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2016 NATO Summit: What Agenda for Italy

by Alessandro Marrone and Ester Sabatino

ABSTRACT

This document provides the key elements of a closed-door seminar hosted by the Istituto Affari Internazionali on 10 June 2016 within the framework of the project "Defence Matters 2016", which aims at stimulating the Italian debate on defence issues in light of the current international security environment and Italy's national interests. The seminar was devoted to the main issues which will be addressed at the NATO Warsaw Summit on 8-9 July, as well as the Italian position on the matter. The debate highlighted the possible strategic decisions the Alliance could take, particularly on relations with Russia and NATO-EU cooperation. Participants discussed also the Italian approach to the Warsaw agenda, focusing on balancing deterrence and dialogue with Russia, and the projection of stability in the southern flank of the Alliance.

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1. Towards the Warsaw Summit: the NATO agenda

The Warsaw Summit will take place on 8-9 July and will represent a fundamental step for Allies to assess the challenges of the current international security environment. The 2010 Strategic Concept established three core tasks for NATO action, that are collective defence, crisis management operations and cooperative security, the latter encompassing partnership, enlargement and arms control. However, since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis the Allies have mainly focused on collective defence. Consequently, from the Wales Summit, NATO's leitmotiv has been developing and implementation of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) as a way to show cohesion and determination of the Alliance to defend the territory of its Member States. In particular, during the last two years NATO aimed to demonstrate of being able to cope with the revived Russian assertiveness, concentrating its forces more in the protection of the Central and Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, also the situation in the Southern flank of the Alliance denotes such an instability that cannot be ignored in the determination of new strategies to be implemented.

Therefore, the two main topics to be addressed with more attention at the Warsaw Summit will likely be on the one hand deterrence and defence of NATO members, and on the other hand projection of stability in the neighbourhood. The main destabilising factors that the Alliance has to face are the aggressive posture of Vladimir Putin's Russia, and the threat of Islamic terrorism which is strictly connected with the instability in the Middle East and North Africa. The measures of deterrence and defence and the projection of stability can be applied to both Eastern and Southern flanks, in different ways, although the formers have been designed with a view to East and the second by looking towards South. At the end of the day, the strategic response NATO needs and tries to find also through the next summit, is a 360-degree approach. Therefore, participants expect from Warsaw a policy statement aiming to retake and expand the comprehensive approach. A comprehensive approach to combine the military dimension with the political and diplomatic ones, and

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to be implemented in collaboration with partners, in order to provide adequate answers to today's complex crisis by using the most appropriate instruments.

However, there is still a long way to go, especially with regard to the challenges coming from the South, upon which terrorism and religious radicalism, presence and risk of failed states, latent or overt regional conflicts, massive migration flows and arms trafficking are particularly difficult to counter.



Claudio Bisogniero (left), Ferdinando Nelli Feroci (right)

2. NATO-Russia relations: deterrence and dialogue

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, NATO worked to reassure its members from Central and Eastern Europe through a number of measures, including the Air Policing mission of Baltic States. Since the Baltic Republics' adhesion to NATO and due to their lack of necessary means to carry out this task autonomously, some of the Allied Air Forces conduct a 4-month rotational Air Policing mission of the Baltic skies. In the current context, the presence of combat aircraft under NATO aegis contribute to deter Russia, as the rotational presence of allied ground-troops and military exercises in the region do. In fact, should Moscow decide to attack a country of the Eastern flank, it would inevitably strike NATO forces in loco and this will automatically let the Alliance to activate the collective defence Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. From January to August 2015, during its period of responsibility for the NATO Air Policing mission, Italy intercepted 40 Russian aircrafts approaching very close to the Baltic airspace. These numbers shows how tens the relations between NATO and Russia are and how high the risk to incidents is.

Also with the objective of radically reducing these risks, on last 20th April the members of the NATO-Russia Council officially met again for the first time after two years. The main topics of the meeting included the situation in Ukraine, Afghanistan, as well as how to reduce the risks of misunderstanding and conflict between the two parts. After the meeting no joint communiqué has been issued, and the necessity of more dialogue is also evident from the refusal by Russian observers to assist to the NATO Anaconda 2016 military exercise held in Poland on the last 7 June – to which they were invited in the framework of transparency and confidence building measures. Indeed, Anaconda 2016 was the biggest NATO military exercise since the end of the Cold War and the absence of Russian observers to such an important event denotes Russia's mistrust towards the Alliance.



Claudio Bisognero (left), Ferdinando Nelli Feroci (right)

NATO is also going to decide the rotational deployment of battalion units in each of the Baltic Republics and in Poland to assure a “persistent” but not “permanent” presence of allied multinational forces, in order to reinforce deterrence and defence of the Eastern flank. Considering that the 1997 Founding Act for NATO-Russia relations foresees the possibility to deploy forces on the border if they are not permanent, the deployment of battalion units does not violate the Act. However, even if

in line with the 1997 agreement, this measure raises Russian mistrust, posing the Alliance in the position to explain Russia its actions in order to avoid escalation.

