

CONFERENCE REPORT

NATO under the Gun: The Emergence of New Security Challenges



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This is a report on a public session titled “NATO under the Gun: The Emergence of New Security Challenges”, held as part of the TRT World Forum 2019. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of participants and speakers present at the TRT World Forum 2019, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

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Speakers



Hulusi Akar

Defence Minister of the Republic of Turkey

Hulusi Akar was born in Kayseri in 1952. He graduated from the Military Academy in 1972 and the Army Command and Staff College in 1982. During his military career of 49 years, he served in various positions in the Turkish Armed Forces and NATO, including as commander of the Turkish Task Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following his promotion to the rank of General in 2011, he served as the Deputy Chief of Turkish General Staff (2011-2013), Land Forces Commander (2013-2015) and as Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces (2015-2018). He was appointed as Defence Minister in 2018. He has been awarded the Turkish Armed Forces Courage and Self-Sacrifice Medal, Distinguished Service Medal and Medal of Honor along with several medals by other countries.



Tacan İldem

NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy

Ambassador Tacan İldem is the NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy. He directs the Public Diplomacy Division that works to raise the Alliance's profile with audiences around the world in order to build understanding of, and support for, NATO's policies and operations. He also oversees the coordination of all Strategic Communications activities across NATO. Ambassador İldem is a senior Turkish diplomat. Since the start of his career in 1978, he has held bilateral and multilateral positions including Ambassador to the Netherlands and Permanent Representative to NATO and the OSCE.



Jan Vincent-Rostowski

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Former Minister of Finance of Poland

Jan Vincent-Rostowski is the former Minister of Finance of Poland (2007-2013), and was subsequently appointed as Deputy Prime Minister to then Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusk. During his tenure as Minister of Finance, Poland achieved the fastest growth rate of any EU or OECD country. In addition to his political career, he has a distinguished career in academia as the former Head of the Economics Department at Central European University and a lecturer at University College London. Mr. Rostowski is the author of numerous publications on European economic policy, monetary, financial and fiscal policy and the transformation of post-communist economies.



Yavuz Selim Kiran

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Yavuz Selim Kiran was born in 1985. He received his bachelor's degree from the Department of International Relations at Middle East Technical University. He has held various advisory roles at the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), Ministry for EU Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Ministry. He was assigned as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey on August 8, 2018.



Aleksei K. Pushkov

Chairman of the Commission on Information and Media of the Council of Federation, Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation

Aleksei K. Pushkov is currently the Chairman of the Commission on Information and Media, Council of Federation, Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. He is also an author and television anchor for Postscriptum, TV Centre and Russian TV Channel 3. Aleksei K. Pushkov has published more than 400 papers and analytical articles on foreign policy, and he has served in several positions in the Russian government. He is a specialist in media and diplomatic relations and was the Speech Writer for General-Secretary Michael Gorbachev.



Luke Coffey

Director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation

Luke Coffey is the Director of the Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation. Before joining Heritage, Luke served in the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence as Senior Special advisor to then Secretary of State for Defence, Dr. Liam Fox MP. He was the first ever non-UK national to be appointed by the Prime Minister to this role. Prior to this, he worked in the House of Commons as an advisor on defence and security issues for the Conservative Party. His work in British politics followed his service to the United States as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army. In 2005 he was deployed to Afghanistan and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

Summary



The session 'NATO under the Gun: Emergence of New Security Challenges' discussed the efficacy and relevance of NATO in the face of new security challenges.

The keynote speaker, Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar, underlined the importance of NATO in ensuring transatlantic security since the end of Second World War. Minister Akar, then elaborated on the new security challenges as being transnational terrorism, hybrid and cyber warfare and other emerging and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and autonomous systems and their impact to the traditional rules based security order. He then discussed how NATO can tackle these challenges. Lastly, Minister Akar mentioned Turkey's importance for the NATO alliance and the challenges that Turkey is facing from terrorist organisations such as Daesh and the PKK/YPG. Finally, he explained how Turkey's 'Operation Peace Spring' aims to eliminate these terrorist elements from the region.

