NATO deterrence and defence after Brussels Summit

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Introductory remarks

Despite being a regional alliance, NATO is a global actor, trying to preserve a 360-degree perspective and adapt itself to the complex challenges of the 21st century, being *par excellence* the guarantor of the *transatlantic bond*.

NATO Brussels Summit, held on the 11-12 July 2018, created great expectations. On the table were important decisions to be made by the Heads of State and Government to face threats and challenges either from eastern flank or southern flank.

After characterizing the security environment, we focus only on a main subject, paramount today to the Alliance, deterrence and defence posture to face threats in its Eastern and Southern fronts.

Euro-Atlantic Security Environment

We live in a dangerous world. Euro-Atlantic security environment is now more fluid, less stable and less predictable than ever. On a daily basis, we face threats and challenges to the security of our populations that came from all strategic directions, either from state or non-state actors; the constant attacks are present on diverse formats, from military forces to malicious cyber activities, from terrorist to hybrid attacks, including disinformation campaigns.

In the Euro-Atlantic region, NATO faces Russia's aggressive actions and provocative military activities, mainly after the annexation of Crimea. NATO also need to deal with the continuous instability and regional conflicts across Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; irregular migration and human trafficking; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and advanced missile technology, events that contribute to

undermine Euro-Atlantic security environment.

Within the Alliance, the plurality of perspectives on the Organization and the natural divergences of the different national interests are evident. Indeed, some Allies concentrate their concerns on the new risks and threats that are also global, others place emphasis on the need to preserve the capacity for territorial defence, seeking to emphasize the importance of geographic elements of diverse nature, favor partnerships and/or enlargement. Nevertheless, in common, the Alliance maintains the consensus on the intangibility of the Washington Treaty, particularly the preservation of the indivisibility of the security of the Alliance and its Article 5.

According to the Summit Declaration, NATO will take all necessary steps to provide the resources, capabilities, and political will required to ensure that it remains ready to meet any challenge, and will continue to pursue a 360-degree approach to security and fulfill effectively all three core tasks as set out in its Strategic Concept: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security (NATO, 2018a).

NATO deterrence and defence

a. Eastern Flank

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, a spiral of distrust between NATO and Russia emerged (Wilhelmsen; Godzimirski, 2017), considering the Alliance that Russia "has breached the values, principles and commitments which underpin the NATO-Russia relationship" (NATO, 2018a), as agreed in the 1997 NATO Russia Founding Act, and 2002 Rome Declaration, breaking the core of mutual cooperation. However, "both have mutual and escalating convictions of the others party's assertive, aggressive and expansionist ambitions" (Wilhelmsen; Godzimirski, 2017); Russia complains about allies' activities, like the expansion into the former URSS sphere of influence; a prospective NATO and EU membership for Ukraine and Georgia and Western military campaigns in Kosovo, Iraq and Libya (Wilhelmsen; Godzimirski, 2017).

In Brussels, Heads of States and Government, reaffirmed the decisions towards Russia agreed at the previous summits, and decided to continue to respond by enhancing deterrence and defence posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance's territory, and also suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia (NATO, 2018a).

At the same time, in order to reduce risk, avoid misunderstanding, miscalculation, and unintended escalation, and to increase transparency and predictability, NATO maintains political dialogue (carried out within NRC) and military-to-military lines of communications with Russia, although "there can be no return to 'business as usual' until there is a clear, constructive change in Russia's actions that demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities" (NATO,

2018a).

In this complex strategic environment, NATO Out of Area crisis management approach suffered a strategic halt, and the Alliance returned to its original foundations, collective deterrence and defence. In many respects, it was a game changer for NATO.

If, in Wales, NATO response showed some military and psychological unpreparedness to deal with the challenge (NATO, 2014), in Warsaw, "a much tougher set of forces goals reflects a return to thinking about deterrence and making collective defence NATO´s first priority" (Larsen, 2017).

In a quest for stability in a time of uncertainty, with the implementation of Warsaw decision, the Alliance showed that it is committed to strength its deterrence by bolstering its defensive presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. In just a year it established a rotational Forward Presence in the Baltic region and Poland and in the Black Sea, tripled the size of the NRF from roughly 13,000 to 40,000 troops and established a 5,000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF); enhanced air policing, adapted its maritime security posture in the Mediterranean and invested in supporting the security and stability of partners by training local institutions and forces to fight terrorism (NATO, 2016 and 2018b).

