

27º Estoril Political Forum

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The Transatlantic Alliance 70 years after the founding of NATO and 30 years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall

The *Estoril Political Forum* is a major event in the Portuguese and international political and academic landscape. It is a truly remarkable event, already in its 27th year, and it is very appropriate to have devoted its 2019 edition to *The Transatlantic Alliance, 70 years after the founding of NATO and 30 years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*.

Let me express my gratitude to the Rector of the Católica University, Professor Isabel Capelo Gil, and to the Director of the Católica University Institute For Political Studies, Professor João Carlos Espada, for the opportunity to, once more, participate in this very prestigious gathering that again was a resounding success.

Introduction

I would like to start by setting set the scene for discussing the most relevant questions with which we dwell at the NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Let me be very clear.

When my colleagues and myself seat at the NATO Council table in Brussels, when our Foreign Ministers or our Defence Ministers gather there, when our Heads of State and Government meet in the NATO format, regardless of the formal agenda in front of us or in front of them, regardless of the topical subject matters under discussion, regardless of the urgent issues of the day, we all know that each and every sitting around that table have in mind a set of matters that constitute a non-written, underlying, real agenda of the most important NATO matters, even if not officially acknowledged.

Let me repeat this idea from a different angle, as this is an important concept that underpins my presentation.

NATO, the North Atlantic Alliance, has a very active, full fledged and always evolving political and military agenda with which we deal every day. That evolving political and military agenda is laid out formally for our discussions and decisions at the many meetings of the Council and its subordinate Committees.

But what I am trying to convey here is that, beyond and above all that constitutes the NATO political and military strands of work, there is a core of fundamental questions that evolve slower with time, that only change if and when the political thinking is sufficiently mature, but that are nevertheless permanently present in the back of everyone's mind at the North Atlantic Council table.

Is that set of core issues that in fact frame the “deep” NATO debate. And it is that core set of issues that I will try to lay out for you today.

What are then those core issues today in 2019? What is then that underlying set of big questions? What is their importance? How they shape the multidimensional NATO debate? What can they tell us about the state of play of our security and defence? And, most importantly, what can they tell us about the trends and directions of our future security landscape?

Methodologically speaking those issues can be addressed in the form of answers to fundamental questions. Here are some of those questions:

1. What is the state and vitality of the **transatlantic bond**?
2. What is really at stake when we talk about “**burden sharing**”?
3. What really means today the binomial deterrence and defence formula in the context of the **three core tasks** of the NATO Strategic Concept, and what do they mean for the adaptation of the NATO Command Structure and for the revision of the NATO Military Strategy?
4. What are the political implications of the fight against terrorism and what does it mean to **project stability** beyond NATO's borders?
5. How important is the **cooperation between NATO and the European Union** and what are the consequences for our security and defence of the recent evolution of the European Union defence related initiatives?
6. And finally, why is **NATO opening up its doors**, expanding its borders, reaching out to Partners and transforming some of them into new Members?.

1. The transatlantic bond

The transatlantic bond is, by definition, the key dimension of our collective security.

If you break it you put in jeopardy the security of both the North American Continent as well as the security of Europe. If you break it, you will achieve the main strategic objective of any actual or potential NATO adversary. It would represent a gigantic geostrategic shift, and, some argue, could even very well spell the end of the West in strategic security terms.

Thus the preservation of the transatlantic link lies at the very heart of NATO's strategic interests.

It is what defines NATO, it is the embodiment of the common strategic interests of the free Nations on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean.

It is like that since the inception of the Alliance, since 1949, since the signing of the Washington Treaty.

During the already 70 years of the NATO's Alliance history, that link, that bond, was often challenged and always with no success.

We must recognize however that it was never challenged as it is being challenged today.

One of the reasons for that challenge is the way NATO is perceived from Washington.

Let me put it in a very simple, but also, I believe, a very compelling way: it is not really "breaking news" that the United States is looking more and more into strategic directions that are not directly related to the North Atlantic area.

