Reinforcing NATO, Defending the West

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The world is changing, and strategic priorities are changing; and changing quickly. Europe lives up an unprecedented security crisis since the cold war, with numerous threats and challenges[*].

The main threats faced by the Alliance in the European neighborhoods are often divided between a Southern Front – today includes terrorism, migration and refugee flows, and failed states in the Mediterranean; and an Eastern Front – hybrid threat posed by an increasingly assertive Russia.

This simplified geographical has lead to regional fragmentation within the transatlantic partnership, since 2014.

Reconciling the two perspectives was one of the objectives of the Warsaw summit, with the idea that transatlantic solidarity could be at risk if an agreement on a balanced response to the two flanks was not reached.

Rather than opposing the two "fronts", the "transatlantic narrative should highlight the constant linkage between the different threats" (Scheffer, et. al. 2017).

NATO's involvement in the South does not need to mirror its engagement in the Eastern Fronts, but rather be adjusted to the specificities of the crises. NATO has indeed shown its ability regarding terrorism as well as its commitment to reassurance measures in Eastern Europe.

All 29 allies are necessary to face both Eastern and Southern issues. 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, against these enemies, traditional deterrence hardly works. We need conventional and nuclear deterence to assure credibility, and also civilian

deterence. We also know that deterrence alone is unlikely to assure lasting peace and stability (Major, Molling, 2016); it requires the complement of the right vehicle to establish a productive dialogue, either with Russia or even non-state actors, as the Alliance cannot afford to not talk with them.

It is in the interest of all transatlantic partners to reinforce the security of their neighbors, and not only focus on the security of the transatlantic territory. So, for us, the current discussions should focus on the level of ambition of NATO's strategic adaptation, as well as on the division of labor among transatlantic partners, including EU (Scheffer et. al., 2017).

As we face a more uncertain world, close partnership between NATO and the EU is essential. NATO and the EU will need to work more closely together and in the same places, to make any new intervention strategy effective. In June 2016, both organizations signed a Joint Declaration "to give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership" (EU, 2016) and, in December, the Council of the European Union and Foreign Ministers of NATO adopted in parallel a common set of proposals (42, for implementation in seven areas) for EU-NATO cooperation.

The new US administration assertiveness policy serves as a wakeup call for the Alliance. Many NATO members have relied for far too long on US might, without living up to their own financial obligations to the military alliance (NATO, 2017).

Former US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates speech on June 2011, lambasted European defense efforts. The arguments of Gates's speech illustrated a renewed US pressure and remained a reference for many US and European decision makers and thinkers:

"In the past, I've worried openly about NATO turning into a two-tiered alliance: Between members who specialize in "soft' humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and talking tasks, and those conducting the "hard" combat missions. Between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership – be they security guarantees or headquarters billets – but don't want to share the risks and the costs. This is no longer a hypothetical worry. We are there today. And it is unacceptable.

Part of this predicament stems from a lack of will, much of it from a lack of resources in an era of austerity. For all but a handful of allies, defense budgets – in absolute terms, as a share of economic output – have been chronically starved for adequate funding for a long time, with the shortfalls compounding on themselves each year (...) The result is that investment accounts for future modernization and other capabilities (...) I am the latest in a string of U.S. defense secretaries who have urged allies privately and publicly, often with exasperation, to meet agreed-upon NATO benchmarks for defense spending. However, fiscal, political and demographic realities make this unlikely to happen anytime soon, as even military stalwarts like the U.K have been forced to ratchet back with major cuts to force structure. Today, just five of 28 allies – the U.S., U.K., France, Greece, along

with Albania – exceed the agreed 2% of GDP spending on defense (…) The benefits of a Europe whole, prosperous and free after being twice devastated by wars requiring American intervention was self evident. Thus, for most of the Cold War U.S. governments could justify defense investments and costly forward bases that made up roughly 50 percent of all NATO military spending. But some two decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. share of NATO defense spending has now risen to more than 75 percent – at a time when politically painful budget and benefit cuts are being considered at home.

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress – and in the American body politic writ large – to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense. Nations apparently willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defense budgets.

Indeed, if current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, Future U.S. political leaders – those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me – may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost."

The US political establishment's perspective has changed significantly over the last years, as Europe, which was always considered strategically crucial, has shifted from being the most stable region in the world to a center of security concerns (Scheffer at al, 2016).

