



Atlantic Council

Atlantic Council

Members' Conference Call Series

**Live from the NATO Summit:
Assessing the Future of the Alliance**

Featuring remarks by:

R. Nicholas Burns,

*Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics,
Harvard Kennedy School of Government
and*

Former US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Damon Wilson,

*Executive Vice President,
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Moderated by:

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*Transcript by
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OPERATOR: Excuse me, everyone. We now have Atlantic Council president and CEO Frederick Kempe on the line to start the call. Please be aware that each of your lines is now in a listen-only mode. At the conclusion of the speaker's remarks we'll open the floor for questions. At that time instructions will be given on how to proceed if you'd like to ask a question. I would now like to turn it over to Mr. Kempe, who will be offering some introductory remarks and choose the speakers and facilitate the discussion.

Mr. Kempe, you may begin.

FREDERICK KEMPE: Thank you very much, Vicente.

Welcome. As Vicente said, this is Fred Kempe. I first of all want to underscore how important the NATO summit is, that's ongoing. Some people have said it's one of the most important summits in NATO history. And one can regard that either from an upside or a downside, and our speakers will talk about that.

We've got a lot of people on the line. We're on the record. We'll get to as many questions as we can. And we've got experts, one of them sitting in Cardiff, our own Damon Wilson, vice president – executive vice president of Atlantic Council, and then Nick Burns in Cambridge, the American Cambridge, at Harvard. And I'll give each of them a quick introduction before we get going. A summary and transcript of the call will be on our website shortly after the call, as soon as we can get it up.

This week NATO convened 40 heads of states from its members and partners for the alliance's summit in Wales and the United Kingdom. This is, as I said, arguably one of the most important summits in NATO history as NATO is facing a range of challenges, from open conflict in Ukraine to the worrying and rapid proliferation of ISIS, the end of the largest mission in NATO's history in Afghanistan. And then beyond the current headlines, NATO has to tackle an emerging world of geopolitical competition.

We've seen the greatest number of crises since the end of the Cold War develop rapidly – it's one of the worst Augusts I can remember in my entire life – and there's real urgency to convening alliance leaders to galvanize international responses to these threats. So one of the question is whether this summit is living up to the challenges, and here to provide us with insights, as I said, Damon Wilson, executive vice president of the Atlantic Council. He'll go first and give us a little bit of a briefing on what has happened thus far in Cardiff. And also, he was just completing our Atlantic Council Future Leaders Summit at the NATO summit, and maybe he'll give us a quick download on what that was all about.

Ambassador Nick Burns – he was ambassador of NATO – Atlantic Council board director, will follow him. Let me introduce him now so I won't go through that again. Nick was a U.S. ambassador from 2001 to 2005 to NATO, ambassador to Greece '97 to 2001, and spokesman of the State Department before that, 1995 to '97. For five years he worked on the National Security Council at the White House, where he was a senior director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia affairs and special assistant to President Clinton and director for Soviet affairs in the administration of President George H.W. Bush.

Damon, from 2007 to 2009, served as special assistant to the president and senior director for European affairs at the – at the National Security Council. He had a series of jobs before that at NATO and the State Department, chief of staff at our embassy in Iraq, so a broad set of responsibilities where he's – that have spanned international relations, and in particular – in particular Trans-Atlantic relations in NATO.

So, Damon, why don't you kick us off from Wales and then Nick will follow you?

DAMON WILSON: Thank you very much, Fred. And it's a pleasure to be here with everyone. Just right at the top let me just mention why we're here and then I'll get into framing – briefing sort of the summit decisions, and look forward to hearing Ambassador Burns' analysis of that.

We're here at the invitation of both NATO and the British government to run what's called the Future Leaders Summit. So we've recruited, from across 34 nations, all of NATO allies and key partners – North America, Europe, Eurasia, Middle East and North Africa and Asia, including Afghanistan – 34 delegates that are between the ages of 25 and 35. They're entrepreneurs, CEOs, civil society leaders, parliamentary – members of parliament, diplomats, veterans, journalists who already have demonstrated proven leadership in their own countries, in their own communities.

And we've been working essentially under the mandate of Secretary-General Rasmussen since the beginning of this year. And we've set out this project and training sort of in recognition that at the end of the day the Trans-Atlantic bond is underpinned by these relationships and that the alliance itself has to invest in that. So they gathered earlier this spring under the mandate of the secretary-general to prepare a report to the NAC, which they presented in Brussels in May, to help seed some ideas in advance of the Wales summit.

We then have expanded the group and gathered them here in Wales, where over the past three days they've been engaging leaders, prime ministers, foreign ministers, defense ministers, the secretary-general, NATO's military commanders to offer their own ideas and contributions. They've been playing a major public diplomacy role. We were the only sort of outside group, if you will, that was embedded in the Celtic Manor, the summit venue, and you can follow their big debate on the hashtag #future nato.

And they're leaving Wales now with the tasking of taking forward the issues that they've selected on the NATO agenda to figure out how to have an impact, whether it's on Afghanistan, emerging threats or Ukraine-Russia, as the working group, the Future Leaders – in many respects, as the secretary-general calls them, as these honorary ambassadors of the alliance going forward.

And that's what brought the Atlantic Council into the heart of the Wales summit, and so at the same that that organization role gave us a terrific access to the decision-makers as the decisions were being taken and as the summit was unfolding. So let me just briefly offer a little bit of a debrief. NATO itself saw this summit about a year and a half ago as a potentially reflective summit taking into account the drawdown after a decade-plus of combat in Afghanistan. And because of world events, it really, in their view, has turned into an inflection point summit, sort of stealing a phrase from

Fred Kempe and the National Intelligence Council, about the time – times that we’re in. And you’re hearing NATO officials talk about this as a potential turning point summit for the alliance leading to a sort of realigned – a re-branded alliance, almost a NATO 4.0, as Ambassador Sandy Vershbow, the deputy secretary-general, has called it, recognizing that the first chapter of the alliance was about deterrence during the Cold War; second about outreach partnership and enlargement. The third phase was really the operational phase dominated by Afghanistan after 9/11, and now this NATO 4.0 has been a combination of going back to basics, because primarily of Mr. Putin, but also recognition that the alliance can’t be confined to basics and has really pushed forward on this idea of a heavily networked alliance that is the hub of a global security network.

