

Dr. Kiron Skinner, U.S. State Department
Dr. Benedetta Berti. NATO
Mr. Maciej Pisarski, Poland
Ambassador Raimonda Murmokaite, Lithuania
Ambassador Andris Razāns, Latvia
Ambassador Eerik Marmei, Estonia

Moderator: Mr. David Ensor
Director - Project for Media and National Security

NATO Policy Planning

Project for Media and National Security
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Special Defense Writers Group Conversation

Moderator: Welcome. I'm very happy to have some of the members of the Defense Writers Group and other journalists who are with us today for a conversation with Dr. Skinner and her colleagues in Policy Planning at NATO, and at several of our very important central European allies nations. I'll get the ball rolling with maybe a question or two and then we could open it up to the rest of my colleagues. This is on the record.

This is a gathering of staff of senior people on policy in the lead-up to the Ministerial which starts Wednesday.

Could I ask you to introduce yourself, maybe name and title and about three sentences on what you're doing here. Then we'll get into more of a Q&A. Dr. Skinner would you like to start?

Dr. Skinner: Thank you all for being here. I'm Kiron Skinner, Director of Policy Planning since September 4, 2018. Prior to taking this job I was and still am, but on leave, a Professor at Carnegie Mellon University, and a Fellow at the Hoover Institution. Most of that time I was an SGE, Special Government Employee at the Pentagon, which I ended right before taking this job.

Dr. Berti: Good afternoon. I'm Benedetta Berti. I am the head of Policy Planning in the Office of the Secretary General at NATO and I'm here because together with Dr. Skinner we are organizing

over the next couple of days the first meeting of the Heads of Policy Planning from across the Alliance. We're having a two-days gathering to talk about some of the issues that we think are of strategic significance to the Alliance and see how we can tackle and frame them together as [inaudible]. That's why we're in DC with some of our colleagues.

Ambassador Murmokaite: I'm Raimonda Murmokaite. I'm Security Policy in Transatlantic Relations Department, Director, for the Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. Basically being here on the eve of the NATO Ministerial dedicated to 70th Anniversary.

Mr. Pisarski: Good afternoon, Maciej Pisarski. I'm head of the Policy Planning team at the Polish Foreign Ministry, and I'm part of this gathering. The group that has met for the first time at the 70th Anniversary of creating NATO but also from our perspective, this is the 20th Anniversary of Poland's membership in NATO as it transitioned from being an aspirant country that saw security guarantees to a country that has become also an [inaudible] as we see ourselves. We also have some important ongoing issues on our plate related to our security and we can address them within the [inaudible]. Thank you.

Ambassador Razāns: Good afternoon to everybody. My name is Andris Razāns, Director of Latvian Policy Planning. Before then I was my country's Ambassador to U.S. from 2012 to 2016, and I'm glad to be back. It's a very important time for countries like mine with 15 years in NATO. That's a very important date, keeping in mind that it was about enlightenment of NATO certain way, the Baltic states. [Inaudible] at that time and nobody really hoped or expected that we might be joining that soon. And that's a very important moment, joining NATO. An analogy, well, every one of us certainly has experienced a time of birth. We don't remember exactly what happened, but we are born. From that point of view, joining NATO was kind of a first for Latvia. That's something that we can't remember in actual experience. I'm ready to talk to you and answer your questions.

Ambassador Marmei: Hello, my name is Eerik Marmei, Policy Planning Director for Estonia, Estonian Foreign Ministry. And like Andris, I served as Estonian Ambassador here in the United

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States as well, 2014-2017. So I've been dealing with all the many security policy aspects of our relationship with the U.S. but also many others, specifically in recent five years dealing in security policy since I joined the Foreign Service in 1993. So right after we gained independence. I'd be also happy to answer your questions today in this very distinguished setting. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you very much. I'm not a journalist anymore, but I was one for 35 years, and it will be obvious because I can't help myself in certain ways. I have rather journalistic kinds of questions. And I'll get the ball rolling and then my colleagues will step in. They'll just pose questions to whoever.

I'd actually like to ask my first question of the last group here, Poland and the Baltics. In the last period of time Russian annexed Crimea from Ukraine, has been waging a war in Eastern Ukraine through proxies, has increased the number of airspace violations over the Baltics, done a pretty large-scale disinformation campaign, done some nuclear signaling even, and Russian officials have been quoted as saying if there was in the Baltics Russia would use tactical nuclear weapons.