As it is not really breaking news if I say that it was not the incumbent American Administration that started to define the Greater Pacific region, or Southeast Asia, to give you concrete examples, as strategic key long-term fundamental objectives for the worldwide power projection of US political, economic and security interests.

If we look back at the last 10 years or so we could almost exactly identify the moment when, at the very beginning of the first Barack Obama mandate, America decided to look more to Asia and to the Pacific than to Europe and to the Atlantic.

As a global superpower, America has global interests and thus it should not have been unexpected or utterly surprising that a strategic shift towards the Asia-Pacific region would occur.

NATO is not competing with that.

NATO should not compete with that.

NATO cannot compete with that.

What is important, what is essential, for our common North Atlantic security interests is that that shift towards the Asia Pacific Region does not harm and does not diminish the US engagement, the US involvement, the US presence in the North Atlantic Area.

It is crucial for the preservation of the transatlantic link that America remains, as it has been since the end of the Second World War, a "European power".

Obviously, we need two for tango.

The Europeans, both those NATO Members that are Members of the European Union, as well as those NATO European Nations that are not European Union Member Nations, should contribute in a steadfast way to the collective commitment to the transatlantic strategic objectives.

This part of the equation is key for the debate about the relations between NATO and the European Union, as we will see, as it is also key in the context of the difficult debate on "burden sharing".

But one thing I take for granted: without the dynamic engagement of the NATO Member Nations on both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean the transatlantic unity could be in trouble.

It is true that the transatlantic bond is more than defence and security, as it is more, much more, than trade or economics. Indeed the transatlantic bond is about people, is about values, shared values, is about History, common History, and thus, it is about freedom, it is about what defines our open societies. But our open societies would not survive as such, open, free, liberty friendly, vibrant and tolerant places, if they would not be safe and secure.

And in that particular but very vital sense NATO is the home of the transatlantic relationship.

2. “Burden sharing”

The fair share of defence related responsibilities, commonly designated as “burden sharing”, is one of the main components of the debate about the transatlantic unity.

Each and every one of the Allies has to meet its share of the overall NATO’s defence responsibilities.

And if you take an honest look at the state of play, we are still away from an ideal fair share.

This is a very complex and potentially divisive debate, and the big question for NATO is how to contribute to an ever-fairer burden share and simultaneously contributing to a greater unity and solidarity amongst the NATO Member Nations?

And why is it so difficult? It is difficult because the economic and financial situations of the different 29 NATO Member Nations are exactly that, different.

It is a difficult debate because the public opinion perceptions of the challenges and threats NATO is faced with are different.

In some cases even very different.

It is a difficult debate because of political internal peculiarities and it is a difficult debate because different Parliaments display different priorities.

And even though it is not a new debate, it is a debate that gained increased importance after years of steady decrease of defence related spending specially in the European countries that are NATO Members after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the implosion of the Soviet Union, the optimistic years that allowed for a “peace dividend”.

That “peace dividend” encouraged governments to shift priorities and resources and to invest and spend more in social policies, urban and transportation critical infrastructures and other key strategic objectives, thus devoting less resources to defence and security.

That decrease had to stop when the security landscape changed.

The wakeup call was the Russian illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

And because it happened very close to the NATO Summit in Cardiff, in 2014, it contributed to prompt the NATO's decision known as the *Defence Investment Pledge*.

In that Pledge, in 2014, the Allies committed to arrive 10 years later, in 2024, at a very different defence-spending picture.

They committed that, in 2024, each and every one of them would spend at least 2% of their respective GDPs in defence.

And in reality, as it is recognized by all, arriving at mid-term now, 5 years later, in 2019, and still with 5 more years to go until 2024, the trend of decreasing defence budgets came to an halt.

Everywhere across the NATO Nations the descending curve was redressed and all Allies are spending more on defence.

But still, what has been done so far needs some qualification.

The *Defence Investment Pledge*, agreed at Wales back in 2014, is not only about *cash*, it is also about *capabilities* and *contributions*. The “3 Cs” of the “burden sharing” debate.