So it’s true the leaders were gathering at a – at a very difficult, potentially historic time, the drawdown of the mission in Afghanistan, the reeling impact of the defense cuts that we’ve experienced since the Great Recession and the reality that the arc of crisis, if you will, the periphery of the alliance is on fire looking at southeast – on Turkey’s border of Iraq and Syria, first and foremost, Ukraine – the Russian assault inside Ukraine. But even Libya, where the alliance ran an operation just two years ago, is in crisis today. At the same time, it’s against the backdrop of a clear approach from the Obama administration the past couple years to take an intentional step back within the alliance to force the other allies to step up and step forward and to address essentially this burden-sharing argument, as Secretary Gates and others have spoken to so forcefully during their tenures. And this summit came together with a sense of urgency because of the crises in Ukraine, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan itself.

The major decisions sort of fall into three bundles, and they’re pretty significant for the summit – for the alliance. The first is this sort of bundle of things that fall under what’s called the Readiness Action Plan, which does look like it could be the most fundamental realignment of the NATO (force structure since the end of the Cold War. And it sort of builds on the backbone of three aspects: The NATO response force, which frankly has lost a little bit of its responsiveness, has been reinvigorated and there will be a new spearhead force within the NRF that really will be capable of deploying rapidly within a matter of days. Second, this will be backed up by, for the first time ever, a new command headquarters element that will be on the territory of a quote-unquote new ally, that’s a new ally after the NATO-Russia founding act in Poland. And this will be a headquarters unlike any other NATO headquarters – will be fully focused on Article 5 collective defense, common defense of the alliance, as opposed to the operations that the other headquarters have been focused on, but significantly, for the first time, putting it in the new member territory. And this will be backed up by forward deployment of NATO assets and forces. There’s been contortions around trying to avoid the word “permanent” in an effort to not stick an eye in the Russians, of a direct violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and so the alliance has agreed to continuous – so, continuous air, land and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern part of the alliance on rotational basis. So there are caveats there but what everyone says – that it turns into a basic continuous permanent presence. It’ll be backed up by new resources – up to a hundred million dollars to upgrade some of the facilities – and the newer allies to help them serve as host nations in terms of reinforcement of other allied forces. And this is buoyed by the \$1 billion reassurance package that President Obama announced earlier in Warsaw.

The second part of this is – was really hitting at the core – the core challenge of the capabilities, was, frankly, lack of defense investment. And so for the first time since 2006, and certainly since the Great Recession, there’s been a renewed commitment across the alliance to end the decline in defense spending. It’s as if the allies have walked up to the cliff, looked over and decided to step back. And they’ve taken a political commitment here in Wales that this will be the bottom. This will be the nadir. And from here on out there will be a sense of momentum and movement towards reinvestments in defense issues. The United States have been pushing quite hard to have a very firm commitment of all allies to recommit to get to 2 percent of spending of the – of GDP on defense and of that, 20 percent or more on defense investment. The eventual defense pledge was a little bit watered down and so those allies have a – all

those allies who are not yet there have agreed to halt any decline in defense expenditure and aim to increase this towards 2 percent within a decade. And so there's a political commitment; it's a little softer, I think, than many had hoped, coming into this.

The third bundle of issues revolves around NATO's partners. There's a whole new effort to leverage the Global Partnership Initiative that President Obama announced in Chicago with a new Partnership Interoperability Initiative. And this really draws on the lessons from Afghanistan and Libya of the importance of non-NATO allies in the operations. So, for the first time, countries – there will be five countries that have stepped forward with a so-called gold card for participation in NATO activities – Sweden, Finland, Australia, Jordan and Georgia. And these countries, for the first time, will be integrated over – into NATO planning cycles and all exercises; they'll have an opportunity to have a much bigger say and participation in NATO activities. While at the same time, about 24 other countries have a broader platform with which – with which to engage. The alliance, as well, also announced a whole new series of initiatives, one being the Defense Capabilities Initiative, premised on the idea of helping to project stability and security without deploying large forces, so drawing on lessons from Afghanistan, thinking about how to forward deploy NATO's training capacity, defense-building capacity. And it will begin in countries like Jordan and Moldova to assist these countries, but hopefully will be expanded, and again going to back to the idea of trying to put NATO at the hub of a global security network, increasingly working with organizations like the African Union.

To close this, what I'd say is that these are some significant decisions for the alliance itself, but the reality is, Fred said, Wales was also a convening, a gathering of the leaders of pretty – of the free world and their closest partners. And so the challenge that I think they urgently faced as political leaders, was not just the NATO agenda, but the test coming from the conflict that Putin was challenging – directly challenging the alliance after his actions in Ukraine. And this is where I think the alliance did an incredible job by projecting a sense of security and commitment to the allies. President Obama's visit to Estonia before the summit underscored that. But in some senses by providing clarity about the defense of all allies, combined with the sense of a lack of clarity about what to do with partners, particularly the partners in the East, the inadvertent consequence is perhaps a reinforcing of this gray zone. There's a heavy dose of realism here in Wales that there really was only so much allies were willing to do, able to do for Ukraine and I think you saw a tremendous outpouring of political support, you saw a modest step by NATO to say it would have long-term commitment to developing Ukraine's defense capacities over the medium to long-term, but a clear – pretty clear message that there's no military solution and there won't be short-term military lethal assistance as it looks for the time being to support Ukraine. Hence, I think helping to convince President Poroshenko that even though a cease-fire has the negative potential to lead him to a frozen conflict, that may be the way to go and that's – (inaudible) – now.

