation between Israel and several Gulf monarchies. But the agreements have implications for far broader cooperation on economic, climatic, water, food and health policies.

24. The accords will not in themselves resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which continues to unsettle the region. One speaker suggested that it is folly to abandon ambitions for a two-state solution as a one-state solution to this conflict is simply unworkable and would undermine democracy and security in Israel itself. The speaker suggested that although settlement policies have made the two-state solution even more difficult to achieve, an effort to lay the foundations for peace through institution-building and concession-making represents the only feasible way forward. This requires the active engagement of those Arab states supporting the Palestinians. At the same time, the speaker warned, those who argue that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the primary source of the region's insecurity are fundamentally misguided, and this argument has historically been used to absolve governments of their responsibilities for poor governance and human rights abuses.

IV. THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND INNOVATION CHALLENGE

25. Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT's) are changing fundamental assumptions about the conduct of warfare. These technologies cut across a range of capabilities and represent significant advances in computational capacities, big data analytics and biotechnology. These technologies are being mainstreamed into defence systems at a moment when the United States and its allies confront serious military challenges from Russia and China. China, in particular, is fusing civilian and military technological development while engaging in a highly ambitious long-term military development program.

26. But the West has important cards to play. Five of the world's ten most innovative economies are situated in NATO member countries, which also host most of the world's leading research universities. Most of the world's top edge technological firms are also based in the NATO space. But there are signs that this edge is now eroding, in part, because technology developed in the West is increasingly available both legally and illegally to rivals and particularly to China. Red tape in the West has hindered development and technology-sharing among allies and this tends to undermine natural advantages in this domain.

27. NATO's new Strategic Concept will have to address several of these problems. The Defense Investment pledge undertaken by all NATO member countries remains highly relevant in this regard, but more effort is needed to meet the targets adumbrated in that pledge. Allies will also have to adjust to fundamental changes in the paradigm of technology development. It is increasingly evident that disruptive technologies are emerging from commercial rather than expressly military-oriented development projects, and this points to very new ways of doing business in the military technology development and acquisition fields. A speaker noted that more effort is needed to break down barriers to cooperation across industries and across countries. This requires more open defense trading regimes among allies and partners, shared procurement programs, and recognition that old national champion models are increasingly costly, slow and ultimately counterproductive. In the discussions, several European members expressed concern about efforts to "buy American", an approach which could lead to discrimination against European defence manufacturers. Several members of the US delegation agreed that a "buy NATO"

approach would be more helpful. Finally, allied governments should look to harmonise regulatory regimes and standards to reduce friction and costs.

V. PROACTIVE APPROACHES TO RUSSIA AND THE CRISIS IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

28. Vladimir Putin's Russia has adopted a security posture that is weakening the principles undergirding the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. Its aggressive military deployments along the border with Ukraine aim ultimately to ensure control over Ukrainian security policy. One speaker suggested that this large and worrying force could move into Ukraine soon and there is intelligence suggesting that such a move is now under active consideration in the Kremlin. It is here worth noting that President Putin has never conceded that Ukraine is a fully sovereign nation. The crisis in Belarus is not incidental to all of this. Indeed, it is very much part of the equation. Although Lukashenko's ambition is to exact a price on Western governments which have refused to recognise his fraudulent election, the tensions and confusion the situation has wrought has fit well into Putin's efforts to unsettle the borderlands and the European security status quo.

29. One speaker opined that the US Administration was not responding with sufficient alacrity to the situation, suggesting that it has hoped to quell tensions on the Eastern flank of NATO in order to harbour resources for the Pacific. But this policy, the speaker suggested, has failed to recognise the Kremlin's revisionist ambitions. The speaker outlined an ongoing debate both within the Administration and among the foreign policy elite in Washington on how best to cope with crisis. Putin, however, does not hold all of the cards and his country is very vulnerable to Western sanctions. It is also important to recognise that the Kremlin has essentially lost the battle of public opinion in Ukraine, which is increasingly Western in orientation. Moreover, his proxy war in Donbas has not gone well in recent years.

30. The question now is whether he is willing to raise the stakes with a full-fledged military operation. Putin has demonstrated in the past that he is a risk taker, but he has operated within a certain set of margins. The West needs to raise the risk to Putin in order to enhance deterrence. The US Secretary of Defense recently suggested that Putin seeks opportunities, and he is now hunting for advantage in the midst of an unsettled moment in global affairs and along the borders of NATO where the crisis extends northward to Belarus.

31. There are also signs that the Administration has now shifted gears and is more focused on deterrence to manage this crisis. It is warning its allies of the danger and has begun discussions to consider what kind of sanctions might be mounted if Russia were to move. Discussions at the Forum, however, suggest that prospective sanctions impacting the gas sector and planned pipelines remain controversial. The Nordstream 2 Pipeline, in particular, continues to constitute a source of transatlantic tension. There is a strong sense in the US Congress that the initiative should be shelved in light of Russia's revanchist ambitions particularly with regard to Ukraine, which that pipeline will adversely impact, and given the Kremlin's propensity to use gas to undermine European transatlantic solidarity. One speaker noted that Russia depends on Western purchases of its gas at least as much as Europe depends on that energy source.

