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TRANSCRIPT

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FEATURING

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Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, NATO; German Air Force

Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean

Director General, European Union Military Staff

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Seth G. Jones: Welcome, everyone, to the afternoon session, Center for Strategic and International Studies. My name is Seth Jones, the director of the International Security Program. Just to give you a bit of a context as we shift gears in this discussion.

We spent the morning talking about the threat landscape in Europe and the evolving threat landscape. We evolved into a discussion with the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the senior levels of the Pentagon, and their general assessment of where the military operations, the Joint War Fighting Concept, were headed. The evolution of warfare, and how the Joint Staff and the secretary of defense were also thinking about issues related to Europe, U.S. posture in Europe, and the situation – evolving situation in Ukraine.

So now we're shifting to issues of both challenges and opportunities in European defense. And then we'll finish the day focusing on the industrial base. So with that, I will turn the floor over to Max Bergmann. Max is the director of the CSIS Stuart Center and Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program here at CSIS. Thank you, Max.

Max Bergmann: Thank you, Seth. Thank you all for being here, hopefully you're all fed and somewhat still awake, and for being in this room when it's gorgeous day here in Washington, D.C.

We're very – I'm very excited about this panel, looking at the challenges of European security. And we have a great panel with us today. Let me introduce them briefly and we'll dive into the conversation. And for all of you watching online, you can submit questions online. And for all of you in the room, please use the QR code to submit questions, and we will get to some of those toward the end of the conversation.

Let me introduce our esteemed panelists.

To my left is General Chris Badia. He's deputy supreme allied commander for transformation at NATO. General Badia joined the German Air Force as a cadet in 1984 to become a jet pilot and officer. General Badia gained experience for eight years as a fighter pilot before taking his first command as squadron commander of the first squad of that wing between 1996 and 1998. And he served in a series of postings within the German Ministry of Defense and the German Air Force. General Badia was appointed as deputy supreme allied commander of transformation in Norfolk, Virginia on July 7th of 2022. So been in the job for almost a year.

And then to his left we have Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean, director of the European Union Military Staff. Admiral Bléjean has held a variety of senior

positions in the French Navy, and as part of multilateral security initiatives. He is the director general of the EU's Military Staff. Additionally, he is the head of the E.U. military assistance mission in support of Ukraine, which trains Ukrainian service members to operate Western military platforms. And it is great to have you both. And I know that both of you had to travel here, and it's good to have both NATO and EU representatives here, German and French, but NATO and EU representatives.

And then last, but certainly not least, is Heather Conley. Welcome home, Heather. Heather, of course, sat in this chair for a number of years here at CSIS, but is now the sixth president of the German Marshall Fund. And Heather also, from 2001 to 2005, was deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of European Affairs, with responsibility for U.S. bilateral relations with the countries of Northern and Central Europe and brings a wealth of expertise.

So maybe let's dive right in. For the past 20 years or so we've been talking about the problems of European defense, of European security. And then now we suddenly have a conventional war in Europe, in Ukraine. And we're now more than a year on from the war. This has taught us a lot of lessons. It's also seen, I think, a really both impressive response from NATO, the EU and the United States.

And maybe we could start by sort of doing a backward-looking assessment of how did we do in response to this crisis? And maybe, General, I'll start with you and sort of offer the NATO perspective.

General Chris Badia: OK.

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you much for having me.

In addition to all that has been said today, throughout the morning already, and for those who have been at the dinner last night where Defense Secretary Esper was talking as well, I would like to make a few remarks in the beginning.

Number one, in practical terms, what has happened. Of course, after the war started, from a European perspective, secure. At that time General Tod Wolters – he, of course, he did everything he could to really go for a very good defense posture. They deployed. They enforced. Vigilance was there. So a lot of things happened right away. And I think this also proves how NATO's response capabilities are and what we have done there.

This is on – if you will, on practical terms, how NATO reacted to that from when the war started overall. But from a NATO strategic overall perspective,

I think what happened then after – and it led up to Madrid summit, because if you see Madrid summit and if you look at the strategic concept, the strategic concept changed the way we think, the way we design and the way we plan for the future. It has a complete new array, if you will, especially now with deterrence and defense.

We might discuss that, because nowadays quite a focus now on deterrence. We had this this morning. And I mean, it's – you see it in the strategic concept. This is a nuclear alliance, but deterrence is much more than just always thinking right away about nuclear issues. So there's a complete array to that.

But the other tasks as well, when it comes to crisis, crisis response, crisis management, or security through partnership. So those are all the new aspects, if you will, out of the strategic concept. And this is where my headquarter – as you said, I'm sitting down in Norfolk. And the task we are having is we're looking in warfare development and looking out into the future. What does it mean for capabilities for NATO, NATO's nations, Western nations? So it's common funded, what NATO can do. But 95 percent of the capabilities we do have is, of course, by nations.

And this is what Secretary Esper last night said as well. Deterrence – and coming back to that, OK – is capability and will. So the will is one issue you might discuss and how you do that overall. But capability is because, you know, with PowerPoint presentations you don't scare off anyone – (laughter) – at the end of the day. And this is really what we're looking at, because it's nice if you have all the concepts and if you have a lot of good ideas, but at the end of the day, there's the what question from my headquarters perspective. And then looking and discussing with the nations is always, so how do we do it?