In Brussels, Allies agreed to strengthen the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture in all domains, guarantying at the same time that NATO "retains its ability to project stability and fight against terrorism" (NATO, 2018a).

It is a premise and a strong belief that "a robust deterrence and defence posture strengthens Alliance cohesion and provides an essential political and military transatlantic link, through an equitable and sustainable distribution of roles, responsibilities, and burdens" (NATO, 2018a).

Deterrence in the Alliance is guaranteed by a mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities. Deterrence is based on credibility, and NATO deterrence, in our opinion, is based more on US military power and determination to use force than on NATO itself, with a slow and complex decision-making process.

The US military presence in Europe, mainly with nuclear weapons, continues to give the clear political indication that the transatlantic bond is the guarantor of "Extended Deterrence", always leaving a negative political signal with its eventual withdrawal.

Nuclear weapons continue to play an essentially political role and are the basis for the Alliance's deterrent and defence posture. In the evolving security environment "NATO has taken steps to ensure its nuclear deterrent capabilities remain safe, secure, and effective" (NATO, 2018a), and in Brussels, allies in an explicit reference to the strategic concept, reiterate that "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance" (NATO, 2010), with the fundamental purpose to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression (NATO, 2018a).

In parallel with the nuclear presence, NATO developed a Ballistic Missile Defence capability as an element of its increasingly important defensive posture, thus adding an important element of deterrence by denial. An effective anti-missile defence system should be understood as a complement to "nuclear sharing", and another military capability to keep the US engaged in European Defence.

Allies, in Brussels, also showed that are determined to maintain the credibility, coherence, resilience and adaptability of its deterrence and defence posture, including "an effective response to changes in the posture and doctrine of potential adversaries, and their significant investments to modernise and expand capabilities", maintaining "a full range of capabilities necessary to provide the Alliance with a range of options to be able to continue to tailor our response to specific circumstances and to respond to any threats from wherever they arise, potentially from multiple directions in more than one region" (NATO, 2018a).

The 29 Member States of the Alliance remain deeply concerned by the proliferation of WMD, and the lack of respect for international commitments, and emphasize the example of the new Russian missile system, the 9M729, recently acknowledged existence by Russian Federation (NATO, 2018a).

NATO's strengthened forward presence, tailored or not, it is only one of the tools at the disposal of Allies, but does not exist in isolation. NATO deterrence and defence posture are underpinned by viable military reinforcement, including from across the Atlantic (NATO, 2018a), but also through a culture of readiness with regular training and exercises, strategic awareness, advance planning and enhanced Allied resilience to the full spectrum of threats.

In Brussels, Member States reached agreement to launch a NATO Readiness Initiative[1] that will further enhance the "Alliance's rapid response capability, either for reinforcement of Allies in support of deterrence or collective defence, including for high-intensity warfighting, or for rapid military crisis intervention, if required. It will also promote the importance of effective combined arms and joint operations" (NATO, 2018a).

The main measures adopted in Brussels, with their long term significance, were that Allies decided to reorganize NATO structures and instruments, starting to enable "Supreme Commanders to command and control forces to deal with any military challenge or security threat at any time, from any direction, including large-scale operations for collective defence, as well as ensure adequate transformation and preparation for the future, in particular through capability development, education, and training". It was also decided to establish a Cyberspace Operations Centre in Belgium; a Joint Force Command Norfolk, and a Joint Support and Enabling Command in Germany (NATO, 2018a).

Cyber threats to security are becoming more complex, frequent, and destructive. In October 2018, Defence Ministers meeting, "Dutch and British governments have exposed Russia's indiscriminate campaign of cyber-attacks around the world" (Stoltenberg,

2018c) being GRU (Russian military intelligence services) identified as being behind those cyber-attacks. To face those kinds of challenges and threats posed by malicious cyber activities, NATO needs to be as strong in cyberspace as it is in other operational domains. Cyber resilience and integration of national cyber capabilities into NATO missions and operation are paramount to strengthen deterrence and defence in this domain.

In Warsaw, NATO decided to make cyberspace an operational domain becoming a core task of collective defence. Since then, the Alliance continued to strength its cyber defences, adapting to the evolving cyber threat landscape, affected as we all know, either by state and non-state actors (NATO, 2018a).