Tacan İldem, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Diplomacy at NATO discussed Turkey-NATO cooperation in the context of 'Operation Peace Spring' and how NATO recognises the legitimate security concerns of Turkey.

Jan Vincent-Rostowski, Former deputy PM and Finance Minister of Poland drew attention to NATO's role as being not just a mutual collective se-

curity organisation, but also the guardian of the rules-based international order. He pointed out that NATO's role as the protector of rules-based order has been compromised by President Trump and he argued that that is the central problem for NATO today.

Yavuz Selim Kiran, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, underlined Turkey's significance for the NATO alliance and discussed the necessity of 'Operation Peace Spring' for Turkey's security. Deputy Minister Kiran highlighted the importance of unified action for NATO and its members.

Aleksei K. Pushkov, Chairman of the Commission on Information and Media of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, spoke on the relations between NATO and Russia. Pushkov argued that while Russia has no conflict with any NATO members, there is no dialogue between NATO and Russia, arguing that this is very dangerous and suggested that the dialogue needs to be re-established.

Finally, Luke Coffey, Director of the Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation, criticised Obama administrations support to YPG and said that the region is still paying the price of this policy. On NATO, Coffey argued that NATO should get back to the basics of territorial defence. According to Coffey the organisation does not need to be everywhere, instead it should focus on the North Atlantic region.



Report

Can NATO Adapt to New the New Security Environment?

In his speech, Minister Akar stressed the importance of NATO's role in the face of a new security environment. Minister Akar pointed out that the new security environment presents challenges to the traditional rules based security order in and beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. Rapid advances in technology is one of the major causes of new security challenges and has changed the character of the armed conflict.

He pointed out that In light of the challenges to the security environment, NATO is under pressure to adapt.

As part of this adaptation, NATO needs a unified vision for the future rather than a unified perception of a common enemy. This vision should focus on collective benefits rather than relative gains of each member nation.

Minister Akar also highlighted Turkey's contribution to the overall security and stability of Europe in general and NATO in particular, is perhaps higher today than ever. He also added that Turkey has already been well above the 20 per cent threshold of spending on

major equipment systems, and this ratio is expected to surpass 38 per cent by the end of this fiscal year. He mentioned that Turkey's national operations and contributions to NATO forces in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, in addition to enhancing security and stability, also helped to prevent illegal crossings in the Aegean Sea.

Minister Akar also pointed out to the interest of both regional and international actors in the discovery of

hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and underlined both Turkey's lawful rights and interests within its continental shelf, as well as the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus over the hydrocarbon resources in the area and he declared that Turkey will protect its and Northern Cyprus's rights in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Operation Peace Spring: A Test for NATO Solidarity?

Minister Akar in his keynote speech pointed out the military assistance provided by some of NATO allies to YPG terrorists in Syria. He mentioned the atrocities perpetrated by the YPG against the local population of the region, including the forced migration, confiscation of land and the conscription of people - including children - against their will. Of the four million refugees in Turkey, about a half a million are Kurds who have fled the atrocities and oppressive politics of the YPG.

Minister Akar explained that despite Turkey's long and patient discussions with the US on the acceptance of a safe zone in the area, the discussions remained

inconclusive. Consequently, Turkey launched 'Operation Peace Spring' to protect its borders, prevent a 'terror corridor' in the north of Syria, put an end to the presence of Daesh, PKK, YPG and all other terrorist elements along Turkey's border with Syria.

Tacan Ildem emphasised on the point that the operation is being discussed and consulted at NATO and there has already been several occasions for NATO ambassadors at council meetings to have many opportunities to receive a briefing from the Turkish side. He said that there may be differences of opinion, but that the strength of NATO is to use all the existing mechanisms for these differences be ironed out. He also highlighted that NATO recognises the legitimate security concerns of Turkey.

Upon Moderator Garda's question of whether triggering NATO's Article 5 on collective security is applicable, Yavuz Selim Kiran responded by saying if there is an existential threat to one NATO country, it means - according to Article 5 - that it is an existential threat to all NATO allies. Despite Turkey's efforts to solve the issue with its NATO allies, Turkey did not find solidarity forthcoming according to Yavuz Kiran.