32. Although there is a debate as to whether or not President Putin actually relishes the thought of a full-scale war in Ukraine, he is clearly working to wring out concessions from the West by threatening conflict. The West, however, must be careful not to sacrifice fundamental principles as to do so would only encourage further Kremlin demands. One speaker suggested that the West needs to demonstrate strong solidarity with Ukraine and provide it military support to raise the costs to Russia of any prospective military incursion. This would reinforce deterrence.

33. Russia's Middle East posture was also discussed. President Putin has looked forward to the end of major fighting in Syria where its military provided decisive support to the Assad regime. Now it welcomes both the normalisation of the Assad regime and the reconstruction of the country, although it notably wants others to fund it. Russia is generally comfortable managing frozen conflicts, but it does have control over the situation in Syria and the refugee crisis has provoked tension with neighboring countries. Its foray into Syria has thus imposed diplomatic costs on the Kremlin. Russia works to speak with all parties in the Middle East, but its primary aim is to undermine US leverage and Western influence. It has adopted a similar posture in Afghanistan, and it has used the departure of NATO forces to develop contacts with the Taliban. But there as well, Russia confronts risks, particularly given the Taliban's history of working with terrorist groups that threaten Russian interests and stability in its own Muslim regions.

34. Russia is engaged in a partnership of convenience with China although the relationship is riddled with mistrust and conflicting interests. Russia is clearly the junior partner given its economic weakness, and this poses difficulties for the Kremlin as it undermines its narrative of great power status and requires unwelcome concessions. One speaker cautioned not to try to appease Russia in an attempt to lure it away from its alliance with China.

35. Members also discussed arms control, and, in this regard, it was suggested that there is a legitimate place for nuclear arms control even in the midst of rising tensions with Russia. It is important, however, to frame nuclear talks in the strategic and diplomatic context in which they unfold. Russia does not hold all the cards or even most of them. By any measure, it is weaker than the West and has few genuine allies. Russia's asymmetric security policies are a function of this weakness. It is essentially better positioned to foster chaos than to construct an order genuinely conducive to its long-range interests. But there is nonetheless scope for successful nuclear weapons agreements given Russia's undeniable interests in a workable degree of strategic stability.

36. One speaker, however, suggested that calling ongoing arms control discussions with Russia "strategic stability talks" is misleading. Stability should not be seen as the sole end of these talks. Nuclear weapons are most useful to a declining power, and if Russia were to give up its nuclear weapons, it would be tantamount to foregoing its great power status. Arms control efforts will have to involve equal and verifiable weapons reduction regimes if they are to prove acceptable to both sides.

37. Russia essentially seeks to reassert dominance over the post-Soviet space while fostering division in the West. The Russians look at arms control as a wedge issue that it can use to divide the West. The West must therefore work assiduously to thwart that particular Russian ambition. The United States therefore has to enter nuclear talks while recognising Russian ambitions and acknowledging that Russia tends to cheat on its arms control obligations – something it clearly did with regard to the CFE agreement. With this in mind, one speaker laid out several considerations for NATO governments as they look to future arms control efforts with Russia.

- 1) Allies should keep arms control somewhat separate from ongoing disputes with Russia. When Russia conducts itself in a manner antithetical to Western interests, the default response should not be simply to cut them off from arms control talks. Those talks can lead to outcomes that enhance security and reduce the risk of nuclear use despite other disputes.
- 2) It is important for governments to treat arms control as a means and not simply as an end. Arms control alone will not deliver security, although it can enhance it. The goal of negotiations with Russia should be to improve security on both sides.
- 3) It is essential that Russia is not allowed to foment divisions in NATO. The decision to end the INF treaty was taken at a point when the United States had been engaged in talks with Russia on the INF for eight years. The decision to withdraw due to Russian

non-compliance was put before the North Atlantic Council to clarify why the decision had to be taken, and classified information was shared to provide evidence of consistent Russian violations. That kind of consultation remains essential.

- 4) It is very important to convey to Russia that its perpetual posture of intimidation cannot be tolerated.
- 5) Matters pertaining to missile defense will have to be addressed even if Russia is perfectly aware that the missile defense systems NATO has fielded are useless against its strategic nuclear force. That said, Russia cannot be allowed to divide the West on this particular matter.

VI. THE US PERSPECTIVE ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

38. The Biden Administration is concerned that the situation in the Western Balkans is worsening, and that part of the problem has been a degree of international neglect. A speaker suggested that given the myriad domestic and international challenges the United States confronts, it had lost a degree of focus on the Western Balkans. But the situation there now demands significantly more Western attention as malign actors, including Russia, are again chipping away at the foundations of regional stability. The United States has essentially ceded the field to the European Union, one speaker argued, but the EU has also demonstrated a degree of Balkans fatigue. Institutional weaknesses, economic crisis, pervasive corruption and the role of both malign domestic and external actors have brought parts of the region to the brink of crisis. Significant support is also needed for local governments, which, in some respects, are currently better positioned than some national governments to make a positive difference in the lives of the region's inhabitants.