So I assume that some of these developments have been the subject of policy planners' discussions while here, or will be expected to shape your discussions. I'd be interested in knowing maybe from you, Mr. Pisarski, and your colleagues, the Ambassadors from the Baltics, do you think that NATO's doing enough to deter Russian aggression in your region? And if not, what should NATO do?

Mr. Pisarski: I think that NATO has reacted quite swiftly to the rapid change in our security environment, that it was a very bad change as you mentioned after Crimea and Ukraine.

One has to remember that NATO, infrastructure of NATO, units were not deployed in combat [in the] Baltic states and in the other so-called [universe]. So that put us in a kind of vulnerable position when Russia stepped up with its aggressive posture.

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But since then a lot has been done in order to rectify the problem. We have NATO units stationed in our countries, in Poland and the Baltic states. These are battalions of real fighting qualities. There is also a U.S. brigade that was also deployed in Poland and it is participating in training activities in Poland and the Baltic states and Black Sea states to, you know, [inaudible] out the kind of response.

NATO came up with this strategy of deterrence, and this is [something] we wanted, because what we want to do is to make sure that no hot war breaks out on the NATO border, although as you mentioned [inaudible] is quite close. But to make deterrence effective we need to be credible and we need to put the actual real actions behind our words, and that process has started and it's being continued and has brought some [inaudible].

Now the question is how we should sustain the momentum and develop more robust presence and vigorous response to the threat that is kind of long-lasting. It won't go away in a few years. This is why we are talking about how to increase the NATO and U.S. presence in our region, because we believe this is the only effective way to stem any aggression, to prevent any aggression and God forgive, if the aggression takes place, we will be in a much better place to respond quickly to the crisis if there is more NATO and U.S. presence.

Because we need to remember Russia has the [time] and the geography advantage in our region.

Moderator: Can I ask you, Ambassador Razāns, you have NATO forces in your country but you don't have, I don't think, any U.S. forces there. Is that right?

Ambassador Razāns: Not exactly.

Moderator: There are some?

Ambassador Razāns: Yes.

Moderator: I've been reading up for this session, and I've been reading, it probably got me in more trouble than anything else, but War on the Rocks and some of the other web sites, and they talk about a scenario they worry about in which a piece of Latvia is seized on very short notice before NATO has a chance to respond. Does that scenario worry you at all? And do you feel that NATO's doing everything it could to help Latvia?

Ambassador Razāns: Certainly that kind of scenario, if implemented, should worry each and every state against such scenarios. Why? Certainly it's not a question about permanent U.S. presence in Latvia, but a [notational] basis, U.S. in [one] form always present. And there's no difference when it comes to Latvia.

As Maciej said, the problem in the Baltics is that geographically we're quite a distance from the rest of Europe and that means we can't have the luxury of long planning especially on security and defense. We need to have capabilities and an ability to bring force existing [inaudible] in the case of that kind of scenario with us. We need that NATO structures work extremely, it's mostly the international troops, because it's not only about U.S. military engagement, it's a NATO creation and that means European NATO allies have put their skin the game as well.

In Latvia's case when it comes to NATO [inaudible] and battalions. Canadian troops [have actually lead] the battalion, but there are many European nations, NATO allies participate. And the only way to get that many allies, well they have their [own] military cultures and different procedures, so that takes time certainly to adjust to and make sure that things can work smoothly.

But I think that until now NATO has done really what we have been expecting. And besides that, it's not only a question where we are part of NATO and there are certain obligations for each and every allied member state including my beloved Latvia. Since what happened in Georgia, more specifically what happened in Ukraine six years later, Latvia has done everything really to adjust our budgetary spending as well when it comes to the defense spending. We have [reached famous] 2 percent already and your government has indicated that if it's a question about spending more, our government is ready to spend more. We have

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been investing really in critical capabilities that are required by NATO planning, so basically we are doing, I think, for time being what we can do. But certainly one thing we cannot deal with is the [still] balance between Russian military presence in Northwestern part of Russia and NATO part of Northeastern Europe is a very good friend. It's staggering. And that means in case, if there is additional NATO prepositioning in our region, certainly we'd welcome, but those [shouldn't] be national arrangements, it's regional. Thank you.

