



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

High-level Seminar

## **NATO at 70: Refocusing for Change?**

Atlantic Council, 1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor, Washington D.C., USA

27th of June 2019

### **Summary of the discussions**

#### **The top priorities**

- Cohesion and European capabilities
- Focussing on recognising challenges
- NATO and Atlantic democracies have to recover their inner strength
- Investing in readiness and keeping interoperability

#### **The main arguments**

The results of the discussion among two panels and the public (see programme enclosed) can be regrouped under the three core tasks (collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security).

#### **Collective defence**

An important framing of the future of the transatlantic relationship is the competition between free societies and authoritarian capitalistic countries (China and Russia), a situation that is considered to last in the future and where NATO must be at the core and not the periphery of a common strategy.

This implies that NATO must review its main strategic documents, but in due time because a consensus among allies must be forged, as it regularly happens. The nature of the Alliance and its openness to new members and partners must be restated, together with its core tasks (collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security).

The new aspects that should be considered are:

- a new consensus on the nature of threat: Russia China Iran;
- an enhanced deterrence both conventional and nuclear;
- a new nuclear doctrine;
- a Southern Strategy, now missing, that considers the instability of the region together with Russian and Chinese influence;
- the cases of Ukraine and Georgia;
- new burden sharing measures that calculate not how much money is spent but what is bought for concrete military needs against a realistic assessment of the threats (exit the 2% defence expenditure on national GDP parameter);
- a new division of labour between allies, so that Europeans can handle themselves a number of operations.

The real centre of gravity is the Alliance's cohesion, which is challenged by Brexit, mass migration, financial fragility, trade wars and the real threat by Russia. NATO managed also in the past to overcome great political shocks, but political will is crucial today more than ever. Some countries have an increasingly diverging approach to the political values and practices of the Alliance, further undermining NATO's cohesion

Russia is a serious problem, despite numerous attempts to re-establish friendly relations, because it wants to play the role of major global competitor. The recent suspension of the Intermediate range Nuclear Forces treaty is very unfortunate and the hope is that this failure does not affect other agreements because a nuclear arms race would be negative even if Moscow spends much less than NATO's allies combined budgets. New negotiations on the reduction of strategic nuclear arms are possible, but are uncertain for the time being.

Also considering the defence in the Northern region, the time required by reinforcements to deter a Russian intimidation are too long; the first use of nuclear weapons for defending smaller countries is considered not realistic. The hope is that a recent initiative to muster significant forces within 30 days from an alert will be effectively realised.

The cooperation between NATO and EU is seen positively, but despite some successes, what matters is that European countries acquire credible military capabilities, meaning that they are able to face emergencies in the European region without a massive US presence. Obviously, Brexit represents an important braking factor for EU's activities and the US wariness that European countries duplicate critical military capabilities is another issue.

Enlargement is still considered an achievement and important, but not all countries are ready for it and not all members agree in some cases, notably on Georgia and Ukraine.

Terrorism is considered an important priority, but for the time being it is seen more as a national issue because the focus is in two major adversaries.

### **Crisis management**

The least mentioned issue in the debate. North Africa and the Mediterranean are considered central now and, in the future, because the combination of mounting demographics and persistent overall fragility of the region and in Africa will entail a new big migration wave in a generation and a half.

Central Asia and Afghanistan are other important focuses.

Fears were expressed about a crisis with Iran because a war is eventually possible and because, if the European allies would not take part, the future of NATO could be jeopardised.

### **Cooperative security**

The new theme is of course China and one of the ideas floated was the creation of a NATO-China Council, complementing the more appropriate EU-China dialogue. Another idea was that European navies should patrol the Strait of Formosa in order to uphold the international principle of the freedom of navigation.

It was also acknowledged that partnerships in the Mediterranean, Levant and the Gulf are not enough developed as they should be. Other partnerships should be developed in Asia, Africa and Latin America. India is an important partnership that should be advanced. “Projecting security” remains a fundamental task and many countries look at NATO to get guidance as equals, but not want to be dominated.

Partner countries are more numerous than NATO countries, but “partnerships” (cooperative security) remain a sorely underinvested priority by NATO leadership.