So you see a lot of things have changed over time. And just with the discussion that we have on this panel, just let me make one more comment, because the European pillar of NATO, because this has changed. If you see throughout, as it's designed and the way we go forward, and this is really something. And we are in very, very close coordination and we are along the same lines there, because at the end of the day it's all about cooperation and how do we get things closer in order to really succeed, and strengthening the European pillar of NATO. Why? Because this is what Chris Grady said this morning as well, where in the U.S. they have other things in focus as well. And this is where European nations and this is what we discuss with them. How do we strengthen? How do we redress the military imbalance in order to have much more freedom of maneuver to that?

Mr. Bergmann: Great. Thank you.

Admiral Bléjean, you know, for much of Washington, I think the assessment – there's, you know, the EU. The EU doesn't do defense. That's NATO's job. But here we see you. You're in uniform. You're the director general of the military staff, formally held NATO positions. What has been the EU's role in this crisis from a military perspective over the last year?

Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean:

Well, thank you, Max, and very happy to be back in the same room I was about two years ago.

So first of all, let me just – what's the military? You have asked the question. Are we some kind of aliens in the EU institution? I mean, we were. We started – we built the EU carefully removing the difference in military chromosome from the DNA because of the context of post-World War II.

So when we started again to think about defending our strategic interests, that was a bit more than 20 years ago at one time. This time NATO had some sort of existence, so I can imagine that was questioning the established difference order in Europe.

Since there, the serious discussions started, I would say, five years ago with some bottom-up initiatives on, you know, European Defense Fund, the comprehensive annual report on defense, and so on. I will spare all the acronyms. We are world champions for that.

But what we have thought at this time was to put some initiatives to consolidate the European defense pillar and which is good for Europe, is good for NATO, and I will revert a little bit on the EU-NATO relationship.

So we did that last time and we ramped up also the EU military staff that I had the honor to command in that capacity. For example, regarding Ukraine, I'm the guy managing the use of the European peace facility that's funding mechanism – common-cost mechanism to deliver military assistance to Ukraine. And we decided that from – within the 36 first hours of the war, which was – I mean, you couldn't bet on this reaction from EU at this time.

To give you a figure, I've managed so far more than 8 billion euros of requests from member states to be reimbursed through that mechanism. Also, we created four years ago the umbrella of the EU military headquarter in Brussels, and that's within that capacity. I'm also – as I'm directed, I'm also commanding that. And that's within that capacity that I am the mission commander of all the EU military missions, including the newly established EU military assistance mission for Ukraine launched on the 15th of November, and at the end of this month we will have trained more than 16,000 Ukrainian soldiers in that context.

So it's – and we do that in full coordination with our partners. I'm liaising on a daily basis with Lieutenant General Aguto from the U.S. Army. He is leading the coordination center in Wiesbaden in support of Ukraine. So that means also the cooperation is really increasing.

Let me touch a point on from where we have been five years ago trying to ramp up the capabilities and with only at this time a light view on the industry but ramping up the capabilities. It has been accelerated by a Ukrainian context, and then we have to ramp up the EU – the EU – the European industry to be able to enter a war economy.

To do that we need to offer a business model that is suitable for the industry. That means offer a critical mass of orders to them and we cannot – we can do that only if we enter the joint procurement sphere. Give you an example. Eighty percent of procurement in the 27 member states of the EU are national. So they're not doing anything on 80 percent of what they are requiring with anyone else.

If you take a list of some key big equipments in the U.S. – I'm talking about destroyers and Marines, fighters, transport, artillery, tank – you have a rough number of 30. In the EU it's 187 different equipment for the same list. So that means it's not a good business model. Really, you have to enter that.

And we have also to fill the gap before taking seriously about increasing or difference capabilities to fill the gap from the peace dividend. We need in the next two years to top up our difference capabilities by 70, 7-0, billion euros before thinking about increasing, really, your defense capabilities and being relevant European defense bureau.

So I stop there for the industry. Just a quick word on EU-NATO cooperation because when you talk about development of industry, development of capabilities, you quickly enter the debate about some kind of competition where it's a forced debate, really, and that's my mantra. There cannot be any competition. First, because what we do is also serving NATO. Because, as it has been said – and once again congratulation to Finland. Very happy that they joined officially yesterday. And Sweden will follow, the sooner the better. That means 24 – 23, sorry – member states out of 27 will be member of NATO as well. And we cannot imagine that one day when there are on the NATO military committee they say something and the day after at the EU military committee they say the reverse thing. So it's all the same single set of forces.

So we need to – really to kill that debate. And I think the first lessons of Ukraine has been the complementarity of both organizations. In that vein

also, we don't talk too much about it, but the position of Denmark. Denmark has decided to give up the posture of the opt-out. You know, they were – they decided not to be part of the Command Security and Defense Policy of the EU because they were fearing this kind of NATO and EU competition. Now, they have decided, in the context of the war against Ukraine, to give up that posture, to be a full member of this CSDP, and to be at the table of decisions. So, yeah, I think, I mean, we can debate forever on that. But I think for me, it's one other person. Sure, there is no competition because it's simply not possible.

