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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the key elements highlighted during a closed-door seminar organized by the Istituto Affari Internazionali on 22 September 2016 within the framework of the project "Defence Matters 2016." The project aims to stimulate the Italian debate on defence issues in light of the current international security environment and Italy's national interests. The seminar was devoted to NATO's defence planning needs, in light of the outcomes of the Warsaw Summit held on 8-9 July 2016. The discussion focussed on the main challenges surrounding three specific issues: the Allied deterrence and defence posture towards resurgent Russia; EU contributions to transatlantic security in light of the Brexit vote; and how to fill the gap between the Alliance's level of ambition and national realities in terms of defence planning.

*NATO | Summit | European defence | Military budget | European Union |
Russia*



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by Francesca Bitondo and Paola Sartori*

The purpose of NATO defence planning is to determine the required level of forces and capabilities, also by supporting coordination among national defence plans, in order to best support the military needs of the Alliance and establish equitable share of burden among Allies. At a time of uncertainty characterised by multiple and asymmetric threats and growing nationally-driven approaches, this task has become increasingly challenging. Indeed, while during the Cold War both operational and procurement planning were clearly driven by the idea of a conventional conflict with the Soviet Union, the subsequent phase was marked by a radically changed security landscape and required to replace the previous threat-based approach. Such a transformation led to the introduction of a new and more abstract capability-based and at the same time risk-informed planning, in order to ensure NATO's readiness and effectiveness.

1. Collective defence and the Eastern Flank at the forefront

At the Warsaw Summit, held on 8-9 July, while Member States officially reaffirmed the validity of the 2010 Strategic Concept and the Alliance core tasks – collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security – ensuring collective defence emerged as a clear priority. NATO defence planning is supposed to translate this trajectory into real terms in order to allow the Allies to tackle the current security threats and deal with the issues of defence and deterrence.

Being more specific, as it is evincible from the Warsaw Summit Communiqué,¹ Russia plays a major role within NATO agenda, also in light of its renewed activism.

¹ NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, 9 July 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

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Nonetheless, so far the Alliance's response has basically been framed on an action-reaction model upon Moscow's moves, and NATO's efforts are now aimed at establishing a more coherent and efficient approach. This implies understanding how to properly use new technologies and maximize NATO existing capabilities vis-à-vis Russian aggressive posture. Deterrence and defence on the one hand and re-opening the dialogue on the other are the guidelines for NATO, and decisions agreed at the Warsaw Summit respond to this dual leitmotiv. For instance, while deciding the deployment of four battalions in the Baltic States and Poland, the Warsaw communiqué re-launched the meetings within the NATO-Russian Council as well.



Jean-Pierre Darnis (left) and Jim Squelch (right)

Moving from these considerations, the seminar sought to address the subsequent priority issues for NATO defence planning. Interestingly enough, the open discussion highlighted that a credible commitment to collective defence would somehow require a transformation of the Alliance's military structure. This process would entail a move towards a corp-level organization of the units, which at the moment is hindered by the lack of resources as well as an adequate Command and Control (C2) capability.

Other remarks concerned the need for renovation within the armoured vehicle sector, both from a technical and qualitative point of view. On the one hand, NATO should consider the acquisition of new technologies to fill the existing gap in this domain while ensuring integration and interoperability. On the other, the Alliance should also try to maximize the use of existing capabilities. This twofold process is expected to empower the Allies in view of a potential rapid reaction under Article 5 umbrella, speeding up their readiness.

With specific reference to this last point, vis-à-vis a possible Russian invasion of the Baltics – that according to some experts' comments could succeed within a 48 hours-long campaign – the open discussion highlighted that logistics would represent one of the major obstacle to a rapid Allied reaction, and US commitment in the Eastern flank is central in filling this gap.

In terms of military capabilities, it was actually noticed that European countries together would have the necessary means to respond to a possible Russian aggression. As it was stressed during the seminar, the real nub of the problem is the lack of political unity that leads to an inefficient mismatch between political decision-making and effective deployment of military capabilities.

Moreover, the open debate tackled cyber defence as another pressing issue to be addressed, as it entails the responsibility of defending the Allies networks and C2 systems from cyber-attacks. This aspect is even more urgent giving that NATO is considering the option to gradually move to a C2 system based on cloud computing. The Alliance has recently recognized cyber as operational domain but has not developed a fully-fledged cyber defence concept



Seminar participants

yet. During the seminar the establishment of a cyber defence committee, aiming at increasing the effectiveness and synergy of existing centres of excellence at NATO and national level, was deemed a remarkable step forward in this field. Moreover, participants agreed that despite a good deal of national reticence in sharing information and competences, more commitment within NATO is needed to further progress in the cyber domain.

2. Towards more European commitment within NATO?

The EU is increasing its efforts to enhance its defence and security dimension, and unlike the past both US and NATO seem to recognise the importance of a stronger and more capable EU for the Euro-Atlantic security. According to such perspective, this would enhance the security of the Alliance as a whole, by fostering equitable burden-sharing and striking a balance between benefits and responsibilities deriving from NATO membership. As a matter of fact, while the US are still the main contributor within the Alliance, covering around two thirds of its military capabilities, in the last years Washington has been constantly stressing the need for European countries to enhance their role of security-providers as well as the level of their defence capabilities. In particular, according to the seminar discussion, NATO-EU relations could be strengthened in the security and crisis management domain, with particular reference to the security sector reform (SSR) where the EU has acquired a valuable expertise not only on the military side but also with reference to border guards, security forces, police and law enforcement agencies.

