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After the NATO Wales Summit: Prospects for International Security

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the proceedings of a closed-door seminar hosted by IAI on 16 October 2014 within the project *Defence Matters 2014*, which aims to stimulate the debate in Italy on defence issues by engaging policy-makers, stakeholders and public opinion, with a focus on Italy national interest's link to NATO and international missions. The seminar was devoted to the leading topics addressed during the NATO Wales Summit held on 4-5 September 2014, and its relevant outcomes which could pave the way for the enhancement of international security. By outlining the main achievements of the Wales Summit and debating on the role of the Atlantic Alliance in different geographical and strategic fields, participants in the event discussed the present critical status of international security as an opportunity for NATO to reshape its role, and to maintain capabilities adequately trained and at high readiness. The present report aims to outline the main points that have come out from the discussion, and to summarize the main conclusions the participants have agreed on.

NATO | Summits | Russia | Ukraine crisis | Defence budget | Burden sharing

keywords

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Introduction

The starting point of the seminar was the NATO Wales Summit, followed by a debate which raised two main issues. Firstly, attention was given to the crisis in Ukraine, addressed by the experts as the most urgent concern, considering the country's proximity to the NATO members' territory and the primary interests of the EU there. Secondly, others threatening scenarios facing the Alliance today were discussed, such as the permanent status of instability in the Mediterranean and the Islamic State advance towards the Turkish borders, together with the end of ISAF mission in Afghanistan foreseen in December 2014.

This report summarizes the discussion on these matters in the first and second sections. Conclusions will draft the shape of the future strategic path NATO could follow, as emerged during the debate. In particular, the necessity to change the NATO paradigm, traditionally focused on deployment, and to move it towards the concepts of preparedness and readiness, together with interoperability and close collaboration among Member States, were indicated as the primary ways to let NATO properly respond to the heterogeneous challenges facing the Alliance.

1. The 2014 NATO Wales Summit

As already pointed out, the opening session of the seminar recalled the most relevant results achieved at to the NATO Summit in Wales held from 4 to 5 September 2014, summarized in the following five points.

First, the establishment of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) in response to the Ukrainian crisis was described as a substantial answer to the Russian movements along the Eastern European border and also as the catalyst to prompt NATO

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· Report of the seminar "NATO after the Wales Summit" organised in Rome on 16 October 2014 by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) within the research project *Defence Matters 2014*.

capabilities to be ready for any security contingency. Security in Eastern Europe and the impression that the “revisionism” promoted by Russia aims at trucking the West back to a Cold War-like mechanism emerged during the debate. Within this context, the RAP appeared to be fundamental to face the new Russian posture and its “hybrid warfare” methods which uncovered weaknesses in NATO preparedness to respond to these emerging threats. Even if this kind of warfare is not a new concept, the round-table pointed out that Vladimir Putin’s methods are somehow innovative, particularly regarding techniques of cyber-warfare and information warfare against the counterpart through the circulation of false information. In combination with this, Russia is able to implement its strategy with unprecedented speed, considering that its political system is centred on the figure of the President, who can take the most crucial decisions independently from other authorities. Conversely, when it comes to NATO’s decision-making process, agreeing a sound response is a long, struggling step for an institution which has to take into account the opinions of all its members.

Discussions among the participants in the debate highlighted the fact that Russia has rapidly evolved – or better “dis-evolved” – from strategic partner to potential hostile power. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council established in 1997, Moscow contribution of forces to the NATO-led KFOR, and the “new quality” approach to cooperation agreed in 2002 at Pratica di Mare Summit with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, pointed towards greater partnership. Then the crisis in Georgia and above all Ukraine moved NATO towards the elaboration of the latest Readiness Action Plan, clearly a means to defend the Eastern European border from their perceived threat by the Russian Federation.

A second key achievement of the Summit presented during the seminar is the Member States’ general commitment to enhance defence capabilities under two aspects. Firstly, the Allies have agreed to create a spearhead within the NATO Response Force, namely a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which should be entirely operational by the end of 2016. Land, air, maritime and special operations forces would be provided by the Alliance’s Member States to this force on a rotating basis. NATO’s presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance will be further enhanced with the pre-positioning of equipment and supplies, designation of bases and preparation of infrastructure. A second aspect concerning defence capabilities regards the Investment Plan. Accordingly, the Allies agreed to reverse the declining trend of defence spending and to reach the threshold of 2 percent of GDP, and the one of 20 percent of defence budgets dedicated to major equipment, included Research & Development (R&D), through the next decade. The necessity of reaching a balance between the two components of inputs (spending) and outputs (that is defence capabilities procured) was underlined during the seminar. Deployability, capability and sustainability emerged as crucial keywords to enhance defence effectiveness. However, during the discussion such commitments in the field of defence were put into question due to the cuts in defence budgets that are taking place at the domestic level, also taking into account that, particularly in times of austerity measures, the public opinion prefers to see public money spent on education, health and employment, rather than on defence. This clearly appears

when considering the Italian case. As an answer to this remark, the commitment about the 2 percent GDP threshold in defence spending reiterated in Wales seems to be more promising since the pledge this time was taken by Heads of State and Governments, instead of Ministers of Defence as happened on other occasions.