So, two or three more elements. Matter of mindset. So we'll have to learn our lessons from Ukraine. It has been – it has been already commented by Admiral Grady this morning, but there are two areas where we need really to work. Is the logistic and the military mobility within all territories. You know, as a former SACEUR side, it's easier for an illegal migrant arriving in Europe to cross over Europe than for a European or ally soldier with his equipment. So we need to fix that. And the war in Ukraine has been a live exercise of that. And we see the limitations we have. And the C2, command and control, not only in the capacities – the technical capacities themselves but in the mindset as well.

There is, for me, one lessons learned of how also Ukraine succeeded in front of Russia, beyond our support and so on, where they have – they have got rid of their own USSR C2 mindset, very centralized. Russia is still in a very centralized C2 mindset. That means the boss gives the order and no one has the ability to adapt on the ground to the situation. The Ukraine, they have decentralized to the maximum extent their C2. And that explains a lot of what they are doing.

Two other things, and we have to ask ourselves what's next. So we have to make sure that Russia is not winning that war. We have to make sure that Ukraine is winning the peace. What does that mean? It has been commented this morning, so I will not go back on the definition of what peace will look like. But we have to think beyond what's left for Russia. What do we want Russia to be in our discussion, in our equation in the future? Especially in regard to our discussion with China.

You know, it has been said – it's not from me, but I like the formula – Russia is a hurricane. China is climate change. And so we need to really look at the parameters of this equation. And that addresses two other things – partnership. I mean, we have been focused on Ukraine, but what about the rest of the world? And for EU especially, the strategic area of Africa is of most interest. When you see how most of the African countries have reacted to the resolutions at the U.N. General Assemblies, either being absent

because coffee was a bit too long or abstaining – even those very supported by us – we have to hear the new message they are sending us.

We have to change our discussion. We are not, you know, someone that you can teach how to do things. We want to be partners. You are the unique model. You have to analyze that we can have the balanced approach and that your enemies are not necessarily our enemies. And so we need to listen to that and to adjust our posture, including in the defense and security support.

And lastly, that also it has been touched, the enlargement of the EU – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Balkan states, and others. It's a change of paradigm. We have enlarged EU roughly today on sharing economic principles and values. Today we are enlarging EU or we have the intent to do so on security basis, to make the whole Europe territory more secure. That's a change of paradigm. Ukraine will be an EU member sooner than expected, I think, because in some way we will think that we'll owe them even if we check all the conditions. But they are working, really, on the issue. So change of paradigm.

We need a new treaty, I think, and we need to review our decision-making process. We are too slow. Twenty-seven, I will be very diplomatic in saying it's a challenge to reach consensus. I think when we reach 35 we cannot work like that.

And then my final word will be: How do we secure a change of mindset? We are herbivorous. We didn't become carnivorous, but at least I think EU as an omnivorous, balanced diet today regarding defense and security.

Mr. Bergmann: (Laughs.) Thank you, Admiral.

Heather, I want to go to you. But let me just first just ask General Badia maybe to react to, you know, the EU's now doing quite a bit in the defense space. There's been a lot of concern here in Washington of duplication with NATO. You know, in your – from your vantage point, are you concerned about duplication, or do you see the roles as complementary?

Gen. Badia: No. It's – in your daily work, you see, it's matter of fact what you have.

I give you a personal example. I was the planning director of the German armed forces, and a lot of the European nations coping with the same problem, we having – I had to cope with three planning processes. I had national one, I had an EU one, and I have a NATO one. It's still like that, OK? And this is what you will see over time, that everybody comes to the conclusion we should strive to have one. And that's – and it's the NATO one, OK, because if you look across it's a whole-of-government approach. You

have instruments of power. EU has more because NATO is a military. It's a political but military alliance, so it has the military instrument of power, and this is the one we use primarily. But of course, there are certain things we need to have certain, like, command and control where you have certain capabilities installed. But overall – and that's what Hervé just said – it's a single set of forces. This is what you have to use. And really, what it is at the end of the day – and this is what we see in the daily work – what we do have, it's really harmonization, standardization, and interoperability in order to really – to harmonize what we have and use it to a better extent.

So, from my point of view, with the context we have, with all the cooperations we have, cooperation is the way forward. And there's only one way forward, and that's a common one.

Mr. Bergmann: Great.

Heather, to you. You know, this has been, I think, the last year and a half, when it comes to America's involvement in European security, sort of a wakeup call for the important role that the U.S. plays. And how would you sort of assess the U.S. role in European security? And what have you seen sort of over the last year?

Heather A. Conley: Well, Max, thank you. It is great to be back here at CSIS in a very different role, so thank you so much.

So I mean, I want to sort of pull a little bit on both the general and the admiral's comments. I would completely agree, of course, we know the formula, that it's will plus capabilities, but I'm going to add those capabilities have to match the agreed end state in Ukraine. And we do not have an agreed end state. So the capabilities, it's unclear to me are we doing enough. Is that sufficient?