The second two challenges, in fact Ambassador Burns will speak to this: Middle East, ISIS; much activity on the margins of the summit which we can get into; and Afghanistan, which was a missed opportunity here. This summit was really meant to mark the end of combat operations, a real transition in Afghanistan, and because of the election impasse, there was no president of Afghanistan present in Wales and it took place against the backdrop of an uptick in Taliban activity. And really the discussion here was, are we making a mistake, will Afghanistan face the same fate of Iraq if we don't get this right?

They closed the summit out by agreeing to reconvene in Poland, which will host the next summit, likely in two years from now. Fred, with that, I've gone on too long, let me stop and turn back to you and Ambassador Burns.

MR. KEMPE: Thanks, Damon. That was a great briefing – a lot of questions raised there. You know, my first blush comment on this would be it looks like the allies did well for themselves but did they do that well for the world? But we can come back to that.

Let me turn to Nick. And Nick, I mean, you've been ambassador to NATO, you've planned many of these sorts of summits. You did have the most important policymaking position, you know, short of the secretary of state at the State Department. So give us – give us your view of how you think this summit has gone and its sort of historical context.

NICHOLAS BURNS: Well thank you, Fred. Thanks to you and the Atlantic Council. Thanks to Damon Wilson for that very fine briefing. And good afternoon, everyone.

Fred, I'd say that this summit was one of the most consequential that NATO has had in its 65-year history simply because of the times and the challenges that these leaders face. And I think there are positives and negatives, and I'll start with the positive takeaways.

Certainly, the administration and President Obama and his team should feel proud of what they accomplished. They accomplished more in strengthening the alliance itself at this summit than most in the past. Damon's talked about some concrete achievements here. The NATO response force is not a new idea, it's an old idea; actually, it's more than 10 years old. But they really made it, they've now configured it so it can be very useful in defending those alliance neighbors that may need it in the future, especially those exposed to Russian power like Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

The decision on Defense spending that President Obama talked about in his press conference is very positive, that everyone is – has agreed to achieve a target of 2 percent GDP spending, but I think the devil's going to be in the details because only four of the allies currently meet that, and I'm skeptical that some of the major European allies – Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands – will be able to meet that in the future, and certainly, some impressive decisions on military readiness and on stationing of NATO forces in the Baltics and Poland.

I think there's also a renewed sense in the United States of the importance of NATO and of Europe because of the crisis with Ukraine, because of the challenge that President Putin has put forward to the West. With all the talk of a pivot to Asia over the last several years, Europe is still our largest trade partner, Europe is still the largest investor in the United States and NATO's our most important alliance. And so you saw some of that – there was a sense of urgency at this summit that I don't remember at prior summits.

And I think in Europe as well, Putin's invasion of Ukraine – that, I think, is the right word, and it's disappointing to see that the United States and Germany won't use the word invasion after Putin has annexed Crimea and after he's put his own soldiers across the border into Ukraine to destabilize eastern Ukraine just in the last two weeks. But because of that, because of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, it's been a wake-up call for Europe, and I think the Europeans now understand that NATO is vital for them going forward.

For the last quarter century, there was a democratic peace in Europe, that peace has been shattered now by Putin. So for all of those reasons, I think NATO has been – has been re-energized in the process, and it's been a positive summit.

I do think, however, that there is a – some major challenges that remain after the summit that the alliance didn't really deal with, and the first is on Ukraine. I did not see any concrete proposals for significant military assistance by the NATO countries, by the United States to the Ukrainian government, and the idea that we would not provide assistance to Ukraine when it needs to be able to protect its country, re-establish its authority in the eastern part of the country, it's very disappointing. The fact that there were no tough sanctions announced at the summit when all the world was watching, when the timing was right to really leverage President Putin, I thought was also disappointing.

Now, it's positive that President Obama and the other leaders have said that there will be further sanctions because of what Putin has just done, but, you know, you see now that classic – that Putin has acted in classic fashion. There's a new peace plan by Putin, there's now a new ceasefire, and we hope that that ceasefire will hold, but as President Obama said, we should be skeptical that it will.

I think NATO missed an opportunity here to increase the cost to President Putin by much tougher economic sanctions, financial sanctions on Russia. I think the impetus for those sanctions will now clearly decrease in Europe because of the prospects for some kind of political solution and ceasefire. My own view is that we can't trust Putin and that whatever peace plan and ceasefire's been put forward, he will continue to try to intimidate the Ukrainian government and he will leave his own forces on the territory of Ukraine itself. So in that sense, I'm sorry to say that I think that Putin has outmaneuvered the NATO leaders on this question.

The fact that France has still not cancelled both of its Mistral naval vessel sales to Russia is really ludicrous. The French said that they would – they would cancel one of them, but there's still one on the books. There are members of NATO that refuse to give up the defense contract they've already signed with Russia that are on the books but where the armaments have not yet been delivered. This does not speak of a strong, united, forceful alliance, it speaks to an alliance that has been intimidated in a way by the Russian government.

So I think that this has – this Ukraine issue is going to continue to bedevil the alliance, I don't think we saw a strong statement by the – by the NATO allies on Ukraine. In fact, I think maybe the way to look at the summit is that they made a lot of very positive impressive decisions to strengthen NATO and to reaffirm Article V and to reaffirm military readiness, but they did not make decisions that would be truly useful to the Ukrainian government.

Just two other points. I think that the President Obama did a very good job in his press conference today of outlining the initial framework of a pushback against ISIS in Iraq and possibly in Syria. And the United States has certainly put forward substantial commitment of air force – of air force to combat ISIS. It's now up to the Europeans to join the U.S. in a coalition.

The president says there will be a coalition, he said he heard positive comments by the allies. I hope very much that the Europeans will contribute not just with political support but with actual air assets to supplement what the United States has been doing. And I would say the big challenge is to convince some of the Sunni Arab states in the Middle East that they should give actual military and political support to such a coalition.

