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European Security Governance and Transatlantic Relations

by Matteo Brunelli

ABSTRACT

Europe and the United States are in crisis management mode, finding themselves with the necessity to adapt to a deteriorating security environment in both the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. Adding to the difficulties, these negative trends are occurring at a time of increased political uncertainty in both the EU and the US due to Brexit and the increased polarization in the US presidential elections. These various crises have highlighted the need to rebuild and reform security governance on the European continent, while at the same time devising a new approach to deal with the risks stemming from the MENA region. The ninth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium, IAI's annual Rome forum on transatlantic security, focused on these various challenges confronting Europe and the transatlantic alliance as a whole. During the conference, views were exchanged and analyses and potential solutions to the aforementioned challenges discussed. The symposium featured a productive mix of speakers coming from a wide variety of countries and backgrounds, including policymakers, diplomats, academics, and think tank experts.

European security | NATO | Russia | Ukraine | Islamic groups | Terrorism | Mediterranean | Transatlantic relations | United States | European Union | Brexit



European Security Governance and Transatlantic Relations

by Matteo Brunelli*

Europe and the United States are in crisis management mode, finding themselves with the necessity to adapt to a deteriorating security environment in both the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. Adding to the difficulties, these negative trends are occurring at a time of increased political uncertainty in both the EU and the US due to Brexit and the increased polarization in the US presidential elections. These various crises have highlighted the need to rebuild and reform security governance on the European continent, while at the same time devising a new approach to deal with the risks stemming from the MENA region.

The ninth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium, IAI's annual Rome forum on transatlantic security, focused on these various challenges confronting Europe and the transatlantic alliance as a whole. This was achieved with the invaluable support of various partners including the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, US Embassy in Rome, Compagnia di San Paolo, Council for the United States and Italy, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. During the conference, views were exchanged and analyses and potential solutions to the aforementioned challenges discussed. The symposium featured a productive mix of speakers coming from a wide variety of countries and backgrounds, including policymakers, diplomats, academics, and think tank experts.

Session I. The Next US President's View of Europe: Partner, Follower or Liability?

This first panel focused on the US election and its possible effects on US-Europe relations. This election presents a particularly stark choice between two candidates with very different views of the strategic direction of US foreign relations. The participants agreed that the Democratic contender, Hillary Clinton, is a mainstream presidential candidate committed to the transatlantic alliance. This

* Matteo Brunelli was intern at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

Report of the the ninth edition of the Transatlantic Security Symposium entitled "Europe's Security Governance and Transatlantic Relations", Rome, 29-30 September 2016. The conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Public Diplomacy Division of NATO, the United States Embassy, the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Council for Italy-United States Relations and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

is not to say that she would not present specific challenges for Europe, most notably perhaps a more confrontational US stance vis-à-vis Russia, which not all countries in Europe would support. Other, more traditional challenges concern the strategic realignment of the US towards Asia and a concurrent reduction of resources committed to Europe, which would force the Europeans to provide for their own protection and security more. Some experts also argued that the influence



From left to right: Armando Barucco, Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, Riccardo Alcaro

of the protectionist and populist forces that have propelled anti-establishment politics into such a prominent position will affect US policies even if Clinton wins. They pointed to Clinton's public abandonment of support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the trade deal with 11 Pacific countries that she had championed as secretary of state, as attesting to the growing strength of protectionism. Overall however, while these dynamics pose a risk to European interests, most experts argued that these difficulties could be largely managed under a Clinton presidency.