And I agree the NATO summit in Madrid really was substantial. Obviously, both for Sweden and Finland, I think we do have to just take this historic moment and say, wow, yesterday was an amazing day, where we now have a NATO ally that – again, this – for me, the strategic commanding heights is the Arctic – a really huge issue there. But the challenge we're going to have as we head towards the Vilnius summit is thinking about forward defense because we are now, if – and we hope that Ukraine's counteroffensive is completely successful. But if it is not, or if it is unclear that we have a prolonged stalemate, a prolonged attritional war, what does that mean for the eastern flank? Does that mean we need more capabilities? And as Madrid noted, the shift from NATO brigades and NATO battalions, these multinational battalions, we're struggling to build to those battalions in a quick way. So we have an enormous amount of work to do.

I would say, as I look at the Ukraine war, this is the ultimate laboratory for us, for U.S. equipment, for allied equipment, against Russia, and increasingly Iran's military capabilities. We see the role of drones. We see in some ways this is a private-sector war, the commercial applications, the fact the Ukrainians are jerry-rigging commercially available technology that's having important effect. The fact that we – the Ukraine episodically, unfortunately, relied on StarLink to basically allow it – this is a new dimension that I don't think we are quite capturing how much commercial applications, particularly technology, is going to play.

If you were to ask me what are the European gaps, the same gaps that we've had for over a decade plus. This is, I think, the challenge for all of us. It's the frustrating conversation of enablers – ISR, logistics. We've talked about PESCO and the military mobilization. So we all know what the needs are. We're just – it's the speed of how we get to move these issues forward.

I do have to commend the admiral, the EU, the European peace facility. The rapid deployment and replenishment has been important; this decision to go to ammunition, a shared purchase. But we still know that's hitting snags now. Do we procure it globally? Do we only procure it within Europe? This speaks to the commonality of no one has the industrial base that's ready for this, not only to supply Ukraine for the long term, if that is, in fact, the political will to do so, but to replenish all the stocks, particularly along NATO's eastern flank. I see this as the opportunity to massively modernize NATO members along the eastern flank.

But here's the challenge, and I think this is – the Polish acquisition of Korean tanks and Howitzers is now the point where we are. The production problem is going to be where allies are going to look for any supplier that can provide the capabilities that they need. And that brings a new challenge for NATO interoperability, because we're going to be now incorporating a lot of equipment that needs to be NATO-certified and integrated.

So, you know, we've got, I think, incredible momentum. But what I worry about is, after the initial days – and I'll close by just, you know, the zeitenwende moment, as Chancellor Scholz made that historic speech on February 28th. Some of that urgency is draining. They're not coming. Ukraine held them. Maybe this will take us a year to spend $100 billion in a very important defense fund that I don't want to under – I don't want to criticize, a very important defense fund. But nothing has been spent on that. And that funding will go to cover a lost decade. Where are the new events?

And as I'm looking ahead even to the next summit after Vilnius, which will be the Washington summit here next year, where we will all look at how the

Wales commitment has been met or has not been met. And tragically, I put a little fault on the U.S. We made this the – this is the line. This is how we judge how an ally is committed to NATO.

I think it's a terrible measurement, but that's the one we went with. That's going to be a very powerful list. The 20 percent, the investment, that's a great metric, and most of our allies have met that. The 2 percent, all things being equal and everyone's GDP being equal, that's going to be a terrible statistic. And that's what many of the – most of the American people are going to be judging that.

So huge opportunities and challenges, but I think we need to be very clear-eyed at the challenges ahead. We need that political leadership and we need that urgency – not so much statements and communiques, but urgency to implement.

So I'll toss it back over to you, Max.

Mr. Bergmann: Thanks, Heather. And I think you hit on a number of important things. I'm going to pick out one of them where, you know, the capability gaps have long been pointed to, the enablers. But it strikes me that one of the things the war in Ukraine has also demonstrated is that there's a capability gap in mass, in our stockpiles of ammunitions. This is something CSIS has done a lot of work on.

And General, I'm curious, from the NATO Allied Command transformation perspective – so part of your role is to look around the corner. How do we balance the need to sort of replenish stocks, to buy the basics of ammunition and tanks, with also the need to learn the lessons of what we're seeing in Ukraine, as Heather mentioned, of, you know, the use of drones and other new technologies that are really critical for warfare? How do we make that balance between modernization into the future and then just replenishing our empty bins?

Gen. Badia: Allow me, before I get to the point, just one comment, a very personal one. There will be no end state anymore. You know, when we've been through general staff college and all those issues, there was always – you will always be taught the end state. We never got one, but we always were striving for an end state. And nowadays, if you look at it, you will have conditions that need to be met to do something. OK? You will see it in Ukraine. You see it everywhere. But an end – to define a real end state and to work for that, I don't see that anymore. Just my very personal comment with all the experience I do have on that one.

How do we – how do we balance? And this is what my headquarter is doing most and foremost because, as I explained to you, and I don't want to get into too much details, but we are responsible for the NATO defense planning process. And this is where we do through a sophisticated arena of studies and everything, this is how we try to predict in the future what warfare in the future, 2030, 2040, digitalization of the battlefield, long-range weapons, all those issues, and what Admiral Grady alluded to this morning we do as well.