According to the *Defence Investment Pledge*, 20% of those 2% will need to be ascribed to investment in new equipment and new technologies, in a word, in *capabilities*. Even though also in that component of the *Defence Investment Pledge* the curve is now going up, the picture has still a very significant margin for improvement.

This is a key component of the equation, because, without *capabilities*, you cannot ensure the three core tasks of NATO's Strategic concept, to which I'll be referring later on.

The third C of the Defence Investment Pledge is related to *contributions*, and *contributions* mean the participation in Missions and Operations, be it combat or training and assist missions. And those *contributions* could even be *contributions* to missions that are not directly NATO related, as it is the case of security related activities under the umbrella of the United Nations or the European Union for example.

The *contributions* component of the *Defence Investment Pledge* add to the complexity of the “burden sharing” debate but it is increasingly being recognized that they represent a very important parcel of it.

Regardless of the positive indicators and trends that I just described, there remains, however a striking disparity in the big picture of the “burden sharing” debate.

It is very important to be totally fair, which is the minimum one can do while discussing fairer “burden sharing”. We need to acknowledge that 80% of the defence related costs of the NATO Nations are supported entirely by NATO Members that are not Members of the European Union.

Let me tell you immediately that in this calculation I am already counting the United Kingdom as a non-EU NATO Member.

So, of the 29 NATO Member Nations, 80% of the defence related costs are entirely supported by the 8 NATO Members, including here again the United Kingdom, that are not Members of the European Union.

And when you add to that consideration the fact that non-EU NATO Members like Iceland, Albania or Montenegro have relatively smaller contributions to the NATO defence overall spending, the conclusion that comes to the forefront is that very close to 80% of the overall NATO defence spending is supported by 5 NATO Members: the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Canada and Norway. 5 out of 29!

I am reflecting on that, not to diminish the importance of the defence related contributions of the other NATO Member Nations, specially knowing as I know how difficult it is in many cases simply to reverse the defence spending curve, because of economic and financially hardship, because of political conditions, because of public opinion perceptions, translated into acrimonious parliamentary debates, because of geography, because of the perceptions of threats.

I am highlighting the still existent unbalances across the landscape of NATO Allies in what defence related expenses are concerned with the sole objective of contributing to a better understanding of the difficulties of the debate.

But, as I said at the beginning, the most important thing is that the “burden sharing” debate unites and does not divide, contributes to strengthening the transatlantic unit and not to weaken it, contributes to preserve and reinforce our collective defence and does not give our critics or adversaries an opportunity to play with our common strategic goals.

Some tend to inflate the fact that the “burden sharing” debate is now more acute than before, some pretend that with the arrival of Donald Trump to the US Presidency the “burden sharing” debate changed in nature.

That is simply not true. As President John F. Kennedy said back in 1963, and I quote, “We cannot continue to pay for the military protection of Europe while NATO states are not paying their fair share.”

If something changed, it was the way of communicating.

A different and sometimes less diplomatic way of saying things. It is a question of style.

But the urgency to address the problem created by insufficiently funded defence priorities in the face of an evolving, more complex, more dangerous and more unpredictable security landscape is obvious.

And thus all Allies are aware and committed to meeting the requirements of a fairer “burden sharing”.

3. “Three core tasks”

To guarantee the security of our open societies, of our Alliance of free nations, the NATO's Strategic Concept have evolved throughout the years.

It is only natural that it evolved.

The world was not the same after the Berlin Wall was erected, as it was not the same after the Berlin Wall was shuttered down.

It was not the same after the death of Yugoslavia, as it was not the same after 9/11.

So it is only natural that NATO's Strategic Concept adapted, evolved and adapted again.

The current NATO's Strategic Concept dates back from 2010, dates back from the NATO Summit that took place in Lisbon.

Many would argue that it could very well profit from a new adaptation. Some argue that it is even high time that it is revisited in a serious deep strategic way.

The arguments in that sense, in that direction, are compelling.