Now, US expect a different burden share, and Europe should take responsibilities for their own regional security. European allies have taken steps to increase their strategic responsibility within the transatlantic partnership. But it remains unclear what level of engagement and responsibility is sufficient to create a more secure Europe.

In both NATO summits, Wales and Warsaw, the 2 % DIP (Defense Investment Pledge) was reaffirmed (NATO, 2016). Yet, even now, some European allies question the need for a stronger defense commitment, based only on a pledge of 2%.

The mere increase of defense capabilities does not reflect the real European contribution to the transatlantic partnership (Scheffer et. al., 2016). Some point instead, to other foreign policy instruments employed by EU member states, to reinforce the security of their neighbors, like economic development aid that must increasingly become an integral part of security policy (Dempsey, 2017).

Noble and efficient as these tools may be, they serve a different purpose. The war on Europe's Eastern doorstep and the instability in the Mediterranean are clear proof of civilian power limits (Dempsey, 2017).

There is a very practical side to the defense spending disparity between US and Europe. It is becoming increasingly difficult for US forces to work with other NATO forces

because of an emerging technology gap and the related interoperability. At some point in the future European NATO forces may not be able to work alongside with the US military forces (Oliver; Williams, 2016).

If Europeans met the DIP commitment by 2024, as agreed in Wales, "it would mean an extra $100 billion annually on defense spending" (Dempsey, 2017). Germany would virtually double its military budget, spending more than Russia (Lorne; Angela, 2017).

We believe that the new European Defense Fund (5,5 billion euros per year) will help to develop new military capabilities, improve cooperation and reduce duplication. This will be a huge step to minimize the growing military asymmetry across the Atlantic (EU, 2017).

The current US administration strategic ambiguity, "for the bad reasons" have "achieved in a few months what previous administrations have not succeeded to do in years: getting Europeans to focus on defense spending and investment" (Dempsey, 2017), creating also an opportunity to Europe builds a truly credible CSDP.

Now European allies need to develop a strategic construct for burden sharing by convincing publics that increasing defense spending is in their interest. For that, both the EU and NATO need to think strategically – beyond election cycles (Dempsey, 2016).

Angela Merkel already started to follow this path. As we can verify on her declarations after the last G7 meeting:

"I have experienced this in the last few days (...) And that is why I can only say that we Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands – of course in friendship with the United States of America, in friendship with Great Britain and as good neighbors wherever that is possible also with other countries, even with Russia (...) But we have to know that we must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as European" (Reuters, 2017).

Reviewing the transatlantic relationship that has delivered a degree of stability for seven decades demands political courage. A first step should be to seize the *momentum* and set out a redefinition of European security that takes into account that US will remain indispensable for the future of NATO (Merit, 2017).

The current US policy is shifted away from maters European. US is pivoting to Asia, China is a potential peer competitor. US policy makers are increasingly focusing their energy on Asia and commitments to allies such as Japan and South Korea, rather than Europe. If a major crisis occurs, US will focus on the region, and when that happens, interest in Europe will diminish significantly, reducing their presence in the continent.

To keep US as a strategic partner and engaged in the old continent and in order to guarantee the cohesion of the transatlantic bond, transatlantic partners need to share a common understanding of the changing and complex security environment and remind that the challenges in the transatlantic relations are also about values, culture and very

much connected to economic questions (Nagy, 2016).

In current security environment, if Europe wants to deal with the myriad of challenges in its neighborhood, will have to step up its defense capabilities in the future. Neither NATO nor EU had the full range of tools to address these security challenges on its own; cooperation between the two organizations is essential.

Despite its conceptual flaws, we believe that the 2 % metric will remain the tool of choice in the debate over military spending in NATO. A smarter yardstick would produce a more sophisticated picture of reality but would not have the same political impact. (Techau, 2015)

For us, the real debate should focus less on spending and more on the widening transatlantic divide over security in Europe. Although we face a global strategic shifts, NATO must continue to be the guarantor of Europe´s collective defense and the transatlantic bond must remains the bedrock of European security.

For now, NATO remains a community based on shared values, including individual liberty, human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and his essential mission is unchanged. This is the main reason why a number of countries still aspire to join the Alliance, and why NATO remains strong, and as necessary today as ever.

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