During the seminar, participants underlined the necessity to communicate properly to Russians the possible outcome of the Warsaw Summit with the aim to deescalate tension on the Eastern flank. A further point which needs to be explained to and discussed with Russia is the Alliance missile defence system. Recently, one site of the system was completed in Romania and another one is under construction in Poland. The planned NATO missile defence is not equipped with warheads able to destroy land or air targets by exploding, but rather conducts a kinetic interception of other missiles – and does not have the range necessary to strike Russian strategic missiles. Moscow, however, believes this system is meant to contain and counter Russia, the more after the conclusion of the nuclear deal with Iran, and that it is altering the strategic balance in Europe. Given the constant Russian mistrust, it is necessary to work to find a solution limiting the negative effect of the system under construction on the NATO-Russia relations. In this sense, it might be of help conceding to Moscow observers the access to the missile defence sites. As a matter of fact, in the last 25 years the political border between the Alliance and Moscow shifted from Vistula eastwards towards the Don, and this fact should be kept in mind when evaluating the recent deployment of Russia’s military assets next to Eastern Europe to enhance its position in the region.

3. NATO-EU cooperation: obstacles and steps forward

An important aspect to deal with at Warsaw will be the relations between NATO and the European Union (EU). The greater obstacles hampering cooperation between the two actors regard mainly their different memberships, particularly due to the disputes involving Turkey, Cyprus and Greece. Today, after the EU and NATO enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe, the Alliance’s security umbrella of Union’s political agenda shifted eastwards, and a new balance between different national agendas of their Member States is needed.

In recent years, there has been an improvement in the dialogue between NATO and the EU, represented not only by cooperation on the ground in the missions deployed by the two actors in the same theatre, but also – and more importantly – by increased interaction of their institutional representatives. In particular, the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini regularly attends NATO Ministerial Meetings, whereas the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg normally participate in the EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings. This improvement in relations between the two Brussels-based actors is particularly important, since the participation of their respective representatives to the EU and NATO high-level meetings allows them to be constantly updated on the politico-strategic issues discussed in their respective areas. This in turn encourages a convergent analysis of the international security environment.



From left to right: Alessandro Marrone, Claudio Bisogniero, Ferdinando Nelli Feroci

The EU attention and activities in the defence sector have recently increased, thanks to the drafting-process of the EU Global Strategy, the efforts of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in favour of a European cooperation on capability development, and to investments of the European Commission in dual use, security and now defence-related research under the Horizon 2020 programme. As emphasised during the seminar, there is a need to avoid duplication between NATO and EU programmes, in order to maximise the limited defence spending of the European countries. Another sector still to be explored and that leaves room for possible NATO-EU cooperation is cyber security, where the two actors have, to a large extent, complementary assets and expertise.

4. The Italian perspective: political and strategic balance

The Italian view on the next Summit in Warsaw aims to achieve a 360-degree approach able to tackle the current security challenges to the interests and shared values of the Alliance. Italy's position differs from the ones Central and Eastern European allies, as it aims to promote a re-balancing of the policies and activities of the Alliance to counter the threats coming from the South. For instance, NATO is giving its political support to the operations of the international coalition against the Islamic State, and could increase its operational support with the deployment of the Alliance's Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) in Turkey and in the eastern Mediterranean for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. For the Southern flank, Italy could work to increase the NATO efforts within the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) for regional



Seminar participants

security and stability. The single Alliance's actions and tools to face the crises in North Africa and the Middle East should be more interlinked within a cooperative framework with the countries in the region. In this context, bilateral programmes for Defence Capacity Building (DCB) would enable partners to counter the threats in loco, through the transmission of know-how and the necessary support by NATO. Progress in terms of DCB should come from

the Warsaw Summit with regard to Jordan and Iraq. Moreover, a positive sign of a greater willingness to explore opportunities for collaboration is represented by the opening of diplomatic missions to NATO of Middle Eastern countries such as Bahrain, Jordan, Israel and Qatar.

Regarding NATO relations with Russia, in the last years Italy has maintained a constant position of balance, moderation and dialogue. The Italian approach today aims to deescalate tensions, by limiting for example the maximum threshold of military assets deployable in the countries of the Eastern flank in respect to their requests. In Rome's view, such deployment – which is necessary to ensure proper deterrence – should be linked to the reopening of dialogue with Moscow through the NATO-Russia Council. A balanced reinforcement of military assets on the Eastern flank would put the Alliance in a position in which it would avoid the Russian accuse of being aggressive, and it would find less problematic to conceive a potential deployment in the south of allied forces for defence, partnerships or crisis management operations. To succeed, Italy should continue promoting dialogue within NATO on this issue, together with like-minded countries like i.e. France, Germany, Spain and the Member States of the Mediterranean area.

From the seminar it emerged the necessity for Italy to reflect more, and actively express opinion about, the development in the Eastern flank of NATO. Notably, at the Italian political level the participants observed scant attention on the crisis in Ukraine, the issues related to missile defence, and the strategic implications of the deployment of allied military assets in Central and Eastern Europe. While much attention has rightly been given to the debate on the lifting of EU economic sanctions due to the negative effect they are having on the Italian economy, there is a lack of an adequate analysis of the international security environment and the options to ease political and military tensions – which in turn have an impact on the economic and trade relations.

Finally, it has been underlined that the Italian aerospace, security and defence industry has been able to reach important results within the transatlantic arena. As an example, in the last years Finmeccanica-Leonardo won a tender to enhance the cyber security of NATO command and control structures that could bring to

other developments considering the relevance of the topic. Furthermore, Italian small and medium enterprises proved to be highly competitive and technologically innovative, as proved by the winning of subcontracts in the framework of the US-led F-35 multinational procurement programme. As for the NATO procurement programmes, the modernisation process of the AWACS will continue in the next years, in order to extend their operational life cycle while discussing which systems acquire in order to replace them in the future. In fact, thanks to the technological advancements, available options will probably include, but not be limited to, manned and unmanned vehicles.

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