The Strategic Concept predates the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in Ukraine, as it predates the rise and now the fall of Daesh. It predates the Arab Springs, and the end of them, it predates a growing acute awareness of the defence implications of climate change, it predates many of the challenges that we now face in the arc of instability in NATO's European Southern neighbourhood. It predates the exponential rise in cyber attacks and it predates the immense challenges that we are all faced stemming from emerging innovative and disruptive technologies.

Still, the Strategic Concept defines 3 core tasks that remain essentially valid, even though adaptable, that deserve careful consideration before we start discussing changing them.

Collective defence, the principle that our common defence is indivisible, lies at the heart of the first core task of NATO's Strategic Concept.

Based on deterrence, meaning that any adversary can never be sure but of one thing: that it could expect to suffer disproportionately more than any envisaged gain if it messes up with NATO, and founded on full fledged defence capabilities across the board, NATO's deterrence and defence is the first guarantor of our collective security.

Then a second core task of the strategic concept, that time and again proves its importance and far sight, cooperative security is what NATO does to ensure that Partners and friends that are not NATO Members, simultaneously benefit and contribute to the overall security and strategic stability of NATO's Area of Responsibility.

And thirdly, crisis management, meaning the capability of the NATO Alliance to project, even beyond its borders, the means necessary to prevent the eruption or the deepening of complex security related international situations.

A key element of these three core tasks is that all of them are always present in a 360 degree approach. That again is as a clear demonstration that NATO's security is indivisible, and that

NATO is looking to protect its Members from threats coming from every single one of the strategic directions. Be it East or South or North or from the Atlantic itself.

It is also obvious that the tripod of these three core tasks does not need to be exactly of the same shape or consistency as it rotates 360 degrees. I mean by that that depending on the threat assessments, depending on the characteristics of the different challenges, the tripod of the core tasks could very well look different in composition and capabilities.

Indeed, why should I look at the challenges emanating from the arc of instability in our southern European neighbourhood with the same lenses, or engaging the same means, as when I look east towards the preoccupations that an increasingly more assertive and even aggressive Russia poses to NATO?

The beauty of the three core tasks of the NATO's Strategic Concept is thus its capability for flexible adaptation.

And it was exactly that flexible capability that allowed NATO to adapt its Command Structure in the recent past, and that is allowing NATO to adapt its Military Strategy without having yet started to revisit the Strategic Concept.

It is this continuously adapting NATO's nature, this, as the formula goes, persistent adaptive federated approach, that allows NATO to face with confidence the new security challenges keeping our countries and our peoples safe.

The so called new security challenges are essentially security challenges that are not materialized by State of peer State actors, meaning thus security challenges that are embodied by non-State actors, by loose structures and organizations, by defuse terrorist and criminal networks, in a word many of the challenges emanating from the arc of instability in our Southern European neighbourhood.

It is important to recognise that those challenges are exactly the same challenges that our neighbours in that region are faced with.

The NATO Mediterranean Partners, from the Atlantic shores of Morocco deep into the Middle East and the Gulf, face the same challenges we do.

We are all on the same boat, and thus the need to joint efforts and to cooperate ever more.

4. Projection of stability

In fact it is not only about how to fight terrorism, but also about how to project stability, that became the name of the game.

As the NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, likes to say, "*when our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure*", so NATO's cooperation with our neighbours in the South is tantamount to our common security.

This is a relatively new ground for NATO.

We must recognize that we are into uncharted waters, into a dimension of our common security that is very different, fundamentally different, from what NATO was created for.

And thus the difficulties of the debate, and thus the need to recognize that NATO cannot do it alone because NATO does not have all the needed tools in its toolbox, and thus, the absolute need to contribute to the projection of stability in close cooperation with other international actors and Organizations, and, with no surprise, first and foremost, with the European Union and the United Nations.

We have to keep in mind that the ability to tackle the challenges emanating from the arc of instability in our European Southern neighbourhood is a very important component of the debate on the NATO-EU relationship.