And with that now we have 31 nations. We assign capability targets to the nations. We assign quantitative targets and qualitative targets, OK? And if you look into that, because – and now it gets – it gets really sophisticated. Because if you look at it, it's not only the three Cs, it's cash, capabilities, and contribution, and the 2 percent and the 20 percent. You also have to look which nations are providing what in order to really get the right mix of capabilities. And just to make it a bit more complicated for you, OK, there are – right now, there are only four nations who still apply to all the 68 qualitative targets we are giving. That's the U.S. That's Germany. That's France. And that's Great Britain. Four out of 31. And those four, making up 60 percent of the capabilities overall NATO needs in order to defend.

So and then you see how sophisticated it gets when you assign those capability targets. But with that, this is capabilities overall. But in sustainment and enablement, everybody needs to do that. The problem we are seeing, especially when we look towards Ukraine, because in the past logistics was always a national issue. And this is why we are having the problems we are having, because you did not have to follow the real targets. This is what we are changing right now.

What you're also changing right now is you will see in about four weeks' time when the regional plans, designed by shape – so our sister headquarter down in Mons, when they will present the regional plans. Then it will be clear what's needed in order to defend if something happens right now. So they're coming up with that. What we do the first time is – because in the past we always looked into the future and the NATO defense planning process was just looking at the future and saying what capabilities are out there we need in 10 or 15 years? Now, you have it from today out. So we're combining what's needed today with what's needed in the future. This is all new quality in order to balance that.

So as I said, a lot of things have changed since the war in the Ukraine started. And with that we're really going forward with a completely new quality in the way we plan. And at the end of the day, as I said before, planning is nice. NATO is nations. Nations have to adhere to that. And nations have to bring the capabilities.

Mr. Bergmann: Admiral Bléjean, maybe to pick up on the point that you made, and Heather made, and has also been made about the variety of systems, the challenges of interoperability. It strikes me, one of the things that we've also learned from Ukraine is the difficulty of incorporating all these different systems that the Ukrainians are receiving, and that the maintenance tails, and that we're sort of – everyone who follows the war in Ukraine has now become sort of familiar with the challenge it can be to operate with all these different types of equipment.

It strikes me, one of the things that the EU is now starting to do with the joint ammunition agreement, which hopefully will be finalized and get off the ground from the EU, where the EU is collectively going to buy ammunition, is that this opens the door for the EU to help contribute to countries hitting NATO capability requirements, and also try to streamline some of the – you know, you mentioned all the 27 different Pentagons within the EU. Maybe helping coordinate them to start buying the same thing so they can hit NATO capability targets.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Yeah. I think that's already the challenge of the joint procurement.

First, a lot of members states there is no doubt that the interoperability process is driven by NATO. I mean, we have been using NATO standards forever. The difference is for those who were former USSR, you know, part of Warsaw Pact. Then they had a lot of old USSR-era or old Soviet-era weapon system. And so the challenge will be how we also use that context to modernize and to have – and that will go necessarily to the same standards.

So I think that would go necessary to the interoperability without also cheating too much on, you know, how we use that to really provide what Ukraine needs, not with a kind of concept that we use that money to replace what has been given with other standards.

In other way, the European peace facility, what I'm doing to render eligible equipment, there are several conditions. Need to match priority one list provided buyers officially by Ukraine. Needs to be delivered at the speed of relevance – our framework is six weeks – and need to be stock value, not replacement value. Otherwise, it would not be fair.

I'll give you an example. When we started and Poland has given 250 battle tanks. The first which were given were T-72, old pieces, half a billion euros apiece. Not that much. If we were taking in consideration the replacement caused by Leopard, for instance, it wouldn't be the same.

So we have to balance between the modernization which drives to standardization and interoperability to helping as much as we can Ukraine without – with, I think, the best value for the money we are putting there.

So but I think that will naturally go there. Under discussion we have with Ukraine and, you know, I was in Kyiv for the EU-Ukraine summit, is they are – which is very good – they are looking at the future. So they are talking about modernization, about having an army and armed forces which will be within the new standards. And the standards they are talking about are the NATO standards, obviously.

Mr. Bergmann: OK.

And, Heather, maybe to pick up on a point you also made about spending, there's been talk about the Vilnius summit of maybe there should be a new defense spending target where it should go from 2 percent to 3 percent. I think it's clear that everyone agrees that it will be great. We will, you know, all want European countries to start spending more on defense and get their military forces back up to speed.

But what do you think about the concept of setting a new numerical target for spending, perhaps, in 2034?

Ms. Conley: Well, if I wasn't excited about the 2 percent, I'm not sure I'm too excited about the 3 percent. And it's – again, it gets back to what you're investing in. You can spend 3 percent as we and, you know, latest figures Greece – the Greek government does as well, but it's what you spend it on that counts. We backed ourselves into something that's a numerical target that I think is now – is becoming increasingly weaponized as a way to say, you know, allies aren't worth it.

So, you know, we have to be extremely careful. I find it interesting, though, that as we think about the replacement for Secretary General Stoltenberg that, you know, the candidate has to be from a 2 percent. You know, that's your commitment. So it's just interesting to me how this conversation manifests.

If I can just – just to pull a couple of thoughts from this really interesting conversation, this is worth a seminar and a conference, and I don't want to belabor it but I just want to put a stake on it maybe for a future idea, Max.