Moderator: Let me just turn to Dr. Skinner and then after that we'll go to you.

Tell us what's going on here. Why are you having this meeting and what difference will it make to the Ministerial? What are you trying to accomplish?

Dr. Skinner: NATO is 70, as you know, and a number of us decided, in particular the NATO Policy Planning Director, Benedetta Berti and I, we were talking at the Mediterranean Dialogue last November in Rome about the need for NATO countries to have a forum outside of the ministerial level to discuss the very issues that you're asking us about today. We felt that the policy planning level was an appropriate one because we can be a little bit, I would say, looser in our conversations. Where many of us are at, that makes it hard. And we are charged with thinking about the long term strategic environment. We're not making day-to-day policy decisions but we do attempt to enforce those with analysis and a discussion about the future and even about historical precedents that might affect real-time decisions.

So this is the first-ever Policy Planning Conference. Twenty-nine NATO countries, everyone's represented, plus one or two over two days. We decided before the NATO Ministerial it would be important for us to meet so that we could be able to go back to our Foreign Ministers and tell them what we're thinking, a little bit off the record, but with a different point of view than they may hear from other than, in kind of more formal channels through the Bureau.

So this is our first-ever. We hope to keep it going. We're already talking about smaller efforts among the NATO Ministers, smaller multilateral discussions on issues like the one surrounding the eastern flank. But this is really our effort to

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influence the conversation by bringing our interdisciplinary expertise to bear and to see if we can continue to build another structure within the overall NATO which is at the policy planning level.

DWG: Courtney McBride with the Wall Street Journal.

Dr. Skinner, you mentioned all 29 NATO countries are represented plus one or two. I was wondering if you could tell us the others who are represented here?

Dr. Skinner: Yes, in addition to the 29 countries, and I think I was just told by the Greek Ambassador that he's representing the policy planners. In some cases it's another government official. We have the EU Policy Planning Directorate, some members from EU as well. And then a broader group of NATO Headquarters and North Macedonia as well. That's the broader group.

DWG: Thanks. And then just a quick question on the Baltics.

Mr. Pisarski, you mentioned the U.S. and NATO troop presence presumably for the event, for [inaudible] Group in Poland. But you said more needs to be done. I was just wondering what Poland envisions. Is that enhanced prepositioning? Or is that a larger presence than just battalion and brigade size? How is that discussion going?

Mr. Pisarski: Thank you very much.

There are two strands of efforts with the same goal. This is the increased deterrence and strengthening of our security. And one part is doing, by NATO this is in terms of the form of presence. This is a NATO operation and a process of the stationing of the battalion groups. In the case of Poland it's U.S.-led.

In addition to these NATO activities and efforts, there is a U.S. effort and these are not brigades stationed in Poland, but it's operating across the region.

So just to make this distinction, this is not a NATO operation, it's U.S.. But basically it is to achieve the same goal.

Right now we are discussing with the United States [inaudible] but more of the increasing, of the U.S. presence in Poland. And

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while the negotiations are ongoing, so this is very difficult for me to comment on the specifics, but there is multiple of options on the table and we are looking for innovative and [inaudible] solutions, so to say.

The objective is to make this policy a long-lasting one as long-lasting are the present challenges that we are trying to answer through this voice.

Ambassador Marme: If I may just add to my Polish colleague, I think one thing I want to underline here is that it is very important that NATO forces [as well as] U.S. forces are in the region. In the Baltics, in Poland. You can call it eastern flank, whatever.

The fact is also that after Crimea U.S. deployed very rapidly to all four countries. Those units were rather small, company size. They stayed in Poland but they left the Baltic states. Andris said that they left some U.S. troops there. I think he talked about the helicopter presence, the troops there. This was not the case with Estonia, and I'm not sure about Lithuania but probably the same.

I think it is very important that U.S. presence and its flag is flying in all of these countries.

