

EU-NATO Relations in the Era of Trump and of the European Defence Union

Written by Luigi Lonardo

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LUIGI LONARDO, FEB 17 2017

The Warsaw Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of 8 July 2016 is a strong political commitment to renew the traditional trans-Atlantic bond. It was signed by Secretary General Stoltenberg and by Presidents Tusk and Juncker, during the NATO summit held in the Polish capital. The declaration identified over forty proposals in several key areas of security and defence policy. It comes at a time of change for the US, whose new administration might take an adversarial stance to its NATO commitment. In light of the election of President Trump, the Warsaw declaration acquires even stronger importance as it is a document that delivers quite clearly what were, in 2016, the hopes and fears of the Obama administration and of the EU. This insight offers some reflections on the significance of the Warsaw declaration for the US and the EU, and concludes with a substantial warning to these actors.

Background: EU and NATO Position on the Threats

In the first ever NATO summit taking place in Poland, NATO is insisting on its mission of 'defence and deterrence' while explicitly stating that it 'poses no threat to any country'. This mission will consist of the persevering in the objectives outlined already in the Readiness Action Plan adopted in Wales at the previous NATO summit in 2014. The exertion to boost security in and around Europe is based on two key pillars: protecting its citizens through modern deterrence and defence, and projecting stability beyond its borders. In June 2016, the EU published its Global Strategy, a document drafted by the European External Action Service, and sponsored by the High Representative for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Federica Mogherini. In that document, the EU re-stated that 'NATO remains the primary framework for most Member States' (hereafter 'EU Global Strategy') (EU 2016, 20). At the same time, the EU stressed the complementarity of NATO and of its own security mechanism (the Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP), because the cooperation 'shall not prejudice the security and defence policy of those Members which are not in NATO. The EU will therefore deepen cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two.'

The concerns that appear from the Warsaw declaration reflect the most prominent items on the foreign policy agenda of all great western powers. These are the three partly interrelated issues of the fight against terrorism, the behaviour of Russia, and unrest in Middle East.

After major terrorist attacks have been carried out on European soil, the EU sees as pivotal increasing investment on countering on counter-terrorism. With this aim, it encourages 'greater information sharing and intelligence cooperation between Member States and EU agencies' (EU 2016, 21). NATO as well shares the concern. In 2001, after a terrorist attack, the mutual collective defence clause of the North Atlantic Charter was invoked for the first time by the US. In 2006, NATO recognised that 'terrorism, increasingly global in scope and lethal in results, and the spread of weapons of mass destruction are likely to be the principal threats to the Alliance over the next 10 to 15 years'. NATO's Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, recognises that terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries. At the Chicago Summit, NATO leaders endorsed new policy guidelines for Alliance work on counter-terrorism, which focus on improved threat awareness,

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adequate capabilities and enhanced engagement with partner countries and other international actors (NATO 2016).

Key areas of cooperation with Russia, before the 2014 Ukrainian crisis escalated to the point that dialogue was suspended, included state-building and training counter-narcotics in Afghanistan, as well as overall coordination on fighting terrorism, and on limiting proliferation of arms and weapons of mass destruction this institutional set up, however, NATO has strongly condemned Russian actions and rhetoric in several recent occasions. This was the case after Russia intervened militarily in Georgia in 2008, and in Ukraine in 2014. Now, after the escalation of the Crimean crisis, all practical civilian and military cooperation between the two actors is suspended, with only political dialogue ongoing in the NATO-Russia council. In NATO's narrative, Russia has breached with its action its commitments, and with that it has nullified two decades of efforts at cooperating: 'We strongly condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea to Russia and will not recognise it' (EU-US Summit: Joint Statement of 26 March 2014. Since 2004, among others, the Baltic republic are part of NATO. In view of this shift in its borders, NATO is also concerned for Russia's military activities not just in Ukraine but also on NATO borders, 'in particular its practice of calling snap exercises, deploying near NATO borders, conducting advanced training and exercises and violating Allied airspace.' Another area of conflicting interests is in Syria, where NATO 'has called on Russia to immediately cease their attacks on the Syrian opposition and civilians, to focus its efforts on fighting so-called Islamic State, and to promote a solution to the conflict through a political transition.'

As far as Middle East is concerned, the war in Syria is a top concern for NATO. As mentioned, an issue of contention is Russia's increasing involvement in supporting the regime of Assad. In Syria and Iraq, the US-led coalition is progressing against ISIS, which is losing ground. The future of Syria and Iraq was a key concern at the Warsaw meeting, with the EU trying to honour its commitment to foster 'comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships' (EU 2016, 10).

The Decisions

The outcomes of the summit are set out in detail in a communiqué.

On terrorism and hybrid threats, EU and NATO agreed on a strategy to counter Hybrid Warfare, to be implemented with mutual coordination. They also agreed on concrete measures to increase situational awareness and better respond to hybrid attacks, 'where a broad, complex, and adaptive combination of conventional and non-conventional means, and overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures, are employed in a highly integrated design by state and non-state actors to achieve their objectives' (par 72 of the Communiqué). NATO Airborne Warning and Control System aircraft will provide information to the Global Coalition to Counter-ISIS. Cooperation in exchanging information on returning foreign fighters will also be strengthened.

Russia's 'destabilising actions' (par 10 Communiqué) have prompted NATO to reaffirm its decisions to enhance its deterrence and defence posture, including by a forward presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, and to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia. It re-states that 'The Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia. But we cannot and will not compromise on the principles on which our Alliance and security in Europe and North America rest.' (par 14 Communiqué), and NATO's commitment to the implementation of the Minsk agreements for a peaceful solution in Eastern Ukraine.