This question about end state is huge because what you just said – and I completely agree with what you said – then how in the world do military leaders know what capabilities they need if they never have the end state?

How do you tell a population this is what we are achieving and the time frame?

That, to me, is where we need a conversation about end state goals and this is where my concern, just very focused on the war in Ukraine. If we are not clear on what victory or failure looks like, how in the world does General Cavoli know what capabilities he requires to achieve that end state? But I completely agree with what you say. I just think it's something we need to think about. I think because the last 20 years – Afghanistan/Iraq – we had no end state, and in some ways we have to think, I think, with a greater clarity, particularly what our populations will support. But I'm going to get off that topic right now.

Two other quick thoughts. Yeah.

Mr. Bergmann: Real quickly, did you want to respond –

Ms. Conley: (Laughs.) Well, I don't want to get this into a debate. We got to talk about credibility and capability.

Gen. Badia: We have a new seminar here. (Laughter.)

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Just give you a thought because, you know, it has developed in a much more sophisticated world. And what I said before, at least from my observation in the old world it was there was a military instrument of power and it was black and white. So if there was something, military was sent. Now you have a lot of instruments of power. Military instrument of power is one. And I would comment and say the end state is something very political, and this is where it's hard to get. Nevertheless, General Cavoli or we as military leaders, we know – we have a very, very good feel for what it takes to win. If you – so, because everything is at the end it's threat-informed, capability-based.

And I give you just one quick example, OK? For us, it is, I would say, as important or maybe not so important what the lessons learned out of Ukraine from our point of view. For me as a strategic planner, it's even much more interesting what the Russian lessons learned out of the Ukraine war because this will be the threat we are facing in 10 to 20 years, and this is what I have to counter, and this is what we have to plan for. I'm not so worried that we, from a military side of the house, we would not be prepared. This is what we are here for and that's what we get paid for.

Ms. Conley: You make me feel so much better, and you could not be more right. What we actually have to be thinking about now is Russian reconstitution, and that – in addition to this. So this is a parallel process.

Just two very quick comments.

Admiral, when you're talking about the European pillar of NATO and pulling on the general's comments about regional planning, you know, for so long, how long has it been the taboo of NATO regionalization? You could not say it. But I think it is absolutely a natural evolution, and we just saw it in the announcement the other week with the Nordic countries using their air – that is smart. That is exactly what we should do. But we have to have now, I think, a more conscientious approach. I'm not saying going back to the Cold War regional commands. I'm not talking about that. But I'm talking about a regionalization where all NATO members, there's a circulatory process to it but we have a greater concentration, whether that's north, south, or the east. And I think this is something that we need to unpack a little bit.

My final – my final comment is on sustainability. I think we are not having a passing grade, in my view – and I'd love the pushback from the audience or the panelists – about sustainability of existing equipment that we are providing to Ukraine. Some of that is by choice, by not allowing contractors and others to be able to facilitate. We are seeing the new center in Romania, a regional – you know, this is important in Poland as well. But we – this is logistics. This is sustainability. We're seeing how this equipment wears. How do we have to manage that in the field? I think, again, this is a huge area of learning.

And your point, Admiral, about are we going to keep sort of with the Soviet-era equipment – are we going to keep that because of cost and speed – or are we going to modernize NATO's eastern flank, I would argue we have to push to modernization because that flank is going to be – have to be thickened if we believe that Russia will reconstitute, if we believe this regime will come at this over and over again. We're talking about a different – so I – this is where the long-term costs really do have to come in. But I appreciate that, you know, the near term has to be addressed, and the funding is limited.

Mr. Bergmann: I think – I think that's a great point.

And I'm going to take – go to one of the questions from the audience which was also a question I had, so it works both ways. But the – Admiral Bléjean, you had mentioned that, you know, China as climate change, Russia as a hurricane. As a Floridian, the problem with hurricanes is they keep coming back and they – (laughter) – and I wonder now, you know, as – Heather's point about modernizing the eastern flank, it strikes me as a requirement because if you're giving away all the Soviet equipment you have to modernize. NATO's focused on, you know, conventional – warfare is back in Europe and the threat is conventional. However – and I ask this from an EU perspective – it strikes me that, you know, especially as Washington has

pivoted to, you know, we're focused on Russia and China but not so much on the Middle East anymore, not so much on North Africa, not so much on Europe's neighborhood, that the out-of-area operations and other interventions that we had been planning for for the last 20 years, actually Europe still may need to be doing those. And I'm curious, how do you balance the need to focus on the hurricane with other urgent challenges that may emerge in your periphery.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Well, the interesting thing in the context of the war against Ukraine that we could have seen the temptation of most of the EU member states to focus only on their immediate neighborhood. Saying, OK, the threat is there, so the rest is not that much important. And then we refocus there. It's not happening. It's not happening. And we have all those which are feeling the immediate danger from Russia – Baltic states, Poland, and so on – they are telling us also where we should not underestimate what's happening in our – in the global south. I'm not sure I like very much that wording, but in other strategic area of interest, including those concerned by fighting against terrorism.