39. NATO and the EU need to fashion a new approach to the region and to consider making a new set of economic and political investments in it. Efforts are needed to reduce tensions between Belgrade and Pristina, while Bosnia-Herzegovina needs support to build a new institutional framework to address the problem of failing governance in that country. President Biden has named Christopher Hill, a very experienced and skillful ambassador to Serbia, and this signals newfound US determination to address the region's challenges more directly than in recent years.

VII. MEETING CRITICAL CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

40. Addressing long range challenges to Western democracies, one speaker suggested that NATO's current Strategic Concept is woefully outdated as it was designed for a strategic landscape that no longer exists. The Atlantic Alliance is now operating in an era of disruption in which the tools of chaos are not simply military in nature. Moreover, the critical functions of international society are now deeply integrated and interdependent, and this has opened up new vulnerabilities. Innovation and pace are now as important as space in strategic terms, that speaker suggested. Resilience demands a degree of societal and governmental agility in the face of these new and very serious threats. Policy makers and legislators now need to think about how to defend themselves in an era of connectedness. Leaders ought to consider what exactly it is that makes western societies strong and resilient. Democracy will remain a central source of societal resilience. In this regard, it is very important that NATO find a way to reemphasise its founding values as a critical element of its inherent strength. NATO itself has several core tasks including defence and deterrence but preserving the critical functioning of society is fundamental. President Biden has made renewing democracy a key theme of his presidency and plans for the summit on democracy placed the matter squarely in the centre of American diplomacy. The US Congress is hosting a series of discussions on defending democracy and countering disinformation.

41. An authoritarian resurgence is underway not only beyond NATO but also, to some extent, within it, according to one speaker. This is evident on both sides of the Atlantic. Many of the old safeguards to the democratic order that were once seen as untouchable in the West are now under pressure. China and Russia are leading the way, but the movement has seeped into western societies. Corruption is also posing a challenge as it counters democratic governance while empowering authoritarian forces operating in the international system. The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is illustrative of the corrosive and devastating impact of corruption. NATO's democracies need to band together to build greater resilience in the face of these challenges. NATO's democracies also need to demonstrate solidarity with those democracies that are not member states.

42. One speaker expressed optimism about America's capacity to face down this threat, suggesting that the demand for democracy remains vital in the United States. Public demands for democracy will not recede. This global phenomenon remains an important source of strength and will create opportunities for democratic renewal in many countries. This is evident, for example, in Belarus where the public has unambiguously demanded a voice in government even in the face of harsh repression. Dictatorships are hard pressed to quell these ambitions. But the challenge is how best to give this global impulse oxygen. This demands solidarity among like-minded partners operating with a sense of confidence about the righteousness of the democratic cause. Collective responses invariably will be more powerful than purely national responses, and support is needed for those carrying out the struggle at the ground level. In this important way, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has a vital role to play in forging democratic solidarity and helping to transform it into democratic resilience.

VIII. CONCLUSION

43. Several key themes emerged over the course of the Forum. Clearly, Russia can no longer be considered a partner. It poses a serious threat to stability and to democratic rule, and its ambitions are expanding. An ever more powerful and revanchist China also challenges the international order, and there is an apparent convergence of perceptions about the nature of this challenge within NATO itself. Meanwhile NATO member governments confront a growing list of specific challenges some of which are directly linked to Russian and Chinese behavior that will need to be addressed including disruptive technologies, cyber and hybrid war, the erosion of arms control regimes, transnational migration, threats to the supply, corruption and climate change. The new Strategic Concept will have to remain mindful of NATO's core tasks including collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security while one speaker suggested adding a fourth core task focused on strengthening resilience in the face of disruptions to crucial societal function. Indeed, disruption is apparent across the board and allied governments must develop new approaches to mitigate the myriad risks that this poses. At the same time, governments must focus on the democratic values that unite them as these provide a shared sense of purpose.

44. The United States has raised the alarm about China and is intensely interested in working with its allies to cope with the challenge that country now poses. It is employing a whole-of-government approach and sees a strong and capable Europe as a critical partner. NATO's new Strategic Concept offers an opportunity for allies to address these challenges across the board. But allies will need to dedicate the resources and sustain commitments to developing essential capabilities needed to enhance security.

45. They will also need to derive critical lessons from the unhappy outcome of the war in Afghanistan. The withdrawal highlighted the need to improve coordination among the Allies. Experts warned of the potential consequences of a burgeoning humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, including mass migration, and urged Allied nations to provide more humanitarian assistance to the

people of Afghanistan. They also warned that the Taliban takeover could embolden other extremist groups both within and outside Afghanistan.

46. Allied governments are now roughly halfway through the first phase of consultations on the new Strategic Concept and the deliberations have engaged a range of stakeholders including parliamentarians. Whatever concept emerging from this complex process, it will have to be nimble and adaptable to meet future challenges and not just those that are evident today.