There was a strong agreement that, on the other hand, Republican candidate Donald Trump poses a much more fundamental challenge.¹ While participants agreed that it is difficult to predict the specific direction of a Trump presidency due to his unclear policy positions and complete lack of foreign policy experience, several of the speakers pointed out that Trump has three beliefs, all posing negative consequences for US-Europe relations, that have remained largely unchanged over the past 30 years. The first is his idea that US allies are free-riders and that alliances must be renegotiated to be more favourable to US interest. Experts warned that therefore Trump would probably take a wholly instrumental approach to NATO, which would weaken the alliance. Second is his understanding that global trade is giving the US a bad deal, therefore requiring the renegotiation of trade agreements. It appears likely, therefore, that he would follow up on his plans to impose tariffs on imports from China, which would risk a trade war between the world's two largest economies (the third being the EU). Some speakers however argued that he would have some important limitations, presenting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as an example of a deal that would be very hard for President Trump to repeal. Lastly, a worrying constant of Trump's behaviour is his overt attraction to authoritarian leaders, having publicly praised former Libyan and Iraqi dictators Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein and especially Russia's authoritarian president Vladimir Putin.

¹ See the paper presented by Jeremy Shapiro: "Serious and Existential: The Clinton and Trump Challenges to Transatlantic Relations", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 16|26 (October 2016), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6838>.



From left to right: Thomas Bagger, Jeremy Shapiro, Peter Hill

The participants acknowledged that there was not much that could be done to mitigate these risks in case of a Trump victory. Some suggested that the Europeans should send a high-level delegation to Washington, possibly under a NATO banner, to make the case for a continued strong Atlantic alliance. Others however contended that such a move would put the Europeans in a weaker bargaining position. While some argued that a Trump presidency might actually foster European integration because it would create the need for greater European security autonomy, the prevailing opinion was that a fractured transatlantic relationship would be more likely to cause further disaggregation of the EU.

Special Session: The Transatlantic Relationship after Brexit

The discussion in this session focused largely on the EU-UK relationship and the future of European security governance after Brexit. Four risks were brought up in particular.

The first was that after Brexit, the EU will no longer be able to count on the competence, experience and creativeness of the UK diplomatic service, thereby losing in capacity of initiative and proactiveness. The second risk highlighted was that, if the divorce turns out to be a messy one, the UK and EU could develop a competitive relationship, which would damage wider transatlantic ties. This relates to the risk that the future economic relationship between the UK and the EU will affect foreign and security policy cooperation. While some experts argued that security and the economy work on separate tracks, others said that it is entirely possible that strong disagreements in the management of the economic relationship could inevitably spill over into other issue areas, including defence. The third risk is that, while remaining Europe's largest defence player, the UK would matter less and retreat more into isolation, weakening European security as a whole. Lastly, some experts argued that the most worrisome risk of Brexit for transatlantic and European relations is in fact the domestic trend of rising identity politics, rejection of the establishment, and growing anti-globalization discourse. These dynamics are difficult to confront and can truly weaken cooperation both within Europe and across the Atlantic.

The debate did put forth possible solutions to mitigate these risks. One expert suggested forging a special relationship between the UK and the EU that would

give the UK some type of influence in the EU security field. Others argued that the indirect involvement of the US might help keep tensions down in the negotiations. At the same time, several participants (though not all) agreed that Brexit is not the main problem facing Europe and transatlantic relations at the moment, as terrorism, Russia, economic stagnation and the migration challenges present a much larger area of common concern. In these areas, there is much scope for cooperation.



From left to right: Thomas Bagger, Jeremy Shapiro, Peter Hill, Ettore Greco

Session II. NATO's Role in Europe's Neighbourhood

The first day of the conference ended with a session on the role of NATO in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. The initial part of the debate focused on how NATO should deal with the growing anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities in its neighbourhood.

A participant argued that using A2/AD as a conceptual framework is a way to connect NATO's main need to strengthen deterrence in the East with the management of risks coming from the South. In this regard, developing shared capabilities to counteract and roll back Russia's growing strength in this area, as seen for example by the deployment of S-400 systems in Kaliningrad, was emphasized as being of primary importance. Many other participants, however, did not share the assessment of A2/AD as the best framework for orientating NATO's action along its eastern and southern flanks. The concept of hybrid warfare and the need to develop strategies to respond to it was put forth as a better conceptual link.

