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## NATO and the 'Pivot' after Wales

What take-aways did NATO's recent summit in Wales provide us? As John Hemmings sees it, the United States' pivot to Asia is here to stay, despite the ongoing crises in Europe and the Middle East, and the Alliance's member states will have to commit more resources to secure their near-abroad.

By John Hemmings for ISN

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Now that the NATO Summit in Wales is over, analysts are working to understand its implications for the strategic landscape around Europe. One issue that lay behind many of the discussions was the impact of US global strategy on the force-posture of US military assets in and around Europe. Although Hillary Clinton famously [quipped](#) that the United States "can walk and chew gum at the same time", European allies still wonder how the US 'pivot to Asia' will affect its ability to defend the European continent and manage instability in the Middle East.

Overall, the Summit was a success: 28 world leaders came together as a symbol of transatlantic solidarity and moved past much of the awkwardness that had characterized US-German and US-EU ties over the past year. Vladimir Putin's revanchist policies had reminded them of the purpose of the alliance, as had the growing instability on Europe's southern border. On the whole, there were no significant differences of principle among member-states, and the leaders of the United States, Germany, France, the UK, and others committed – on paper, at least – to keep Europe "[whole, free, and at peace](#)."

Some have called the crisis over Ukraine a '[Munich moment](#)', referring to the Munich Conference of 1938, when Germany won control of Sudetenland, a Czechoslovakian territory. However, the comparison is a favorable one for this generation. Rather than accepting the dismemberment of Ukraine, NATO member-states pledged support to Kiev in the form of a planned military exercise in Western Ukraine to show the alliance's commitment. Furthermore, NATO members agreed to invest in reinvigorating the Alliance's capabilities in three ways: 1) through the development of a new 4,000-strong deployment force, 2) through increased defense spending, and 3) through strategy readjustments to cyber warfare and 'ambiguous warfare'.

### Losing focus?

At a joint [NATO-Cardiff University Conference](#) held prior to the official summit, policy-makers and academics struggled to understand how the pivot would affect America's ability to defend Europe. More than once, the US commitment to allocate more military resources to the Asia-Pacific was questioned. Some even wondered if the pivot was still in place, given the amount of traction that the Ukraine crisis and rise of ISIL were getting in Washington. This was despite US efforts to allay such fears at a [press conference](#) held on the 14th of August, where Admiral John Kirby stated that,

despite instability on Europe's eastern and southern flanks, the US remained very committed to the pivot, as illustrated by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel's recent trip to Asia (his sixth as Secretary).

At the August 14th press conference, Admiral Kirby pointed out that five out of seven US treaty allies were located in the Asia-Pacific region, in addition to 350,000 troops and 200 ships. He might also have pointed out that the region is home to some of the world's largest militaries and now [outspends](#) Europe collectively on defense. In addition, as powers like China and India rise, fissures and tensions along their peripheries have begun to threaten the stability of a region that already dominates global trade and is [predicted](#) to represent 51% of global GDP by 2050. If the US continues to turn towards the Asia-Pacific, it is out of long-term strategic necessity. Its European allies must recognize this.

### **Three Effects of the Pivot on NATO**

Noting that he was no stranger to these discussions, one senior NATO official at the Cardiff conference stated that the pivot was likely to have a three-fold effect on European allies: **First, it would force them to reconsider their own resource commitments to Europe's 'near abroad'.** While the US military would remain committed to the region, there would be a greater need for European resources, particularly air and ground units in NATO's eastern member-states, like Poland and the Baltic states. If sequestration becomes a fact of life in the US, then this need will increase, as the US struggles to fulfill all of its commitments. In addition, the US will continue to maintain viable C4ISTR and heavy lift capabilities to integrate and enhance French and British air capabilities for missions on NATO's southern corridor.

**Second, the US pivot will see a growing link between NATO and a number of US allies in the Pacific - such as Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia - who are already developing greater inter-operability with the alliance .** These states have already worked closely with the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and their concerns over instability in the Asia-Pacific - especially in the East and South China Seas - have led them to search for external allies. Small sub-groupings, known as trilaterals, have developed between the United States, Japan, and South Korea; the United States, Japan, and Australia; and the United States, Japan, and India. In many ways these groupings have the potential to be nascent multilateral groupings - like NATO. NATO Brussels should ensure that these allies are able to link more closely to its global security objectives. Jamie Shea, the Deputy Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges at NATO, has suggested in a recent German Marshall Fund [piece](#) that US allies in the Asia-Pacific might be "brought more regularly into NATO's political consultations and initiatives," on "non-traditional threats, such as cyber attacks, terrorism, WMD proliferation, critical infrastructure resilience, and so on." Japan's relationship with NATO might be used as a template for other Asia-Pacific allies, as the island nation has recently signed a military [accord](#) with the Alliance and its Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, has twice addressed Alliance ambassadors on mutual security concerns.

**Third, NATO member states will have to 'think' Asia, even if they cannot go there, and search for ways to work more closely with the region .** European states are increasingly realizing that what happens in Asia deeply affects their interests and security. Naturally, any cooperation with Asian powers would include continuing to develop maritime and cyber cooperation with the above-mentioned US allies where distance is less of an inhibitor. Karl-Heinz Kamp, research director of the NATO Defense College in Rome has convincingly [argued](#) for an Asian-looking NATO alliance that does exactly that. Another maritime activity - aside from anti-piracy operations - where NATO could increase cooperation with Asian states is within the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which includes nearly 101 countries as members. In addition to the low-hanging maritime and cyber fruit, NATO could also forge links with China and India, as a means of trust building. Certainly,

no one is suggesting that NATO should withdraw from one far-flung part of the globe - Afghanistan - only to engage in one even further away. However, a NATO that is willing to continue to think globally will be able to complement the US strategy for maintaining stability in Europe as well as the Asia-Pacific.

### **What is the West's grand strategy?**

The transatlantic partnership has achieved political unity fairly swiftly over the Ukraine issue. Perhaps the West was lucky to have a Russian leader so willing to remind them of the horrors of pre-war Europe, when annexation and territorial predation were the order of the day. From here, however, the Alliance must move beyond a renewal of commitments and promises about 2% spending levels, action plans and readiness forces, and articulate a new vision of its core mission and of what the West stands for - on a global level. Otherwise, instability on Europe's borders - and intensifying, ideological, national and religious struggles around the world - may prevent Europe from remaining 'whole, safe, and free' for long.

In a new age of uncertainty, a paradigm that enables the kind of political, cultural and military unity that existed during the Cold War is needed. Certainly, no-one is arguing for the black and white binary that characterized the Cold War, but some strategic paradigm is necessary. Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' paradigm is over, as is the age of state-building. The West and NATO now must consider the '[Rise of the Rest](#)' and articulate a strong defense of the current global system. The West must also seek a common goal on the Middle East and Islamic fundamentalism. Such a quest to shape a common vision should be accompanied by outreach to the general public. Many no longer know what the alliance stands for. NATO is one of the few great military powers that has remained purely defensive throughout its life span. Its core values include adherence to democracy, civilian rule of the military, human rights, and pluralism. As the West and its allies move towards an Asian century, we must remember that while the US still has a preponderance of the world's military might, that might is decreasing in relative terms. With the US unable to carry as much weight as it once did, allies like Australia, South Korea, and Japan have developed the capacity to partner with it. NATO can and should lead by example.

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