Moreover, NATO will begin training and capacity building in Iraq, while continuing to train hundreds of Iraqi officers in Jordan. Allies will enhance ongoing cooperation with Jordan in areas such as cyber defence and countering roadside bombs. With regards to maritime strategy, NATO and EU enhanced cooperation between Operations Sea Guardian and Sophia in the Mediterranean.

Reflections

I now look at two of the main actors involved – the US and the EU – before turning on a general consideration on the substance of the Warsaw declaration.

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The big question is what significance, if any, will this declaration have with the new Trump administration. Will it impact transatlantic relations or will it remain only a formal commitment?

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry said, in December 2016, that the last EU-NATO meeting was 'a milestone in our efforts to build our cooperation and to strengthen the partnership between NATO and the EU'. However, will the US continue with its efforts to strengthen cooperation between the EU and NATO and their respective work on operations and capabilities? The answer likely depends on the policy that the new US president will want to pursue and his stance towards the European allies.

After the failure, as far as we know, of the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and after the election of the new US president, the bond between the US and the EU is still very strong on security issues. As far as cooperation between the US and the EU is concerned, the two actors signed a framework agreement on U.S. participation in EU crisis management operations in 2011, providing the legal mechanism for the United States to contribute civilian personnel to EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions – the EU's mechanism for deploying crisis management missions around the world – and strengthening options for practical, on-the-ground U.S.-EU coordination in crisis situations. The United States continues to contribute civilian personnel to the EU's missions (see US-EU Cooperation factsheet issued by the Obama administration).

Security will most likely be one of the fundamental concerns of the Trump's administration. Re-stating a message that came out quite unequivocally from the electoral campaign, the new website of the White House explains that, '[t]he Trump Administration is committed to a foreign policy focused on American interests and American national security. Peace through strength will be at the center of that foreign policy' (accessed 3rd February 2017). For this reason, the new President has already planned to raise military expenditures, and to pursue 'aggressive joint and coalition military operations when necessary' in order to defeat and destroy 'ISIS and other radical Islamic terror groups'. Joint and coalition military operations could include, evidently, NATO operations. But the commitment of the US to the North-Atlantic Treaty Organisation is all but certain. In his inauguration speech, President Trump said 'We will re-enforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth.' However, he had also previously spoken of NATO as 'obsolete'. He nominated as National Security advisor Flynn, whose ties with Russia have, to say the least, elicited suspects in certain circles (Rosenberg 2017; Del Pero 2016a). But James Mattis, new Defence Secretary, already took a strong anti-Russia stance, and voiced unequivocal support for NATO (Kopan 2017).

It is too early to ascertain whether the President will actually try to implement his highly rhetorical and deeply divisive foreign policy plans or if, as some suggest, he will instead take a more cautious and pragmatic approach (Del Pero 2016b).

And what does this declaration mean for the European Union? The answer to this question is inextricably linked to the future of trans-Atlantic relationships. The European Union's political international relations are conducted under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, a distinctive area of EU decision-making where Member States retain very much their sovereign rights, decisions are taken by unanimity rather than by majority, and jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice is in principle excluded. Within the CFSP, the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy was originally institutionalised in 1999 as a tool to grant the EU with military capacity, (European Council 1999, hereinafter Cologne European Council Declaration) as the availability of an army was deemed an 'essential component of a credible foreign policy' (Solana 2000). Traditionally ever since then, the United States has claimed that it supports the development of the European Security and Defence Policy. It has never seen CSDP as a competitor of NATO, but rather as a complement to it (Duquette 1992). Indeed, at the NATO Washington Summit in April 1999, the parties proclaimed that a European Security and Defence Policy would not only be compatible with the NATO Treaty, but would benefit the Alliance generally. In late 2016, NATO Secretary General confirmed that 'The security of Europe and North America is interconnected. A stronger NATO is good for the EU and a stronger EU is good for NATO. And strengthening our strategic partnership is more important than ever.' While the US and thus possibly NATO on one hand, and the EU on the other hand have different understandings of International Law and the international system (Verdirame 2007) and while there is scholarly debate (Demetriou 2016) on whether the US official position is in practice that of an ally rather than that of a watchful supervisor, NATO officially welcomes a

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strengthening of EU defence. Eastern Europe seems to be an area in which the two actors can and should cooperate (Simon 2015). The Warsaw declaration, therefore, could have a positive effect on the plans, advanced by German and French politicians, of creating an EU 'defence union', which, however, so far is limited non-combat military operations. With this in mind, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the Defence Union in which it called on the European External Action Service to develop concrete options for the implementation of the Warsaw Declaration.

The decisions of the Warsaw Declaration are very pragmatic and are not too ambitious. This is, as recalled, subject to the absence of major policy changes in the US (were they can be expected) or elsewhere (where they would be, admittedly, more surprising). However, a concluding remark on the overall method for the joint EU-NATO mission is necessary. The insistence on stability to attain security, while commendable in principle, may rest on a false assumption. Policy makers of the Euro-Atlantic areas have proved incapable, even in the recent past, to properly assess what areas were and were not stable. This led to egregious miscalculations, which turned into human catastrophes, as former Indian Ambassador to the UN Singh Puri warns (Puri 2016). The fundamental flaw lied, perhaps, in mistaking lack of turmoil for stability – and *vice versa*. On the risks of 'stabilising' a system have written convincingly Nassim Nicholas Taleb, also in relation to US policy in the Middle East and intervention in Syria, (Taleb 2014, 106; Treverton and Taleb 2015). Even more importantly, after an intervention, the artificial suppression of fluctuations or turmoils may give only the impression of stability, while creating, under the surface, a bigger threat. The alerts sent by these practitioners and scholars should not go unnoticed.

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