Others experts rejected the creation of a common conceptual framework more generally, and rather pushed for differentiation between the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods in order to develop more effective and tailored strategies. First, they pointed out that the threat levels are fundamentally different: while Russia is a powerful state with a full range of military and hybrid resources, the threats from the South come mostly from terrorists and guerrilla groups. Furthermore, they argued that the two neighbourhoods warrant differing end goals: while there are clearer objectives in the East, e.g. a return to an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) track in security relations, in the South these goals remain largely unclear due to an unresolved tension between stability and democracy.

When the conversation proceeded to analysing the strategic position of the Alliance, there was widespread agreement that NATO's overall position in its neighbourhood is significantly weaker than in the past. In all of its post-Cold War initiatives – crisis management, enlargement, partnerships, strong Russia-NATO dialogue – the Alliance is in difficulty. The strategic changes in the Black Sea region were presented as emblematic. The Black Sea has increasingly come under Russian control due to the deployment of sophisticated anti-aircraft systems and modern ships. The fact that participants agreed that the pro-Russian stance of some members of the Alliance, in particular Greece and Bulgaria, was to blame for the difficulty of coming up with an effective NATO response emphasized just how deep the problems are.



From left to right: Wojciech Zajaczkowski, Luis Simón, Vincenzo Camporini

The session ended with an analysis of the recent NATO summit in Warsaw and possible solutions to the many problems highlighted above. NATO is attempting to provide credible collective defence, keep Russia engaged, do more to stabilize the Eastern neighbourhood, and create a stronger relationship between Russia and the EU, all the while trying not to create a hierarchy of importance between the Southern and Eastern flanks. Furthermore, the discussants agreed that while NATO's refocus on deterrence is welcome and initial steps in reversing Europe's trend of decreasing defence budgets are positive, much still needs to be done. They expressed optimism on the issue of EU-NATO cooperation, although the need to translate rhetoric into concrete cooperation was brought up.

Session III. The West, Russia and Europe's Security Order

This session started with a sombre assessment of the current state of relations between the West and Russia. The discussants argued that, while relations with Russia on global issues are complicated, they remain manageable. Regionally, however, the situation is much worse due to a fundamentally different understanding of European security governance: in the ongoing geopolitical conflict in Eastern Europe, the idea of Western collective security stands in sharp contrast to Russia's idea of multipolarity and sphere of 'special interest', of which the Ukrainian conflict is symptomatic.

The debate then proceeded to focus more specifically on the drivers of Russian foreign policy and their respective importance. Three drivers in particular were identified, the first being geopolitics, the second domestic politics and the third

ideology. It was argued that although geopolitics remains important, it cannot be seen as the dominant driver. If it were, Russia and the West would theoretically be able to find enough common ground for compromises since, in geopolitical terms, the rise of China is Moscow's greatest threat. The experts saw the domestic political context as a more relevant factor. This is seen as the key driver of Russia's foreign policy due to the fact that the fundamental, overriding goal of the current Russian



From left to right: Victoria Zhuravleva, Reinhard Krumm, Marta Dassù, Arkady Moshes, Samuel Charap

leadership is to remain in power. President Vladimir Putin, several experts argued, is pursuing a revanchist foreign policy predicated on antagonism against the West to shore up support for his regime. The third driver is an ideological one, and is structured around the idea of Russia as a protector of traditional values with its built-in antithesis to Western ideas of liberalism. This relates closely to domestic politics, as it serves to undermine the Western liberal ideas that constitute a key threat to Russia's current political structure as an illiberal state.

Concerning the strategies that should be undertaken to deal with Russia, there was substantial disagreement among the experts. A fundamental dichotomy was apparent between those that still believed in engagement vs those that wanted a more aggressive response. The latter, in particular, believed strongly in the need for the West to be more proactive in pursuing its own strategic interests, while taking a stronger stance and pushing back against Russia. At the same time, however, all participants also agreed on the need to keep the channels of dialogue open and to maintain cooperation in areas of common interest, as limited as these may be.