Another important issue which has been raised concerning NATO-EU cooperation, relates to Brexit potential implications. What emerged from the debate is that the referendum outcome caught the UK political establishment mostly unprepared, and therefore possible consequences on NATO and NATO-EU relations cannot be clearly assessed at the moment. However, as for defence planning, being the UK one of the six top Allies – which altogether ensure 95 percent of the whole NATO defence expenditure – Brexit will certainly have an impact on NATO-EU relations. For this reason, the discussion clearly underlined the necessity for UK *in primis* to

find out its mid/long-term vision for national security, defence priorities and the resulting implications for military planning and procurement. In this regard, understanding the political vision of UK, and obviously of all the top six Allies, is pivotal to define NATO future path in terms of military plans. In this sense, the Alliance defence planning is trying to adopt a pragmatic approach seeking to identify which are the prominent national long-term visions, and which elements will drive the capitals' perspectives and defence priorities in the next future.



Jim Squelch

More generally, given the EU renewed commitment to defence cooperation and integration, the open discussion raised the question about what could be the European added value to the Atlantic Alliance. While the current geopolitical reality in Europe is increasingly nationally-driven, it was broadly agreed that greater political unity among EU Member States would certainly be beneficial for NATO too.

However, the different memberships of NATO and EU, and particularly the growing tension between Greece and Turkey, were pointed out as the main obstacles hindering the concretization of a fruitful and smooth cooperation between the two Brussels-based actors. Despite the fact that the two parts do not have problems at working level, political misunderstandings and contrasts keep having a detrimental effect also on the coordination of the respective defence planning processes, as they prevent even a normally efficient exchange of non-classified information between the two entities.

3. Level of ambitions and reality in defence planning: A widening gap

An important issue emerged from the seminar relates to the widening gap between the NATO level of ambition and the national realities in terms of defence planning.

There are signs that defence budgets among allies are going for the better. Indeed, according to the Warsaw communiqué, "Allies' defence expenditure have increased in 2016 for the first time since 2009."² More specifically, five Allies currently meet the

² NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, cit. For further information, see: Alessandro Marrone, Olivier De France and Daniele Fattibene (eds.), *Defence Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Developments, Trends and Drivers*, Roma, IAI, January 2016, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/5850>;

NATO goal to allocate a minimum of 2 percent of GDP to defence. Moreover, 10 Member States spend more than 20 percent of their defence budgets on major equipment, including Research & Development. This shows the Allies' commitment in making considerable efforts for collective security, by contributing to NATO operations, activities as well as its command and force structure.



Jean-Pierre Darnis (left) and Jim Squelch (right)

However, there is actually a gap between what NATO has and what NATO needs. In this regard, some examples raised during the open debate are telling. Concerning combat aircraft, according to the agreed level of ambition the Alliance's Ramstein Air Base should be able to manage about 3,000 sorties per day, but only 300 is the current doable level. Moreover, besides quantitative considerations, from a qualitative point of view Eastern European allies are still using Soviet-made equipment which would need to be replaced, but tiny defence budgets in many Allies are hindering such transformation process.

Considering the gaps the Alliance has to fill, the discussion clearly pointed out that a single defence planning cycle would be necessary but not sufficient to reach the goal to match ambitions and available capabilities. Such a process would take up at 15 years as the Allies are struggling to generate the necessary funds after a long period of financial restrictions.

In addition, further progresses are required in terms of metrics and methodology in order to effectively evaluate national military contribution and commitment. So far, the defence planning process has been focused more on accountancy exercises rather than qualitative assessments. According to the suggestions raised during the seminar, metrics should evaluate also the quality of countries contribution to Alliance's defence, in addition to the quantitative performance parameter. In this regard, the discussion highlighted the effects of the introduction of new technologies on weapon systems' efficiency standards. Indeed, taking again the air domain as an example, the use of precision-guided ammunition requires a much lower number of sorties given the greater effectiveness in hitting the targets.

Furthermore, focusing more on quality also means adopting more output-oriented metrics: considering the percentage of deployable forces the Member States provide for NATO or non-NATO operations as well as calculating operational

Alessandro Marrone, Olivier De France and Daniele Fattibene (eds.), *Defence Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Trends and Investments*, Roma, IAI, July 2016, <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6542>.

costs for deployed equipment and personnel are possibilities to explore.

Above all, despite the fast-changing political and security environment, the defence planning process firmly needs long-term vision in order to be efficient and take advantage from national efforts. Finally, to ensure a widely supported approach it is paramount to have greater coordination between NATO defence planning and the Allied national level. In this regard, the open discussion underlined the need for more collaboration by the Member States in sharing information regarding their military needs, as well as the importance of training and exercises in contributing to create common frameworks, supporting interoperability and knowledge-transfer.



Alessandro Marrone (left) and Jean-Pierre Darnis (right)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the seminar highlighted that much work has to be done by NATO to implement the objectives of the defence planning set in Warsaw – following the trajectory initiated in the previous Wales Summit.

More specifically, with reference to main issues analysed in this report some considerations can be made. First of all, a strong Allies' commitment is required in order to ensure – as stressed in the Warsaw Summit Communiqué – that “NATO's overall deterrence and defence posture is capable of addressing potential adversaries' doctrine and capabilities, and that it remains credible, flexible, resilient, and adaptable.”³

Second, a stronger EU commitment in defence as well as more transparent and efficient EU-NATO relation would be beneficial for a more equitable burden sharing among the Allies, as well as a more efficient exchange of information and a greater degree of coordination among the respective defence planning processes.

Finally, NATO defence planning needs to adopt a more long term vision and complement the current quantitative-oriented metrics with a more quality-based approach, in order to ensure a more effective process.

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³ NATO, *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*, cit.

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

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