Last point and I'll stop here, Fred and Damon. On Afghanistan, I know there was a special session on Afghanistan. I know it's a big problem, obviously, in trying to finish the election and work out the disputes between the two presidential candidates, but I think it's deeply worrying that NATO did not face the major decision it has to make: will it leave even a minimal level of combat forces in Afghanistan post-2016. And to have announced that we intend to bring the troops out by the end of 2016 does not – certainly won't intimidate the Taliban; it might even reinforce what the Taliban is planning to do, which is a major offensive against the new Afghan government.

That new government's going to be weak. It just seems to me that a better decision would have been for NATO to say that it's going to stay with some minimal level of combat forces post-2016. So those are my comments, Fred and Damon, on the summit.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Nick, for that. So if I'm putting together what both of you have said, I think what I'm hearing is under normal conditions, this would've been a very satisfactory or even successful summit because of some of the NATO-specific issues that have moved ahead that hadn't moved ahead for quite some time. But these are not normal situations, and by the measure of the historic situation, that the – that the alliance fell short.

So let me go to Damon first and then Nick. Is that a right reading of what you've said collectively? And if so, five years from now, what has been decided today that one could celebrate most, and five years from now, what do you think was not decided today where we may end up living – or paying for it being left out?

MR. WILSON: Fred thanks. I would say – first of all, I'd say under normal conditions, you actually wouldn't have gotten even the decisions you got. We only got this decision package because of Vladimir Putin, and I think that's the first part. NATO only fumbled decisions about itself, even areas where it had been trying for a while, because of the sense of focusing it behind the relevance of the alliance the Putin aggression in the east caused.

I think that what strikes me is the allies did pretty well of taking care of themselves, as you – as you said yourselves. The concern that I have is that there's a sense of – it's a false sense of security that you can protect your home if you've got fires raging all around it. And I think that's what the alliance is facing as it looks south, southeast and east that can really – can NATO really be secure? Can their – can European security – can Europe be stable when its periphery is facing some of the most serious historic crises? And I think that's something that because there wasn't a clear strategy for some of those problems, the focusing end word was "reassuring" and an important thing to do, but it belies a false sense of security if everything is falling apart around you.

And five years from now – I think a significant thing in five years from now, maybe two things: one, that it normalizes the ability of the alliance to move its own assets and resources throughout the alliance, including in the east, even though the alliance did not repudiate the NATO – (inaudible) – provisions that restrict that to some degree, and in all essences and purposes it did

through its decisions, and so the normalization of there are no two tiers of allies and the alliance can deploy on its own territory if it pleases.

The second one is, I think there are strategic implications in Wales to what the decisions that took place on these partners. The ISAF operation in Afghanistan was 98 percent NATO forces or other European forces. There's a good likelihood that any major operation in the future in which many of the allies are engaged, that percentage won't hold. There will be far more partners from Asia, the Middle East that are likely to take place in future operations. And what NATO has just done is it has removed some degree of barrier that really will help put the alliance at the hub of a global security network, because it's opened up a process for countries that have both the political will and the capability to really be able to use and work with the alliance as a credible framework for military operations, wherever they may be.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Damon.

MR. BURNS: So I'd just say that I think that President Obama deserves credit for having reenergized NATO. I get the sense – and I was ambassador there after 9/11, at another critical time – that this alliance has been revitalized. Putin maybe also deserves some credit for that. Putin's actions have revitalized NATO and have really woken up NATO, especially the European members. And I think at President Obama's press conference today, he listed four or five concrete achievements, and he deserves credit for those.

I would also say, though, I don't think that the alliance met the central challenge at this summit, and that was a clear, forceful and convincing response to Putin, because I'm skeptical about the cease-fire and very skeptical about Putin's peace plan. Putin has unfortunately intimidated the Ukrainian government, because there's been no effective, in part, Western response. So a sanctions decision this week would have been much more effective than a sanctions decision two or three weeks from now, whenever NATO and the EU are going to make that sanctions decision. A decision to extend even defensive military equipment to Ukraine would have been a strong answer to Putin. And so I think that the alliance did well, NATO did well reconfigure and revive itself, but it didn't answer the Ukraine question. And that's a problem because if you take Ukraine on top of Georgia in 2008, Putin's invasion of Georgia, and if you add to that the intimidation of Moldova and of Armenia and of Belarus, you have in place now new dividing lines in Europe. And President Putin is going to get away with this unless the cost is raised to him, and it doesn't appear that's going to be the case.

MR. KEMPE: Thanks for the clear answer, Nick, and to Damon as well.

So let's turn first to Jan Lodal of the Atlantic Council.

Q: (Inaudible.) Nick just started off by making my introductory comments, so I want repeat it. It seemed to me that – except to say that it seems to me that what happened here is that we went into the summit with Putin about four or five days away from a successful fait accompli, and unfortunately we've lost two or three of those four or five days, and so it looks like the fait accompli is there. And we now face a situation of living with a de facto Russian-controlled not only Crimea but of this part of Ukraine for the foreseeable future.

So I think the question I would have is, is there any serious effort underway in the alliance to think through the details of how to provide enough military support and economic support and so forth to Ukraine to make sure that the fait accompli is not expanded? And of course, we've already had a lot of discussion about the need for much more serious sanctions to try to – which is the only option right now to try to reverse it, it would seem to me.

MR. KEMPE: Thanks for that question, Jan. For those on the line, formal top official in the Pentagon.

So, Nick, why don't you go first and then Damon. And let me add to Jan's question. What we're really talking about is we were talking about the summit. But of course, a lot of things take place underneath the level of the summit, and that's what Jan's getting at – any serious work, military, economic support within the alliance toward Ukraine that we're not seeing. Obviously there was an announcement of exercises on Ukrainian territory that some have pointed to.