Now when U.S. is negotiating with Poland on more presence in Poland, the Baltic states, and I can certainly speak on behalf of Estonia, would like to see those troops rotate also to the Baltic states on a regular basis. They should have extensive exercises in the Baltic region beyond the so-called Suwalki Gap which is the border between Lithuania and Poland, which very many strategic experts talk about, how to deal with the Suwalki Gap. We don't want to see the situation going to that direction that all the troops are south of Suwalki Gap. That includes the American force.

I think NATO has done a pretty good job since Wales with the budget buildup and the pledge, investment pledge. Also the Warsaw decision on [ENP], the [inaudible] presence troops which are all in all four countries. But more needs to be done.

NATO needs to plan more so the plans, the defense plans that NATO has for the region are actually credible and they are exercised.

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We need more troops, clearly, in the region. We need more prepositioning of heavy equipment in the region. The United States is moving towards that goal very visibly. The so-called EDI Program which is part of the NDAA, the European Deterrence Initiative, which has increased from \$800 million to \$6.4 billion since the American contribution to European and the regional security has been strong, but we want to see more.

Because what Maciej just said, this is a very important point, why do we need to do it is that Russia still has the time advantage over NATO in the region and also decision-making advantage. NATO is the organization 29, and it's not that fast in decision-making. So we have to look into the process of decision-making as well. Giving maybe SACEUR more power to decide on things.

We also need to work more with EU when it comes to military mobility, so that the troops which are stationed in Germany and Poland can move fast in either direction, to north or south, wherever the need is. And we have to guarantee that the security of Europe, or NATO, is indivisible. And that all territories and people are defended in the same way.

So we still have a long way to go but NATO is on the right track.

DWG: Dimitry, TASS. I have a question for Dr. Skinner and Dr. Berti.

Media: Sure. I wanted to ask you about NATO-Russia engagement. You were speaking how you take a longer term view on that and everything else, and I wanted to ask you if in your opinion the two sides, NATO and Russia, moved beyond the no return point so to say, where there is virtually no cooperation, and we're sort of entering into a long period of non-engagement, non-cooperation, mutual threats and things of that nature. Is actually Cold War 2.0, however you want to call that.

And Dr. Berti, I would appreciate your thoughts on that as well. Thank you.

Dr. Skinner: First of all I'll clarify saying even at the height of the Cold War there was always engagement with the Soviet

Union. And the larger version of what we now have has [discretion]. So there wasn't a period where we weren't engaged. And even during that late chill in relations around 1983 when President Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire and announced SDI which later was called Star Wars, we were privately negotiating with the Kremlin to release the Americans, the five or seven Pentecostals who were living at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. So that happened. We didn't say anything about it until the Cold War ended. I just say that as an example of the enduring American commitment to engaging with Russia and with adversaries.

So our principle adversaries now in an area of renewed great power competition are clearly China, Russia and I guess you could put Iran in that category. There are negotiations, discussions, and engagement, Track 1 and Track 2, with all of the competitors including Russia. But we are, just to reassure our NATO members, taking the Russia threat very seriously. You know as well as I do the sheer number of sanctions against Russia related to Crimea, and we're united in continuing those with support from Europeans.

NATO defense spending since 2016 has increased substantially, I think upwards of \$100 billion, depending on how you count those numbers, for mutual defense. The readiness of [inaudible] has already been assessed which is very crucial for sending a strong signal to Russia about NATO readiness. America's own defense posture, defense spending I think is clear as well. Then we have continual unvarnished language by U.S. principals, foreign policy leaders and the President about the unacceptable nature of Crimea and Russian presence in Georgia as well.

So I think we have a fairly robust posture. In terms of the future I think if Russia responds to all of these measures which I think are formidable, NATO stands ready to engage. But we're engaged in really a level of deterrence that knits us together in facing the Russian threat.

Dr. Berti: I agree with all that, and I would say that NATO's,

the allies' current policy with respect to Russia is directly actional to post 2014 security environment. Before that we had a few years during which dialogue was more robust, during which we talked to Russia as a partner. Of course that changed when Russia's actions changed. So after 2014 we have shifted to the policy that remains very much in place today which is strong defense and deterrence and dialogue. Those two pillars have been reconfirmed at the last summit in Brussels. I think they will continue to be part of the way we deal with Russia which is very simple, as Dr. Skinner said. If Russia does change its behavior, including with respect to illegal annexation of Crimea, then we will reconsider or reopen the discussion. But until that changes there cannot be return to business as usual.