In Brussels, allies show their willingness and determination "to deliver strong national cyber defences through full implementation of the Cyber Defence Pledge" (NATO, 2018a), a central tool to enhance cyber resilience and to raise the costs of a cyber-attack.

Do all those policies and measures taken by the Alliance have any impact on Russian decisions? Are they effective to dissuade Russia? They should, but we have to wait and see.

b. Southern Flank

NATO maintains a 360-degree perspective to collective defence; but his involvement in the south does not need to mirror its engagement in the eastern flank, but rather be adjusted to the specificities of the security environment. NATO has indeed shown its ability regarding fighting terrorism as well as its commitment to reassurance measures in Eastern Europe.

All 29 Allies are necessary to face both eastern and southern flanks challenges and threats. States need to protect both territorial integrity and the social, political, and technical fabric of their societies. So, NATO states must determine how they can deter hostile state and non-state actors from destabilizing Europe through military and non-military means.

But for these challenges and threats, against these enemies, traditional deterrence hardly works. We need conventional and nuclear deterrence to assure credibility, and also civilian deterrence and resilience. We also know that deterrence alone is unlikely to assure lasting peace and stability (Major and Milling, 2016); it requires the complement of the right vehicle to establish a productive dialogue, even with non-state actors, as the Alliance cannot afford to not talk with them.

For NATO, dealing with the southern flank strategic threats is a challenge in cooperating with other organizations, mainly partners, either form Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, African Union, the League of Arab States or Gulf Cooperation Council.

After long years centring on the eastern flank, NATO finally decided to move forward

with a more comprehensive strategy for the South. With a clear intention of deepening its focus on threats from the southern flank, NATO established a regional hub for the South in 2017, in Naples. The hub with the aim to improve situational awareness and to enhance engagement with partners is now full at power.

At the Brussels Summit, NATO adopted a specific Package for the South. It outlines three core objectives: to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence against threats emanating from the south; to contribute to international crisis management efforts in the region; and to help NATO's regional partners to build resilience against security threats, including in the fight against terrorism.

NATO actively projects stability and security beyond borders, mainly in its southern neighbourhood, being an active member of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS and by supporting regional partners' efforts to fight terrorism.

As southern partnerships are set to be at the core of the new strategy defined in Brussels, it is worth considering the expectations of NATO's Mediterranean partners. On the "practical level, partners are interested in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training, intelligence sharing, border control, cybersecurity, civil protection, and access to NATO courses and Science for Peace and Security projects" (Brandsma, 2018).

This common interest to NATO and its partners exists. However, many of the partners still distrust the true intentions of the Alliance; in some of them still persist the Cold War era perceptions and they also have very present NATO intervention in Libya in 2011. To Charlotte Brandsma (2018), "as NATO proceeds, and to avoid misinterpretations or wrong perceptions, NATO should be sensitive to how its past actions have shaped present perceptions. Having a clear message for its partners today will help build better partnerships in the future".

The presence of NATO is also very important in the maritime domain, being well known in the Black Sea, an area where the challenges of the East and the South converge simultaneously; as well as in the Mediterranean and the Aegean seas. This presence is paramount for situational awareness, for the support on counterterrorism and the combat to illegal trafficking.

Conclusions

NATO Brussels Summit was held on a complex Euro-Atlantic security environment, facing Allies an unprecedented security crisis since the cold war, with numerous threats and challenges; with Russia, the relations are under a spiral of distrust; and in the Mediterranean area, instability is clear.

In the Summit, Allies decided to continue to respond to threats and challenges from all strategic directions, by enhancing deterrence and defence posture, with a forward

presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, along with the decisive support of nuclear weapons and missile defence. It was also agreed to increase military capabilities, including in the cyber domain.

After long years focusing his efforts on the eastern flank, NATO also decided to move forward with a more comprehensive strategy for the South, adopting a specific package, being a southern partnership at the core of the new strategy defined in Brussels.

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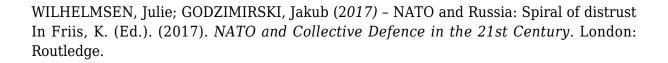
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[1] This initiative "will ensure that more high-quality, combat-capable national forces at high readiness can be made available to NATO. From within the overall pool of forces, Allies will offer an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days' readiness or less. They will be organized and trained as elements of larger combat formations, in support of NATO's overall deterrence and defence posture" (NATO, 2018a).