With regard to how relations with Russia should be structured, some experts posited that the different issue areas should be compartmentalized, while others contested that compartmentalization is fundamentally impossible because certain issues cannot be decoupled. This proved to be particularly contentious over the issue of Ukraine. While all agreed that the West should accept no trade-offs between cooperation in Syria and in Ukraine, a number of participants argued there could and should not be any fundamental improvement in relations with Russia until the Ukraine crisis is resolved as it is a pre-condition for re-establishing a degree of functional security governance in Europe. Notwithstanding the Ukraine issue, all agreed that the fundamentally differing narratives between the West and Russia render the (re)creation of a common security architecture on the European continent a virtual impossibility at least in the medium term. There is also not much scope for autonomous EU action because, as one participant argued, it is perceived in Russia as a source of American influence and oppression. Hence, the EU-Russia relationship is hostage to the inherently conflictual relationship between the US and Russia.

Session IV. Europe, the Mediterranean and the Threat of Jihad

The final session of the conference focused on the threats coming from the Southern Neighbourhood, focusing in particular on terrorism and jihadism. The discussion started over the analysis of the process of radicalization. One of the experts explained that the drivers of radicalization in the context of Islamism are composed of both push and pull factors. Push factors are those that come from the general governance structure and the environment wherein the radicalization occurs, while the pull factors relate to the psychological characteristics of the individual. Both push and pull factors are thus necessary but not sufficient. A third ingredient necessary for radicalization to occur are the so-called enabling factors, which include the social networks and the connections that the at-risk subject has with already radicalized individuals. The expert also contented – with widespread agreement – that as the recruitment and radicalization process often occurs directly from overseas, it is important for strategies that deal with the issue not to be regional in scope. Rather, they should take a transnational approach that spans both Europe and the Middle East.



Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi

The process of radicalization is quite different according to country. The session discussed the problem of jihadism by focusing on two particularly relevant countries: Libya and France.

In Libya, the situation is very difficult as the Salafi jihadi subculture has evolved there over a significant period of time. It has taken root so strongly that participants posited that while specific jihadi groups can be defeated, it would be almost impossible to impede the creation of new groups. Particularly worrisome is the fact that a significant ideological divide between the different generations of jihadi fighters has developed, creating a contested jihadi milieu. The first generation of jihadi fighters actually supported the democratic transition in Libya after Gaddafi's fall, while the second and third generations are more radical and actively fought it. The lingering strength of General Khalifa Haftar, the Egyptian-backed strongman who opposes the internationally-backed government in Tripoli from his base in Cyrenaica, increases the problems as he is targeting all Islamists, regardless of ideology. This reduces the attractiveness of the more moderate Islamist positions and instead increases radicalization. It is therefore necessary to stop Haftar's force-only approach and adopt a counter-radicalization strategy deep within the local communities.

In France the situation is obviously quite different. There is no typical profile of the jihadist and it is hard to predict who will become one. One third of the foreign fighters coming back from Syria are actually women and a quarter are converts, which shows that jihadism is often a family project and thus cannot be reduced to the immigration problem. Participants largely agreed that the fundamental security problem now facing France and Europe is that the radicalization threat is increasingly decentralized, which makes detection and prevention much more difficult. Furthermore, lone-wolf attacks treading the line between mass murder and terrorism increase the difficulty in creating a tailored response. France is now confronted with the additional challenge of avoiding an overstretch of military and security resources and the political instrumentalization of the political issue of Islam in the country.



Riccardo Alcaro

The session concluded with a discussion of potential policy responses. One of the participants argued that while from a policy perspective the notion of a global response is important, strategies at the local level can in fact be more effective as integration and identity are key drivers of radicalization. Another potential response that some experts brought up was the issue of managing the religious discourse within the communities by increasing state control over imams. However, others made the important point that radicalization is increasingly occurring online, which decreases the effectiveness of this specific preventive strategy.