We are not in not very comfortable position there, because things are moving. But the focus is still very much there around the Mediterranean, Northern Africa, up to the Gulf of Guinea. That's really an area where we do not want to give up things. And the challenge with this use of the European peace facility, which is exploding towards a focus on Ukraine, is that the member states are remembering why it's a global instrument. So we cannot spend everything for Ukraine. And if we do not have enough money to do that, we have to top up the instrument in order to preserve the global dimension of this instrument. And I think it's wise to do that.

Mr. Bergmann: Great. I'm going to take some of the questions from the audience and then we'll maybe do lightning rounds and go through the panelists. There's a question about – from Byron. How is NATO viewing the red line with regards to cyberattacks, and potentially invoking Article 5? This, I think, is a real concern for both NATO and the EU, and the potential threats to European infrastructure. General Badia, maybe.

Gen. Badia: Yeah. You know, there are strategic papers out there on how we use cyber, how we view cyberattacks. You know, we are working in five domains. It's air, land, and sea, and then it's space and cyber. With space and cyber, it's different to the three, I mean, more military-driven domains, because space and cyber is very much driven by civil side as well, especially if you look at the European side.

And what we are working on – I mean, there is – there are clear statements out there. There is a clear view out there that could be – Article 5 could be

invoked. But at the same time, and we all know that and it's not a secret, defining what would be a clear attack, how would you do that, this is really hard. And I just compare it also to space. If you see the space treaty is from 1966, and nothing else has been basically – could be agreed on later, use of space, then peaceful use of space. And it's the same on cyber.

So if you compare those two, it's pretty hard right now. And what you really need to agree to, and this is what we are working to and what we also see, is you need a code of conduct. Because if you don't have the code of conduct, then where is your red line? And this is from a military point of view. This is – you know, again, it comes down to deterrence. And this is what you are working on. This is what we are needing. But right now, it's – we will come to decisions if something happens. But it's pretty hard to do that, and we need to do better on that point.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: If I can –

Mr. Bergmann: Please.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Something on that, because we have Article 5. We have the – (inaudible) – in EU, 42.7. I would say there are two things. First is the attribution. So how can we give the evidence of the attribution? And usually in this hybrid domain, they carefully avoid to be clearly 100 percent sure of attribution. I take the example of the Nord Stream gas attack. Who is behind it? Some people are saying, well, it cannot be the Russians, so the U.S. I mean, what – the facts are just saying it has been done by professionals, and they make sure they were not relating any evidence that would attribute to it. So open question. I think we'll never have the answer. So the attribution is really important there. And that's all the context of the hybrid warfare.

And then the answer. I mean, neither Article 5 nor 42.7 are triggering a military response. They are just making sure that when allied states or when member countries is attacked and invoking that article, which needs to be endorsed by all the community, that everyone is considered to be attacked. What will be the nature of the answer of the response is another story.

Mr. Bergmann: Heather, what –

Ms. Conley: Well, our understanding of when a cyberattack hits a NATO member, whether that was in 2007 in Estonia, the bronze knight incident, or in 2022 at the – you know, it was more hacktivists and Russian cybercriminals, potentially, in Colonial Pipelines, we managed it bilaterally. There isn't a desire to bring a NATO issue into it. And, again, that's history. I think the question would be if you'd really have a crippling cyberattack against energy, nuclear power plants, taking – you know, wiping out – it doesn't even have to be cyber. Let's say tapping the transatlantic undersea cables

that would cut all communications there. Is that an Article 5? So I think there's a level of severity, civilian issue harms away. But I think, quite frankly, allies will manage it bilaterally in normal course.

Gen. Badia: I think that's what it is right now because when it comes to cyber, NATO's role is a coordinating role and raising awareness. That's what it is. But when it comes to capabilities, all the cyber capabilities, be it defensive or offensive, rests with the nations.

Mr. Bergmann: Admiral, we have a question for you from Greg Sanders.

Looking at the 155 potential procurement, could that be applied to other areas, other portfolios, other weapon systems? And if so, which weapon systems.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Yeah. Well, there are two things. On the 155, it's an urgent measure, an urgent procedure that we want the European Defense Agency to take care of. But it's in parallel with a lot of other joint procurement projects we have put. And, by the way, we have also added missiles in that urgence. So it's urgent for recompleting our stocks and also delivering it to Ukraine, because that's part of also their modernization.

You know, we're talking about Soviet-era. They have a lot of 152mm calibers. But there is no more ammunitions, and very few people are able to produce them. They are not able. So they are already shifting to a standard. That's the reason why they are focusing on 155. But, yes, the joint procurement adventure – or the joint venture, I would say – is really focused everything that the member states are thinking they need to build the proper army of the future in the European theater.

Mr. Bergmann: It really is sort of a new era that the EU is buying ammunition. (Laughter.) General, there's a – I guess for all panelists – there's a question about whether Ukraine will ever be a part of NATO. Also another question about a Sweden-Turkey stalemate, and whether there'll be a breakthrough there. You know, are we going to get to 32, 33? I think everyone's extremely excited about Finland. The Swedes are still waiting at the door. What about Ukraine? What would need to happen for Ukraine to become a member?