So why don't both of you take on that and get us into -- a little bit into the dynamics of the Ukraine debate within the alliance that one doesn't see every day.

MR. BURNS: Well, this is Nick. Fred and Jan, thank you very much for your comment and question. I would just say that I think this is a critical question. How can the Western countries, indeed the world community, help to sustain the Ukrainian government that's embattled, that is overseeing a sick, faltering economy and that has a deep, deep social and political divide in the country? And the challenges are enormous.

And here I would give credit to the European Union and to Germany, that on the economic side the Europeans – and the Germans in particular – have announced over the last several months, including just the last two weeks, a substantial economic aid to Ukraine. And I think the United States could do more on the economic side, perhaps not to match what the EU has done because the EU is – the EU is obviously – is going to play a bigger role on trade and investment in Ukraine by virtue of geography, but the U.S. could do more on the economic side to help the Ukrainians.

On the military side, military support, I get the sense, but Damon would know better because he's in Wales, that the Europeans are quite skittish on this and quite divided, and that that lack of unity was a major reason for why we didn't go forward in Ukraine. I would hope that the United States government would look again at this issue of military support for Ukraine should it be requested, because even if the cease-fire holds, we have Russian separatist groups, Russian military forces on the soil of Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea, at the very least, we should want this major country Ukraine to have the ability to defend itself from any further invasion, or if the war resumes – and I would – I'm sorry to say I think there's a chance that that might happen, that this cease-fire might not hold.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you.

MR. WILSON: Right, I really do think there's a mismatch between the rhetoric and the action. Poroshenko received quite a bit of political solidarity. There's a lot of political outrage. But the reality is, in concrete terms, very few allies are willing to back it up in terms of direct support for Ukraine. You will see there was an agreement that will lead to increase in nonlethal military assistance. The alliance is pushing forward several trust funds to support things like logistics, cyberdefense, command and control, rehabilitation of injured troops. There was great momentum on sanctions, and I think they will come, although I think I agree with Nick: It would have been powerful if they came while everyone was here. The most significant thing was the announcement of a U.S.-led exercise in western Ukraine. This is an exercise that the United States had stepped away from many months ago because of the (conflict announced but ?) we would go forward with other NATO allies.

But at the end of the day, there was a debate among – from what we've heard from some of the internal conversations about lethal assistance, and really only a few allies have been supporting that position, and either opposition or ambivalence among many of the others, who were taking a very painfully, as they would say, realistic view that if this escalates, it's the issue of the Ukrainian military being defeated by Russia. The problem is, is that the alternative cease-fire – permanent cease-fire could lead to a permanent dismemberment of Ukraine, not just with Crimea but with the Donbass. So I agree with Nick. I think this is the biggest missed opportunity to galvanize the alliance between a more coherent strategy to deter Putin. And in terms of the big picture, I think some of the allies failed to recognize that if they don't succeed in helping to deter Putin's aggression and invasion of Ukraine today, we're going to be facing a series of conflicts and crises that may force the allies' hands further down the line even as the costs get higher.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Damon.

Let me turn to James Reinl with Al-Jazeera. And also, if you want to address your question to one of the two discussants specifically, please say that as well.

Q: OK. Great. I'll come in with a question. It's open to whoever's interested in answering it. I'm interested in the efforts against the Islamic State, because we're starting to see the shape of a coalition now. One can envisage, you know, what this will look like – a combination of Western airstrikes, Kurdish and Iraqi ground troops, efforts to get local Sunni sheiks on board. Given that the Islamic State can also envisage this kind of response, what do you think is their game plan, their strategy? And what predictions would you make about how this conflict will play out?

MR. BURNS: Well, this is Nick Burns, James. I would just say that I thought one of the more positive aspects of the NATO meeting were the discussions on ISIS and on the – and on how to combat ISIS, the Islamic State. And certainly I think here President Obama did lay out in his press conference this morning the outlines of a coherent and impressive strategy, if it can work.

I don't doubt the wherewithal of the United States. I think the U.S. is looking at this as a long-term effort that might take months or years to accomplish. It's interesting that the president is using the word – he wants to defeat the Islamic State, not contain it. And you heard that from other U.S. officials, which is welcome to hear.

But to defeat ISIS, the Islamic State, will require a substantial sustained military effort well into 2015, if not beyond. And the key question marks from the NATO meeting are, number one, will the European allies now step up with concrete support, meaning will they contribute their own air assets, aircraft, and personnel into the theater to combat ISIS? Number two, will the Sunni Arab states step forward and can it not just be a NATO coalition of NATO members, Europeans, Americans and Canadians, but can Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar and other states also participate on the – in – militarily as well as politically in the coalition? Will Turkey, a NATO member, agree to take measures to close its border to the introduction of ISIS oil, Islamic State-controlled oil, on – that’s being sold both openly and on – in the Turkish market but also in the black market? And that would be an important way to cut off ISIS’s source of financing.

And I guess the biggest other future decision that President Obama needs to make, along with his coalition leaders, is will they conduct airstrikes into Syria to the base of support for ISIS itself?

So I thought this was a very good beginning, and I’ve sympathized with the complexity of the choices that President Obama faced on the Islamic State. I thought he made a lot of sense in what he said this morning, but you do have those open questions: Will the United States get concrete support in that?

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Nick. And let me turn to Ron Freeman. I would just add one other thing. Speaking to a couple of senior U.S. officials this week, I was trying to gauge how they viewed the ISIS crisis versus the Ukraine situation, and which was more important, for what reason, and the only thing I’ll share is both of these officials said to me that they considered Ukraine a more dangerous crisis for U.S. interests, interestingly, because it got to the core of the international order post-Cold War and whether it was going to be turned upside down and whether the international community would do anything about it.

So that was the interesting answer I had there. Let’s turn to Ron Freeman for the next question.