At the same time that does not mean that NATO as an alliance and individual allies do not have a dialogue with Russia. That very much happens. It should happen. We have regular NATO-Russia Council. To be completely honest the situation right now is not easy because Russia's behavior has not been easy. It's been increasingly more assertive on a number of domains, from the cyber domain to the hybrid domain to some worrisome signaling. So it's not the easiest of the environments, but we continue. And we stay committed to dialogue also because one of the points we make as an alliance over and over again is we don't want to isolate Russia. We don't want another Cold War. We don't want an arms race. But we do want to fulfill our mission which is to provide for the security of the EuroAtlantic Alliance, and that cannot be done if we don't get Russia back into compliance and back to respect the rules-based international order.

So the policy I think remains very clear and we'll review it when Russia decides to review its behavior. I think in that sense it's crystal clear what the Alliance wants to do.

Dr. Skinner: If I can just add to that. I do agree with your points. Also the hardest scenario in international relations is to try to on one track with a competitor to show strength and compete, but on the other side be ready to challenge where necessary or respond, and that's where we are from Russia. This

is a hard one in international relations, and that has formed our decision to pull out of the INF Treaty. But when you look around the globe, Russia is not really cooperating with the rule of law and international treaties and agreements and understandings and has more of an aggressive policy and that affects what NATO does.

Today we didn't talk so much about the eastern flank, we talked about fragile states and cyber security and a number of other issues. But we have so much in common in all of these areas. In many of them Russia plays a menacing role.

DWG: Hi, Julian Borger from The Guardian. I wanted to ask whether there was any discussion about what happens after INF and whether there is any discussion of a possible successor or can a [non-deployment] agreement with Russia, not deploying these missiles in the European land mass, American land mass.

Dr. Skinner: That hasn't been an issue of discussion today, but to speak to that issue, we're coming on August with a final pullout of that treaty. The U.S., especially here at State, we are thinking about a post INF world. That's not where we would want to have been, but the Russians have not been in compliance for a very long time. So when we think about the disadvantage that the U.S. was faced by remaining within the treaty, especially given the number of weapons that the Chinese have in that space, there's a bigger competitive environment that the U.S. has to think about. So it makes no sense to be in the treaty if only one side is complying.

This is part of a larger picture that we're painting of Russia at this time, and I think a more unified NATO on some of the defense issues that we're talking about will help Russia perhaps recalculate their behavior and their interests.

Dr. Berti: Maybe I can add a couple of thoughts. Just very quickly, to second on that. I think as an alliance there's been, again, some very clear backing of the United States assessment and the shared assessment by allies that Russia has not been in compliance with INF. And I think what we have been saying and

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what we will continue to say until August 2nd is now there is a window, the last window of opportunity for Russia to come back into compliance with the treaty. That would be a best case scenario.

However we also have to be realistic. In order to be realistic I think we need to be taking seriously into consideration the possibility that Russia will not return into compliance with the treaty and that we will have to deal with a post INF world that requires for us as an alliance, and that's something that we're doing collectively, to think about what are the implications for our collective security when we're dealing with more Russian dual-capable missiles in Europe, and that is something we are thinking about, we are reviewing as an alliance. What are the security implications of that post INF scenario? It's early to pre-judge what the collective results of our consultation will be, but there is an active involvement by all the allies within NATO to think about what do we need to do to be prepared come August 3rd. But of course our message continues to be now is the last window of opportunity for Russia to return into compliance.

Ambassador Murmokaite: If I might add just one particular point on the story, is simply from our national point of view we find it worrying that some certain false equivalencies are being created with regards to INF withdrawal. When you look at really articles about the withdrawal in the United States the focus is the United States is withdrawing from the INF, while forgetting that for quite a long period of time the United States has been worried about Russian actions on INF and violations on INF. And this did attract attention. And not the pretense is that somebody else is violating the agreement. We have to be very clear and put the blame squarely on Russia's side with regards to the INF agreement, withdrawal from the INF and violations of the INF agreement.

Going back to the issue of what my colleagues have discussed on what NATO could do more, from my national perspective I think what matters to us very much is besides the shortness of plans, deterrence plans because Russia is capable of acting within much

shorter time parameters as my colleagues have said. So deterrence has to be credible and we have to have very credible, very serious deterrence plans for short notice scenarios. And that's where at least our feeling is that NATO is still lacking.