5. NATO-EU relationship

The cooperation between NATO and the European Union is unprecedented. If we would look back we would not find anything really meaningful in terms of NATO-European Union cooperation any time before the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016.

In Warsaw, for the very first time, the NATO Secretary-General, the President of the European Union Council and the President of the European Commission, signed a Joint Declaration aimed at developing coherent, complementary and interoperable defence capabilities, avoiding unnecessary duplication with the aim of making the Euro Atlantic area safer.

And the deepening of that cooperation did not stop in 2016. Two years later at the Brussels Summit, the NATO-EU vows were renewed and they materialized themselves in 7 concrete areas of cooperation, including fighting hybrid threats, operational maritime issues, cybersecurity, defence capabilities, defence research and industry, exercises, and defence and security capacity building projects. It is an ambitious agenda according to which 74 concrete measures are being developed, and this is not the end of the road.

But even more important than the concrete measures and the significance that they carry in terms of the overall political relationship between NATO and European Union, it is vital that some key principles are observed and preserved: non-duplication, complementarity, non-geographical division of responsibilities are some of the fundamental principles that should frame the cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

Simultaneously, the new security environment, the evolving nature of the multifaceted challenges and threats the Euro Atlantic area is faced with, as well as political developments like the painful Brexit process, contributed, in no small way, to the deepening of the European defence and security. To the point that led some to speak about an European Union Strategic Autonomy or even of an European Army.

We need to set this debate straight.

Everything that is done in the context of the European Union that contributes to the strengthening of the NATO's European pillar and thus that contributes to the strengthening of the transatlantic link, and contributes to a fairer "burden sharing" between the two sides of

the Atlantic in what defence responsibilities are concerned, should be welcomed and encouraged by NATO.

But each and every one of the NATO Members have only one set of forces, and so, it is extremely important that the parameters of the ongoing debate about the deepening of the European Union defence dimension respect the non-duplication, non-geographic division of tasks and complementary principles that I mentioned above.

It is true that the debate on the so called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), as well as the one about the creation of the European Defence Fund (EDF), are of a different nature than the more far fetched calls for an European Army and thus any confusion between them should be avoided, but it is also true that the discussion on a future European strategic autonomy and its ambitions and limitations should be tackled with intelligence and political care.

All in all, and realizing very well that we are at the beginning and not at the end of this very important debate, the key takeaway is that everything should be done, specially by those with higher political responsibilities, to preserve and reinforce both NATO and the European Union, thus strengthening the transatlantic link.

6. “Open Door”

The fact that NATO is an open-ended Alliance is not a recent invention. It is inscribed in the Washington Treaty, and so it dates from 1949. The open door policy provides hope for the aspirant societies and projects stability beyond the NATO area.

The best example is of course the Western Balkans.

After the tragedies that unfolded from the implosion of Yugoslavia, only the Euro Atlantic perspective represents a viable option for a better future to all the countries of the region.

And only when all of them will be part and parcel of the Euro Atlantic institutions, only then, strategic stability in the Western Balkans will be achieved with all the associated defence and security related spill overs to the entire Euro Atlantic area.

Thus it was an extremely important step when NATO received Montenegro as its 29th Member Nation. As it is again a sign of NATO's vitality the upcoming formalization of the membership of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Open door means exactly that and does not mean that all the NATO's Partner countries in all different partnership formats will necessarily become one day NATO Members.

But the partnerships that NATO enjoys with many non-NATO Nations, be it European Union Member Nations like the special partnership that NATO developed with Finland and Sweden, or the partnerships with many of our Mediterranean neighbours, are essential for the projection of stability and for enhancing our collective defence, without implying that those countries will one day be part of NATO.

Conclusion

This year the Treaty of Washington celebrated its 70th anniversary. Seventy years of peace and prosperity for the countries that founded NATO and stability and protection for all that joined since then. Let us all contribute to make sure that this unique Alliance will continue to be the cornerstone of our defence and security for many years more.

Luís de Almeida Sampaio

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