Conclusion

The conference ended in a bleak mood. The sheer number of security challenges facing Europe and the transatlantic relationship, including the migration crisis, increased jihadist activity, Brexit, America's flirtation with disengagement from Europe, and greater Russian activism, created a strong sense of crisis overload.

Specifically, participants agreed that the confrontation with Russia is the most serious since the end of the Cold War, with little scope for improvement. With regard to the Southern neighbourhood, the experts generally acknowledged that the region is heading into a situation of permanent instability due to the rise of Islamic terrorism and competing state interests. The conference also emphasized the profound weakness of the European Union, which for the first time is being challenged as the only possible model of European governance. The participants paid special attention to the increasingly polarized domestic political dynamics within the member states, of which Brexit is symptomatic. At the same time,

fears of disruptive US policies in the case of a Trump presidency loomed large in the participants' minds, especially in regard to creating and maintaining vital transatlantic links.

Despite these worries, the need to create a more effective and flexible transatlantic capacity to manage this multitude of overlapping crises was strongly felt, as they reflect the new-normal of the European security environment.

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Conference Programme

Rome, 29-30 September 2016

Welcome Addresses

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Armando Barucco, Head, Policy Planning Unit, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

Session 1

The Next US President's View of Europe: Partner, Follower or Liability?

Chair **Riccardo Alcaro**, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Paper-giver **Jeremy Shapiro**, Research Director, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), London

Discussants **François Heisbourg**, Chair, Council, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London

Angel Carro Castrillo, Senior Advisor, Strategic Planning, European External Action Service (EEAS)

Thomas Bagger, Head, Policy Planning Unit, German Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Special Session

Dealing with the Ukrainian Crisis: A Transatlantic Strategy

Chair **Ettore Greco**, Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Keynote speech **Peter Hill**, Director for Strategy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), London

Session 2

NATO's Role in Europe's Neighbourhood

Chair **Vincenzo Camporini**, Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), and former Chief of Defence Staff, Rome

Paper-giver **Luis Simón**, Research Professor, Institute for European Studies (IES), Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Discussants **Kurt Volker**, Executive Director, McCain Institute for International Leadership, Washington
Serhat Güvenc, Kadir Has University, Istanbul
Wojciech Zajackowski, Director, Foreign Policy Strategy Department, Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw
Knut Kirste, Policy Advisor, Office of the NATO Secretary-General, Brussels

Session 3

The West, Russia and Europe's Security Order

Chair **Marta Dassù**, Editor-in-Chief, Aspenia

Paper-giver **Reinhard Krumm**, Head, Central and Eastern Europe Department, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Berlin

Discussants **Samuel Charap**, Senior Fellow for Russia and Eurasia, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Washington
Arkady Moshes, Director, The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia Research Programme, Finnish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA), Helsinki
Victoria Zhuravleva, Senior Researcher, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow

Session 4

Europe, the Mediterranean and the Threat of Jihad

Chair **Riccardo Perissich**, Executive Vice Chairman, Council for the United States and Italy, Rome

Paper-giver **Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi**, Research Fellow in Middle East Security, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), London

Discussants **Mary Fitzgerald**, Independent Researcher and Analyst
Eric Rosand, Director, The Prevention Project: Organizing Against Violent Extremism, Washington
Gurvan Le Bras, Chargé de mission, Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris

Final Remarks

Riccardo Alcaro, Senior Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Founded by Altiero Spinelli in 1965, does research in the fields of foreign policy, political economy and international security. A non-profit organisation, the IAI aims to further and disseminate knowledge through research studies, conferences and publications. To that end, it cooperates with other research institutes, universities and foundations in Italy and abroad and is a member of various international networks. More specifically, the main research sectors are: European institutions and policies; Italian foreign policy; trends in the global economy and internationalisation processes in Italy; the Mediterranean and the Middle East; defence economy and policy; and transatlantic relations. The IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affari Internazionali*), two series of research papers (*Quaderni IAI* and *IAI Research Papers*) and other papers' series related to IAI research projects.

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