The other thing is, joint enablement. In simpler terms, perhaps, we have the EFB certainly and that's been a very valuable, very useful addition to our defense, but EFB is basically land based. What we're still missing in terms of EFB in our region is the maritime reinforcement and air reinforcement, air defenses.

Brussels summit has underlined among the various documents, important documents that have been adopted in Brussels. One of the points that has been underlined is studying the possibility of transforming the air policing that we currently have, and that has been very important for us, into air defense capability and that will be part, again, of the broader reinforcement strategy.

For our region, given that anti-access area denial activities on behalf of Russia have been going on and have been making defenses increasingly difficult. Particularly again, at the short term scenarios. If we look into that lack of maritime and air defense capabilities. So I think those need to be certainly addressed.

Media: Robbie Kramer with Foreign Policy. The Trump administration has warned European allies against Chinese investment, and critical infrastructure, telecommunications. I know China's not a natural topic of discussion for NATO, but I'm wondering is that coming up in the Policy Planning Conference? Will it come up in the Ministerial? What are the tangible things that can be done in the NATO forum on that?

Dr. Skinner: Yes, in fact much of the conference is organized around European concerns within NATO. That's something that Benedetta and I agree to and that's one of the reasons that we motivated the conference with a discussion of fragile states. That's critical to the U.S. as well. Our presence in Afghanistan, Syria, just look around the globe.

But on the issue of China, critical infrastructure, that will be a topic discussed tomorrow, and it is as important for NATO as it is for us and how the European countries address China's involvement across all of their sectors is central to American security. So we're hoping to both participate in that discussion and help frame it as well.

Dr. Berti: First of all, one of the advantages of this type of format, and Dr. Skinner already mentioned that we do have a little bit of a broader set of topics that would be on a classic ministerial agenda, so we're dealing a lot with NATO's 70 years with the future challenges. We're talking about artificial intelligence. We're talking about the changes in the way we will fight wars. We are talking about prevention, crisis management. So it's a broader set of themes. And within that, we thought it was very important to start framing the China discussion. If I go on the alliance, the broader alliance, beyond just the policy planning with its shall we say broader set of topics that it can discuss, I would say that this is something that we are starting to discuss as an alliance. I think that's, per se, significant. What exactly will that discussion reveal? I think it's premature to discuss it because we're just in the preliminary stages, but I think it's very significant that as an alliance we come to terms with the fact that when we talk about the future of our security, we'll have to factor in the role of emerging powers including China. What will be their footprint on the geo-economic, geopolitical strategics here? It's a discussion. It's started and I think we are very well placed to have it as a transatlantic community, but we are in the early days.

Media: A quick follow-up. I appreciate the discussions are premature, but it seems like some of the allies have not heeded the advice of the Trump administration. Germany has not, you know [inaudible] Huawei. Italy has now joined, officially partnered with One Belt One Road China. Do you feel like there's consensus among allies yet? Or is there still a lot of disagreement in there?

Dr. Berti: I feel that there are different framing of the

issues, but there is a shared understanding that this is something we need to discuss as an alliance. We need to take stock of our critical vulnerabilities, of the impact of external investments on our critical infrastructure, so I would broaden it. There are different approaches, but so there are many issues, but that doesn't mean that, and I do believe we will come to a common strategic understanding of where we need to go on this one.

Again, because this is an emerging issue, yes, there are different positions. Many of those positions are still evolving in many of the allied countries and we'll see them maturing in the years to come. As an alliance we hope to be one of the [inaudible] to facilitate this dialogue. But it is already for many.

DWG: Patrick Tucker, Defense One

If you'll allow me, my questions were addressed earlier in follow-ups, so specifically on 5G, there's a NATO report out today from the Department of Cyber Defense Center, and it basically argues against a blanket ban of employing Chinese companies to build it, but it also acknowledges that there's a lot of risks involved, and they came up with some policy solutions for that.

I wonder if you've seen that paper from the Cooperative Cyber Defense Center and can you comment on that?