Gen. Badia: (Laughs.) I start with Sweden. I'm absolutely convinced rather earlier than later they will join. And, as we know, what are the discussions that are behind it, and I think we will overcome this at the end of the day. And this is from a NATO perspective, and from a military perspective. It's always the cohesion of the alliance. You have to be very careful to send the right messages, because it's also a point of deterrence, number one.

Number two, when it comes to Ukraine this is a politically – I have – of course, Chris Badia has a view to that. And this is what has been discussed this morning already, OK? If a country is at war, and what we see there, and then it's a European country, and that's what's it has, then looking towards EU and looking towards NATO I think it's a clear way forward where this discussion needs to go.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: Well, it's touching also the EU in large amount. I mean, those are the same principles. So but Ukraine, I have no doubt that Ukraine will become an EU full member. I cannot put a date on it. But I would bet it would happen sooner than expected. It's conditions based, but I think there will be – and that's a personal view. I'm not expressing any official thing. There will be a kind of feeling that we owe them something, from – I mean, I'm putting myself in the context where peace or kind of victory will be in their hands, and we will owe them some things; and also because they are defending our values, common values; and because also they are defending the next EU borders and the next NATO borders in some ways.

So I think that would be part of it. But what I can tell you is that when I was in Kyiv for the EU-Ukraine summit with President Zelensky, we discussed during six hours, one hour on the war, five hours on the accession. So that means they are doing their homework. They are changing the laws to fight against corruption and so on. So they are doing what's necessary to be a full member, ticking all of the conditions that need to be made.

Ms. Conley: And in many ways, Sweden and Finland demonstrated with speed you can enter NATO. There's no need for a membership action plan. There's no need for, in some ways, artificiality, other than, obviously, it's a reform process. So in some ways that demonstrated it can be done quickly, at speed.

You know, ultimately, in my view, as we talk about future security guarantees for Ukraine, there is only one security guarantee, and that would be its membership in NATO. And if we think about the cost of providing Ukraine the long-term defensive capabilities that it needs, the so-called porcupine strategy, to be able to repel future Russian attacks, that's going to be very expensive.

So if you think about the cost-benefit analysis, that's a different way of thinking about it. You know, I believe what Vladimir Putin has done has now set Ukraine on an irreversible course towards NATO and the European Union. I would think potentially that NATO is a faster process than the EU. And we know historically typically NATO has come first before EU membership. We have historical understanding. We have welcomed divided countries into NATO, and that was West Germany.

So we have precedent here. It's very, very difficult to see it now. But at the end of this, we are going to have a Ukrainian military that's one of the most highly NATO-interoperable and one of the highest-performing militaries in Ukraine – in Europe. It will add value to the alliance.

So there are lots of reasons to put – think about this in a broader perspective. I believe Moldova could be shifting its own thinking about its neutrality, potentially. So there's going to be other things to think about. We still have a lot of unfinished business, of course, in the western Balkans as well; so much work to be done.

Gen. Badia: If I can just add something on that. So we have to make clear it's not a beauty contest between NATO and EU. It's a joint venture. And it's the interest of NATO to have as many of the allied nations being part of the EU, and vice versa. So, I mean, maybe we'll reach the finish line at the same time.

Ms. Conley: That would be fantastic. (Laughter.)

Mr. Bergmann: That applies to our Norwegian and British colleagues as well, I think.

So we have just two minutes left, so I'm going to ask a very open-ended question for all three of you to answer in a very short amount of time. It's 2030. What has – and we look back on the last seven years and say, man, Europe has really turned it around. What are the things that Europe has then – what are the steps Europe has taken to really strengthen itself defensively? And what are you hoping to see over the next five to 10 years?

Gen. Badia: From a NATO perspective, it's really strengthening the European pillar of NATO, having military capabilities for a military instrument of power that Europe, to a large extent – and, you know, always together with all allies, but to a large extent can defend itself and make the world safer.

Vice Adm. Bléjean: For EU, I would say first we have to secure everything we are doing today. We are doing a lot of progress. We have to make sure that when peace will be there, we are not coming back to our soft power and say it's over so we can ease the pressure. And we need to be much more agile, flexible, and a quick responder to any strategic surprise. We have seen last year it happened. It would happen again, I think.

Ms. Conley: Gosh, I hope we're not having the same conversation in 2030 that we're having here. I think for a European pillar of NATO to really come into its own, Europe has to have a bigger chunk of enablers so they're doing this by themselves. It does not require the United States to be that framing logistics.

And I think what we aren't talking about is, you know, managing a two-theater construct and what elements of European military capabilities can be useful in the Indo-Pacific, and the U.S. needing to manage both theaters, not an either/or. That's the challenge. Again, that's what Secretary General Stoltenberg and others are thinking about. How do you bring Asia-Pacific partners into supporting European security? How does Europe support greater Indo-Pacific security? That will be, I think, the continued challenge that we will have well into 2030.

Mr. Bergmann: Great. With that, I want to thank you all. I want to thank you, General, Admiral, for your service. I want to thank you for all the hard work that you – I know you all have been doing over the last year and a half to support Ukraine and strengthen European security; and for the EU-NATO cooperation I think we see on stage and I think will hopefully be a taste of what we're going to see in the future.

Please join me in thanking our panelists. (Applause.)

Thank you. We'll take a quick coffee break, and then the third and final panel will be here.

(END)