Overall, to achieve effective and efficient results thanks to the 2 percent of GDP spending on defence, a tailored approach to countries was suggested as the most proper option: in consideration of each country's national interests, strategies, ongoing problems and specific features, a made-to-measure procedure is the only way to ensure positive outcomes. A few examples were brought forward: the United Kingdom, spending the 2 percent of its GDP on defence but without a high quality output; Italy, allocating the majority of its budget for defence – around 70 percent – on personnel, that cannot achieve effective and efficient results if it does not reduce the percentage of personnel costs.

A third point from the Wales Summit that was analyzed was the Connected Force Initiative (CFI), already presented during the Chicago NATO Summit in 2012. In view of a changing and unpredictable environment, in Wales the Alliance's members ratified a package of six key CFI measures, including a high-visibility exercise and the Trident-Juncture 2015. Aiming for enhanced education, training, increased exercises and better use of technology, the focus on interoperability and collaboration of Member States' Armed Forces confirms the support for the shift from the idea of "deployed NATO" to a "prepared NATO", by stressing the importance of the "readiness" paradigm.

Fourth, the analysis of the Summit in Cardiff called the attention on the new Framework Nation Concept (FNC), according to which groups of Allies will gather to work on a multinational basis, for the joint development of forces and capabilities. In particular, by the voluntary assumption of specific responsibilities by different NATO members, the initiative intends to improve the balance of provision of capabilities. The debate on this issue pointed out the three-pillars structure of this concept: ten Allies, with Germany as Framework Nation, will focus on capability development and logistic support, cooperating in the long term to create various configurations; seven Allies, with the United Kingdom leading, will be in charge of the Joint Expeditionary Force; six Allies, with Italy as Framework Nation, will be responsible for stabilization and reconstruction, provision of combat enablers, ground troops and command and control.

Through a deeper analysis, the debate put an emphasis on the potential risk of fragmentation underlying the Framework Nation Concept: the Alliance reached somehow an equilibrium thanks to the 2010 Strategic Concept which established three NATO "core tasks" – collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security – through a certain degree of flexibility among them. In this regard, FNC is perceived by some participants as weakening the idea of a NATO collective approach to a shared purpose, since the distribution of responsibilities as foreseen by the FNC could result in a loss of credibility that all Allies will commit to all NATO missions envisaged by the three core tasks.

Along with this, the question on the unbalanced core tasks of NATO was addressed, in particular the relation between cooperative security and crisis management operations, and between the latter and collective defence. After a decade of emphasis on “out of area” crisis management operations such as ISAF, now the pendulum seem to shift again towards collective defence. Since the sets of capabilities for crisis management operations and collective defence purpose are partly the same, NATO is working on how perform both core tasks without putting at risk Alliance’s credibility and cohesion. As a consequence, the NATO Comprehensive Political Guidance currently under revision represents a way to set out the renewed framework and the new priorities for all Alliance capabilities, in light of the operations that the Alliance will likely perform, according to the evolving strategic context.

Last but not least, the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative was addressed as a means to reinforce the commitment of partner nations of the NATO neighbourhood. In particular, thanks to this initiative assistance and advice have been extended to Georgia, Jordan, the Republic of Moldova and Libya.

2. Beyond the Summit

The first part of the seminar analyzed the outcomes of the Wales Summit and discussed how significant are the measures aiming explicitly to tackle the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which has been the core issue for the Summit. Nevertheless, further considerations from the participants have shifted the attention towards topics today apparently not on top of NATO agenda, which instead have significant value according to the round-table.