Dr. Skinner: I haven't seen it, but I will say that we as a State Department are doing ever more in terms of cyber security and understanding our understanding of the diplomatic angle in cyber. Other parts of the government like [VIC] and DoD have been working on cyber as a major area for a long time. But you may know that State is involved in thinking through how to stand up relevant cyber bureaus on the commercial and security side. It couldn't come at a better time because of 5G. So I think there will be more discussion with the NATO partners about that particular issue as well.

If I can do a quick two-finger going back to China. You just mentioned that the European partners aren't listening, or NATO, so much to President Trump or heeding his words on China. I think one of the big successes so far in foreign policy and its domestic effect of the Trump presidency has been something that you haven't written so much about. Perhaps you have and I haven't seen it, but it's the growing consensus among Americans that there is a substantial Chinese threat and so that's no longer in dispute. Years ago it was, the approach was more kind of bring the Chinese into the community of free states across the board, especially in trade. As we've seen the abuses there I think our own growing consensus will help us in building a consensus or a fair understanding or a common understanding with our NATO partners.

I think it will take some time, so if you do see divergence on policies like Italy in terms of dealing with China, I think we have to understand the broad based nature of the threat. And it's not just in trade, but in a range of security issues and all around the globe, and the kind of no strings attached [inaudible] which turns out to be heavy strings attached. So I think there's just a growing body of empirical evidence and the U.S. has been at the forefront of kind of making the case and that has been a success.

Amb. Marme: On this one. I think that having the discussion points to our strength actually in the collaborative and collective nature of the alliance. There is 29 countries with different stages of development of the infrastructure. Different circumstances and kind of local situations. So we need to start from discussing about the threat, about the challenge, and through this type of discussion we'll reach certain conclusions. This is how it actually works. And the process itself is a strong value-added in this regard.

DWG: Thank you very much for doing this. Jeff Seldin with VOA.

Two very quick questions, although they're big questions. How

much are all of you planning and worried about Russian active measures we've heard so much about in terms of elections, and it's been obviously ongoing. How much is it? Does that come into when you talk about deterrence and preventing, building up against the Russian threat?

Also how much concern is there that Russia will use, you mentioned fragile states a number of times, will use their activities in fragile states to distract parts of the alliance and use that to pressure the alliance as a whole?

Ambassador Murmokaite: While others are collecting their thoughts I think I'll just refer to the disinformation aspect. I think Lithuania is now, as many of us are, in their various electoral stages, the election periods. We're looking forward to the election of a president in May this year, and certainly the disinformation aspect and the whole propaganda aspect is very important. So we've been working very hard on these information measures. A country, whatever [inaudible] and attempts to influence the election processes. But I think from our side, our society is very well aware because we have a small history of interference and propaganda. And efforts to rewrite history [as it] impacts the developments that are happening in the country, and therefore overall our impression is that our society is very well prepared and a lot less vulnerable to such efforts overall.

But at the same time there is a structured way to work to counter whatever measures there might be, different propaganda, as well as people who work specifically on dealing with the trolling processes on dealing with all kinds of disinformation. What we call the elves as countries to trolls which have been, a number of civil society initiatives but also government initiatives to deal with whatever it is that might come. So we feel, you can not exclude efforts, but at least the feeling that we have now is that we're quite ready in that respect.

Mr. Pisarski: If I may just, [inaudible] within our countries and within the allies as well, the most important tools of Russia's strategic tool box. And that's nothing new. Russia tries to

utilize any differences, kind of take advantage of existing or not existing witnesses. But I think that we have seen a steady record of keeping the alliance's unity despite all of this effort. Again, we are talking about 29 sometimes different countries. So I think that in itself is a huge issue.

Moderator: Dr. Skinner, you're kind of our host here at the State Department. Do you have any closing comment you want to make? I know we're out of time.

Dr. Skinner: Yes, I think we'll take one more. She's been trying to ask.

DWG: Thank you. You've all talked about the need for short notice plans, both [inaudible] but also the member states for possible active aggression by Russia. General Hodges, the former U.S. Army Europe Commander, talked a bit about the potential for a military shading zone, a term that's not been too popular yet. But the idea of having the ability to move forces rapidly through countries, perhaps short of a formal declaration of war which each country can take quite time and really allow Russia potentially to capitalize on that time advantage.