Luke Coffey called the Obama Administration's decision to arm the YPG to fight the Daesh a broken policy and asserted that the region is still paying the price for it. He said that we have now run the serious risk of alienating or at least being seen to undermining one of the most important actors in NATO (i.e. Turkey).

Despite Turkey's long and patient discussions with the US on the acceptance of a safe zone in the area, the discussions remained inconclusive.

NATO Enlargement

Tacan İldem has argued that as the most successful political and military alliance of the world, it is essential to keep NATO functioning well and responsive to the security concerns of each member-state.

Yavuz Selim Kiran pointed to the new generation threats such as mass migration, hybrid warfare, cyber technologies, and racism including Islamophobia and if NATO adapts itself to these conditions, then it will be stronger.

Jan Vincent Rostowski, on the other hand, while asserting the point that NATO should be maintained, raised the problem of the reliability of the key member state of NATO, namely the United States under President Donald Trump. He said that the United States under President Trump has demonstrated that it is no longer as reliable as it once was. He added that even countries that may feel happy about this in the

short term, such as Turkey, may find that they regret this down the road.

Luke Coffey made two points about the strengthening of NATO. The first point related the use of correct terminology, namely, whether to use the word 'enlargement' or 'expansion'. He said that NATO enlarges rather than expands because the word expansion plays into the propaganda that NATO is some sort of empire. Therefore, the word enlargement should be used. The second point was that NATO needs to get back to the basics of territorial defence. It does not have to be everywhere in the world at once. According to Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which describes where Article 5 applies, its focus must be on North Atlantic region, north of the Tropic of Cancer. It is in this geographical space that NATO must be able to defend the territory of its members.

NATO's Relations with Russia

Commenting on the debate about Russia-NATO relations, Pushkov said that Russia has no conflict with NATO or any EU member today. He said that the conflict in Ukraine should not be perceived as conflict with NATO or the EU since Ukraine is not an EU or NATO member. However, Pushkov added, some people in NATO use the Ukrainian conflict as an occasion to antagonise Russia to either boost NATO's military capacity or to create a sense of purpose since NATO has been losing this sense of purpose to a certain extent.

Tacan İldem, on the other hand, responded to Pushkov about the deteriorated relationship between NATO and Russia. He argued that we cannot consider things in a vacuum. There is a historical background and NATO countries did not come out of the blue to enlarge towards Russia. İldem has said that, 2014 represents the watershed year when the Russian Federation illegally and illegitimately annexed Crimea, against the very principles of documents such the Helsinki Final Act that the Soviet Union then was a party to.

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İldem also added that if there is any country challenging this principle and it becomes a continuous pattern of behaviour to challenge rules, space, and the international order in general, then others have to take certain measures. That's why NATO leaders in 2014, at the level of heads of state and government, decided to strengthen its deterrence and defence against Russia. Jan Vincent-Rostowski also responded to Pushkov by endorsing Tacan İldem's statements by stating that NATO is not just a mutual collective security organization but is based on the principle of defending the rules-based international order, particularly in Europe.

Pushkov answered the arguments related to the rules-based international order by saying that "If there are rules-based things that everybody should observe why are those rules are being applied to some and not applied to others?" He questioned why NATO did not act when Iraq was occupied by the US and Britain despite the fact that there was no threat from Iraq to the United States and Britain. Why the rules are being applied in certain occasions and on other occasions the rules are not applied?

Key Takeaways

- NATO is going through difficult challenges which stem from newly emerging security challenges. However, NATO is well-positioned to overcome these challenges if they come together with a strong sense of unity and cohesion.
- There is a lack of solidarity between the NATO members. Unified action is vital for NATO's survival.
- NATO today lacks a sense of purpose and it needs to adapt itself to post-Cold War conditions.
- Turkey is a vital NATO ally. Turkey's security concerns regarding the safe-zone and the Daesh/YPG-PYD-PKK terrorist threats in Syria must be recognised and addressed collectively by the alliance.
- There has to be a level of engagement and reconstruction of dialogue between NATO and Russia.

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