The discussion was connected to NATO “open door policy”. The second part of the debate focused on what stands behind the formal assumption included in the Wales Summit Declaration: “NATO’s door will remain open to all European democracies which share the values of our Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, which are in a position to further the principles of the Treaty, and whose inclusion can contribute to security in the North Atlantic area.”¹ In particular, during the seminar a few specific cases were discussed: the thorniest problem concerned Georgia, whose democratic development, and military and defence packages improvements have amounted to a legitimate business card to present the application for joining NATO. But, bearing in mind the 2008 Georgia-Russia crisis, the country’s admission to the Atlantic Alliance was suspended since it could put European security at risk once again. Together with Georgia, the potential enlargement of NATO to Montenegro, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was described as

¹ NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, paragraph 25, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

delicate and potentially risky situations, taking into account the Russian position in this regard, and the unstable regional context where different groups are still struggling to strike a balance between each other.

Finally, the participants debated about the role of Turkey in the current geopolitical scenario: as a NATO member, the country is a gateway to a challenging area of the world, particularly at a time when the Islamic State is waging a holy war at its border. Its role is pivotal to deal with this, but it is still not clear to which it is willing to do it either autonomously, or within a multinational coalition currently led by the United States and grouping the majority of NATO Member States.

Against such complex, diffuse and heterogeneous threats, interoperability and close collaboration among Member States were addressed as the primary ways to let NATO elaborate a proper response. Furthermore, the attention focused on a kind of "division of labour" between NATO and the European Union. A drawback that was pointed out is cooperation between the two bodies in formal fora, which apparently does not work: cooperation is rather more efficient at informal levels, mainly between NATO branches and the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Defence Agency (EDA). This is because the power to take crucial decisions is still entirely in the hands of the Member States, rather than at the supra-national level, and the Cypriot-Turkish issue continues to block NATO-EU cooperation. As a result, for example the NATO/EU Capability Group encounters several difficulties and obstacles to a smooth process of cooperation.

Despite NATO's long standing commitment to security, some experts suggested that the Alliance shares at the same time a great responsibility in some of the most serious recent crisis, for example considering Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011 (not followed by a stabilization effort) and the decade-long NATO enlargement towards Russian borders which has clashed with Moscow perception of the region. Undoubtedly, it was pointed out, conflict situations and international organizations are connected. Yet it would be too simplistic and short-sighted to assume that the current situations, like in Libya for example, are merely a spin-off of previous actions under the responsibility of members of the Alliance. It was stressed the necessity to be aware that it is not easy to face the challenging situations in conflict zones of the world, which could have disastrous consequences for international security.

In addition, a reference to NATO nuclear capabilities was made during the debate, concluding that this theme has not been officially part of the Summit outcomes, but nuclear means remain part of a proper mix of capabilities within the Alliance.

Alongside the aforementioned topics, the seminar raised some questions about other fundamental security challenges that are not currently addressed by a NATO clear strategy. Among them, the issue of Ebola, for which so far no role for NATO can be recognized. This is part of a bigger picture comprising the challenges of the unstable Africa continent, which is an additional concern at the global level because of its importance for Europe: its complexity and heterogeneity made

difficult for both EU and NATO to define their role in stabilizing the area.

Conclusions

Even if an open confrontation between NATO and Russia is excluded, and the latter, according to some of the participants, is more worried about the influence the EU is gaining in Eastern Europe rather than about NATO enlargement, the Ukraine crisis remained the central topic of discussion in examining the Wales Summit outcome. This does not mean that the other complex, diffuse and heterogeneous threats can be underplayed. On the one hand, as it was underlined during the debate, threats are perceived differently by different Allies, also because of historical reasons, which often let the Alliance to miss a shared perception of the security challenges. This fragmentation of risks perceptions is strictly linked to the Allies' divergent priorities at the domestic level, their capabilities and their geographical position: undoubtedly, countries of Southern Europe are more concerned with the difficult situation in the Mediterranean area and the Middle East region, rather than with the events at the Ukrainian borders with Russia, and *viceversa* can be said for countries of Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, notwithstanding national concerns, NATO aims to respond collectively to all the challenges at the same time, without privileging one over another.

In conclusion, considering the present international security scenario characterized by unprecedented, divergent and disruptive threats, the seminar pointed out the need for the Atlantic Alliance to develop a comprehensive strategy in line with Member States' interests, and secondly to redefine its own identity, facing impressive political, strategic and geo-political changes occurring in key areas of the globe. As a consequence, a common view which emerged is the importance of adopting an approach able to take into account contemporarily different fronts. To this end, NATO needs to have the most responsive and prepared capabilities, also because of the more evident limit of the Alliance that emerged from the debate: since it is almost impossible to predict the threats NATO will encounter, Member States have only the chance of reacting to them. For this reason the reaction must be immediate, prepared, prompt, and in order to pursue this goal the Member States need not only prepared capabilities, but also a more balanced and effective burden sharing in light of a commonly agreed strategy.

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