So where are you right now in this discussion? Is it also an EU question?

Ambassador Marme: If I may start. I think the Baltic States have actually shown a very good example of how to tackle this issue. The three of us actually have agreed that the movements of military equipment between the three countries should not take, the bureaucratic process should not take more than 48 hours.

Now this is clearly not the case with the rest of NATO and the rest of Europe. And this is where also NATO's cooperation with the European Union comes to play. This is a very rapidly developing issue between the two organizations. And hopefully there will be soon, I'm not sure that NATO is planning on this specifically, but this is really something that we will tackle in

the nearest future, for the rapid deployment -- the planning phase is one thing, but the actual deployment of reinforcement is also a very practical thing that we need to kind of get straight and right. But NATO is, together with EU, is more leaning towards that direction. The same way as NATO is working or cooperating with EU on the military mobility [part] to expand, enhance the infrastructure of NATO countries in Europe.

Ambassador Murmokaite: If I may just add one sentence, within the European Union we certainly have PESCO projects, a major project which was initiated by the Netherlands, is dedicated specifically to military mobility. And it's been advancing at quite a good pace. We will like to see that pace faster, I think, and much more comprehensive, but it is moving ahead and I think it's certainly very important, and definitely one of the areas where the European Union and NATO can work together for the best result possible.

Amb. Razāns: Just to add, I think General Hodges is absolutely right when he says there's a problem. But as my colleague said, it's understood and the thing is that among the absolute majority of European NATO allies the biggest half certainly are EU members as well. And when it comes to different security elements for Europe, as well as defense elements, the EU is extremely important in execution. It is simply because EU allocated more funding and have plans for an infrastructure in different regions. The Baltics being in the south of Europe, and currently there are a couple of ideas I hope will, from policy planning if materialize would be really exceptionally nice and strengthen the transportation routes. Not only west-east or east-west, but north-south. That's a critical element here, and that's actually something that was evolving already.

There is a strong commitment as well from allies, not only from Europe but as well from this side of the Atlantic. I hope it will grow and produce good result. But EU is critical here, and EU is critical as well when it comes to challenges posed right now in different technology areas including by China.

Dr. Skinner: A couple of words. It's great for you all to come here, and I'd like to invite you back. I have my handbook here kind of open up [inaudible]. But I think we've focused on NATO and Russia in a lot of our discussion, but the concerns of the alliance are much broader.

I think one of the areas that we're all thinking about and talking about has to do with the fact that the international system looks so different at this stage of the 21st century than it did 30 years ago. But we're still working with institutions, ideas, precepts, and partnerships and arrangements that were designed [inaudible] for a much different time. Thirty or so years ago on any given day we had to worry about, in terms of kinetic activity, two countries -- the U.S. and the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons. Now we have to worry about the gray zone and hybrid conflict, and that brings us to about 50 countries that can attempt to level American power, Western power, NATO power through cyber, through information warfare, financial warfare, and other hybrid means. Well below the level of armed conflict but nonetheless very important.

So on the one side we do need greater readiness for conventional conflict or military conflict within NATO, but we have a whole spectrum to worry about at a level that perhaps we didn't in the past.

Also something we didn't mention that affects all of us is the [coming] power in the international system of the global south. And many of those countries, when we think about the countries that joined the nuclear club in recent decades and those that possibly could join in the future, they come primarily from the global south.

Also for the first time in the history of the United States, just speaking for our country, we have an economic competitor in China. We've had military competitors before, but at the level of the Chinese global threat it's something that's unique.

So these are a range of issues that we're all thinking about

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within NATO as we revise our strategies and doctrines and it makes the policy planning world all the more important for our Foreign Ministers and as a community that's growing because of the nature of the complicated, overlapping, and diverse nature of the threats with a whole new set of actors that just weren't real essential to our daily strategic planning just a few years ago.

Thank you so much for your time. Let's do this again. Sorry it took us so long.

Moderator: Thank you, and thank you for working with George Washington University's Project for Media and National Security. I hope we can do it again sometime. I would urge the State Department to continue to be very open and inviting to journalists because I think it's to pretty much everybody's mutual benefit.

Dr. Skinner: Absolutely.

Moderator: Thank you for having us.

Dr. Skinner: Thank you.

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