Q: Fred, I just wondered whether you’d like to comment on the contrast between President Ilves’ body language when President Obama was speaking in Tallinn and what President Ilves had to say so eloquently at Wroclaw in June.

MR. KEMPE: The – I actually didn’t watch the body language. I read the reports and I heard it, but I didn’t see it. So I don’t know whether Damon or Nick could speak to that.

MR. WILSON: You know, I would say, regardless of – I think I understand what you’re alluding to, Ron. But I’d say, even regardless of the body language, where usually President Ilves speaks with a degree of clarity and conviction that is unmatched among NATO leaders, and he was studiously a little bit more restrained standing next to President Obama, who might speak about these issues a little bit differently.

I nonetheless will tell you that in – we had a chance to – (inaudible) – the Estonian prime minister – (inaudible) – as well as other Estonian delegates, who thought that the president’s visit had an enormous impact, psychological and practical, both of reassuring the Estonians of their

own security, the concrete measures – there’s a new airbase in Estonia that will be now used as – to support the NATO operations – that it had a significant impact, even if there may have been differences in presentations and the way they spoke about some of the moral issues at stake.

Q: I just want to say Damon did a great job on moderating the session at Winfield House of the Young Atlanticists. But all of the Young Atlanticists at my table – and they were all from former Soviet Union countries – they all expressed exactly what Nick Burns said so well a moment ago: the hope, a desperate hope, really, from the Azeri side, for concrete action, immediate short-term concrete action from NATO, and hope that NATO would broaden its arsenal to other forms of weapons in terms of propaganda that responds to Putin’s lies and a much more aggressive and flexible approach, such as providing weapons to the Ukrainians from existing stockpiles in Europe, just a sense that something concrete had to happen, or countries like Azerbaijan would follow the path of Armenia and simply collapse under Russia’s pressure.

MR. BURNS: Hey, Ron, this is Nick Burns.

Q: (Inaudible.) Yes, Nick.

MR. BURNS: I just wanted to add one point, Ron, to your comment, and it really agrees with what you and Damon have said. I thought the president was very effective in Tallinn. He gave a very fine speech. And the Balts desperately – the three of them desperately need to believe that the United States and NATO will be there if they are – if their security is threatened. And I thought that the president was as clear as he could have been that NATO’s boundaries – obviously Article 5 extends to all members, including, most notably, those three. And I think that was – to be fair to the administration, that was another impressive part of this summit, that they were able to say that, I thought, with a degree of credibility that I hope will reassure the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians.

Having said that, again, it just redoubles in my mind the missed opportunity of not standing up to Putin on Ukraine. And I – what I mean by that is further sanctions, tougher sanctions and lethal assistance, even if defensive, to the Ukrainian government.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Nick.

Q: There was – Fred, I just want to mention there was a Lithuanian delegate sitting next to me in Winfield House who said, why doesn’t President Obama declare the contact with – between France and Russia invalid for act of war, buy the French warships and offer them to the Ukrainian navy? (Laughter.)

MR. KEMPE: Yeah. There – that’s –

MR. BURNS: That would have – that would have been a brilliant maneuver. (Chuckles.)

MR. KEMPE: Yeah. (Inaudible) – avoid wishful thinking.

So we’ve got about 15 minutes left on this call. I’ve got one questioner.

Let me turn to Leandra Bernstein.

Q: OK. Great. It seems as though Putin has definitely outmaneuvered NATO and the United States in this – in the summit meeting. From what – from what’s been said, NATO has made a lot of very strong statements but is essentially hamstrung economically, strategically and militarily. So I’d just like you to comment on some of these – some of these cases.

Economically, the West could not support Ukraine, could not supplant Russian economic ties with Ukraine. Strategically, Putin has effectively gotten a buffer zone from further NATO expansion. I know that there were – there was talk about a week before the summit about the open-door policy, but that seems to have changed regarding Ukrainian membership. And militarily – and wouldn’t it look awfully suspicious if, immediately after Putin calling for a cease-fire and Ukraine and other partners agreeing to it, we began funneling in military aid to Ukraine? So if you could comment.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you for your question.

Nick, do you want to lead off?

MR. BURNS: Well, sure. I’m just in danger of repeating myself so I’ll be very brief.

You know, the options here on the economic side are quite broad, and there’s a lot that the West can do to support the Ukrainians. We cannot supplant Russia’s economic influence because that’s been built up through the symbiotic economic ties of centuries. And in fact, one should want Russia and Ukraine to continue to have an economic relationship. It’s vital to both countries, especially Ukraine.

I do think the Europeans deserve some credit. The Germans announced a major expansion of their aid to Ukraine just a couple of weeks ago and I think Chancellor Merkel has taken that on very seriously. I think the United States could do more on the economic side.

MR. WILSON: I’d add I think there is a sense and understanding that the economic and financial support for Ukraine will increase. Even to make their current IMF understandings work is going to require some stepped-up support. And I think for the most part you’ll see – I feel like that’s where the allies will be more – on energy policy you see the European Union actually moving. Albeit slowly, it is moving to more decisively diversify its own resources and deal with the dependency issue. It won’t happen overnight.

The U.S. has been reluctant to sort of frame its own decisions in a way that would sort of underscore their political value being at stake here. I think the real weakness – so folks are expecting – they’re expecting a bigger price tag. They understand the need to have economic relations between Ukraine and Russia, although the reality is the rate at which Ukraine’s trade relations have been changing have been dramatically helping to advance its economic integration with Europe as opposed to Russia even in the Donbass, where in some cases Russian and Ukrainian firms are competitors rather than suppliers.

On a broader open door, it's interesting. The Ukrainian government tabled a draft law just before the eve of the summit that would raise the issue of whether to restore the aspiration for ultimate NATO membership as part of the Ukrainian policy. There is almost an effort to just pretend like that didn't happen and not talk about that or really acknowledge that here at NATO, which underscores reluctance on a more decisive action, and certainly the military side.

There were some steps, a nod towards an enhanced package for Georgia, which didn't get a MAP but did get some concrete things – (inaudible) – in terms of NATO presence in the country as well as Montenegro now on a timeline for consideration for membership in 2015. But otherwise, the open-door policy was very much on the back burner.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Damon.

Let me turn to Marta Witter (ph), I think, from the Canada-Ukraine Council.

Q: Hello. Thank you very much for the briefing. I have a question. It seems to me that the alliance has an inherent weakness in that there are many different countries in fact that are trying to agree on one specific question, and of course they have many points of view, whereas Russia has a strength because there is one leader, Putin, who is making all the decisions.

What are the chances of the U.S., for example, providing leadership or aid to Ukraine, specifically military aid and/or economic sanctions, on its own outside of the alliance, to help Ukraine in its difficulty at the moment?

MR. BURNS: I think that really is the only realistic way that Ukraine will get military assistance, and that's why individual nation-states – as you know, NATO operates by consensus, so all 28 members have to decide on everything, and that's both a strength and a weakness but it's a strength as well. But that means that you won't get – you will not get every last European member of the alliance agreed to help Ukraine. Hopefully the United States, Canada – because of the strong stance that Prime Minister Harper has taken – the United Kingdom, those are countries that I could see moving forward to extend advanced military technology to Ukraine. I don't think it's likely that NATO will do it on an alliance basis.

So President Obama still needs to face this question. And, you know, there may be a thought now that, well, there's a cease-fire, Putin's offered his seven-point peace plan, so why should we go forward with military assistance? Well, the reason why is to leverage Putin, is to increase the pressure on him, is to force him to honor his commitments and to make it more likely that deterrence can be effective. And I think that is, again, the opportunity loss at this time.

MR. WILSON: I would just echo what Nick said. I mean, I think the issue of military assistance is not that people naively believe the Ukrainians will beat Russia, but that it is actually part of impacting Putin's calculations and strengthening the negotiating hand of Poroshenko and the Ukrainians. And I think that's one of the elements that is missing from the debate, that just because – (audio break) – is providing lethal military assistance doesn't mean it ultimately believes this is an area where Ukrainian forces will beat Russian forces over the long term. It's part of the maneuvering here.

The reality is that they aren't as responsive to U.S. leadership, and on a difficult issue, particularly in terms of confrontation with Russia, everyone will look to the United States. It's highly unlikely that an ally would be an outlier and go further than the United States in something as difficult and controversial and potentially dangerous as standing up to Putin. They're not going to do it on their own. And so this is where it fundamentally is a national bilateral decision.

We are only now, after Georgia's – Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, we are only now considering restoring some of our defensive lethal arms shipments to Georgia, and this is years later. We have – we fell into a trap of letting the victims become hurt by basically de facto arms embargoes, and I think that's the situation unfortunately that the Ukrainians are facing right now.

At the same time, there is a building sense of consensus that we've been able to detect in the U.S. Congress in support of lethal military assistance. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, was just in Ukraine on the eve of the NATO summit and came out forcefully in support of lethal military assistance.

The Atlantic Council hosted Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Armed Services staff just a week before the summit, and they uniformly, the staff members, some of who had been divided only six weeks earlier, had come around to the conclusion that it was time for the United States to provide lethal military assistance. So I think this debate is still to unfold in the United States, and if it moves in the U.S. it will help advance it in other countries that are sympathetic.

Q: Thank you.

MR. KEMPE: Great. So thank you for those answers. We are down to the last few minutes. Let me take the two questions that are left on the line, Liz Harper and Jan Lodal, one after the other, and then we'll do a final round with our discussants.

Liz.

Q: Thanks so much. And this is a great call. My question is about Afghanistan. Could you say a little bit more about what the leaders should have said, what they needed to say, and how this might impact things on the ground, particularly regarding the political situation?

MR. KEMPE: And, Jan, could you come in with your question as well? Can we make that possible?

Q: I agree with all the points about the long-term comments on military assistance, but there's a short-term issue too, and that is to provide enough support to the Ukrainian army to make sure that they – Russia is not able to open a corridor all the way across to Transnistria. And I'd appreciate some reaction to that.

MR. KEMPE: Yeah, so why don't we pick up those and then close with your comments on Afghanistan and on Russia?

And I hate to extend this call too much, but one of the questions one has to keep asking oneself is ultimately a Europe whole and – whole and free and at peace has to include Russia. So what do you do in this incredibly difficult situation where you have to stand up for Ukraine but at the same time you have to figure out a way to continue to work and get to a point where you can work with Russia?

So, Nick, since you went second first, why don't you go first this time, and then we'll close with Damon.

MR. BURNS: Thanks. I'll take the Afghanistan question first and say – thank you for the question – the United States has said – the Obama administration has said that it will take its combat troops out of Afghanistan by 2016 and there will be a – there will be a transfer to a new strategy.

The problem with that now is that you have a very – you're going to have a very weak Afghan government no matter who emerges from this protracted post-electoral phase as the new president of Afghanistan. The Taliban is certainly going to test that person, and without Western military assistance, without the substantial economic aid that Afghanistan has had since 2001 – there's going to be a substantial drop-off in economic aid – the Afghan government is going to be in peril.

And particularly with the lessons of Iraq in mind, you know, whether it's really right for us not to leave a training mission, for instance, in Iraq – I wouldn't have left a combat force but a training mission – do we now want to – shouldn't NATO now re-consider its strategy in Afghanistan? Why signal to the Taliban that the bulk of the NATO forces, if not all of them, will be leaving by 2016? Why not be more purposeful and more strategic and try to provide an effective deterrent against the Taliban by indicating that NATO is going to stay in some fashion? It may be only with several thousand troops, down substantially from full strength.

But I think the NATO – NATO did not face that question at the summit. (Inaudible) – but it did not face that question, and that's an issue that remains ahead of President Obama, and one would hope that the administration would reconsider this decision.

Fred, I would just say, to sum up, President Putin has a strategy. It's very clear and it's very well-defined. He is executing that strategy, and the NATO leaders have been largely, since the beginning of the Crimean crisis, been in – reacting to it. That didn't really change at this summit, and that was the key missed opportunity.

A U.S.-NATO strategy of its own might be to reinforce the NATO partners, countries that might not become members anytime soon or ever, like Ukraine and Georgia and Moldova, and to say to them we will help you politically and militarily. We'll help you militarily to be able to defend the borders of your country through the provision of advanced military technology. You can –

you can describe it as defensive, but anti-tank weaponry would certainly have been helpful to the Ukrainian military forces over the last two weeks, and they lacked that.

The strategic imperative should be to help these countries survive so that they can have modern relationships in trade and investment with the European Union and the United States, partnership relationships with those militarily, they probably won't become members of NATO anytime soon. But right now, we're not executing – we don't have a strategy that's apparent and we're not executing effectively and we're simply reacting to Putin's strategy.

And that's a very weak position to be in, Fred – this will be my final comment – because if we – what you just said, and we still believe in a Europe whole, free and at peace. We should. It's the Europe that we were able to create in the wake of the end of the Cold War through the efforts of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton and others. It's the one that we should want to preserve, but if we keep reacting to Putin and don't push back a little in a strong way, I think he'll continue to have the upper hand.

And so this summit doesn't end that question, it simply continues the question that we should be asking of our governments in all allied capitals, a stronger, more strategic response to build that, maintain that democratic peace, a Europe whole, free and at peace. Thank you.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you, Nick for that very clear answer. Damon?

MR. WILSON: I would just add – I'll start with Afghanistan and then conclude on the Europe piece. I mean, originally, many thought that Afghanistan might even dominate the summit. Mr. Putin changed that equation.

But it really was a missed opportunity, I would say, to rally the international community in support of a new Afghan leader, whether it be Ashraf Ghani, as it looks likely, or Abdullah Abdullah, a new Afghan leader who really was going to demonstrate he could be a partner of the alliance and the international community, sign the bilateral security agreements, move on to the transition to the operation resolute support, which the allies stand behind. It could have been a rallying moment and a way to change the narrative and the trajectory of Afghanistan. In that case, it was a missed opportunity and somewhat buried.

The irony is that we heard from – we met with – I believe, with many defense ministers and other allies who expressed a high degree of nervousness about their investments going down the drain if we mishandle this final year and head too rapidly out of the exit before Afghanistan is ready, would that lead Afghanistan to the fate that we've seen in Iraq.

And it's striking to hear smaller allies say we really think we need to remain in Afghanistan. Now some allies clearly would be eager to get out and would welcome that, but others are speaking up. But the reality at the end of the day is that they all know that this is going to be determined by the United States because the United States is the most security actor on the ground, and they can't operate or do this if the United States is out. So I think this decision boomerangs back in Washington.

On Europe, I think Jan Lodal's point is absolutely right. Tactically, the biggest concern right now here at NATO is that Russian forces were moving into Ukraine further along the Black Sea coast headed towards the port city of Mariupol, which is a stronghold of Rinat Akhmetov, one of the oligarchs there, and the real concern being that if the Russians kept moving that way creating a land connection, a land bridge to Crimea and perhaps ceding, as Jan said, even a land bridge all the way to Transnistria in Moldova.

They've laid the intellectual groundwork for this by putting out an incredible narrative now about this 18th century entity called Novorossiia, New Russia, which is the Donbass and eight oghlachs in the south and east of Ukraine almost as if they're giving themselves room for – (inaudible) – to hedge to potentially push for an independent Novorossiia. Not to say that's specifically where they're headed, but they're keeping that option open by laying the ideological information or groundwork for that. So I think the movement on the ground, particularly connecting the Russian forces to Crimea poses an even greater strategic threat and challenge not just to Ukraine but to Europe.

To conclude, this alliance actually – interestingly enough, the second sentence of their declaration is about a Europe whole, free and at peace and how Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our shared vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace. And so there's a resounding commitment to that – sustaining that vision which represents a movement, and I'm quite pleased to see that in the wake of a lot of the Atlantic Council work on that issue.

But the strategy of achieving that Europe whole, free and at peace is broken. It's no longer a partnership with Russia, no longer further enlargement to former adversaries and deeper integration in Europe. And so I think the biggest challenge here is that for NATO to be secure, it has to be able to deter Putin's aggression not just intentionally against Estonia, but against Ukraine. And that's what's missing, is a sense that Ukraine's fight is NATO's fight, that Ukraine's fight is the West's fight; it's the world's fight. And the inadvertent consequence of Wales may be to really reassure and secure the allies (in cells ?) while inadvertently putting Europe on a path of a – of a clear division, a much brighter gray zone and an unfortunate sphere of influence in the east where these countries lack a degree of sovereignty.

And I think that's the challenge, that if the alliance doesn't manage to stop Putin's aggression now, we're likely to see another conflict, another crisis in six months, 12 months, 24 months from now.

MR. KEMPE: Thank you Damon, and thank you Nick. And thank you for that powerful close on both of your parts.

This is what we try to do on these membership calls. This is a moment that's quite important certainly in alliance history and in transatlantic history. We've had two of the keenest observers of all of this and talking in a very frank and, I would say, unsettling way at the end of a NATO summit that will be historic. And we all know its importance, so we're not quite sure until this plays out what the ramifications are going to be.

Thank you to the two speakers and thank you for all joining us. As members on the call, think of ideas you'd like us to bring into these conference call series where we can more effectively bring together our global membership than we can sometimes in a conference room. Please send us your thoughts, ideas and suggestions and we'll respond as much as we can. Thank you again for the call.

MR. WILSON: Thank you so much. A pleasure.

OPERATOR: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. This concludes today's teleconference. And you may now disconnect.

(END)