A Long-Term Perspective on NATO and the Multinational Order

by Sinan Ülgen

ABSTRACT

The evolving external threat environment is impacting the internal political dynamics of NATO nations and is accentuating a series of already existing trends – differences in threat perceptions, burden-sharing difficulties, challenges to respond to sub-threshold threats and the rise of populism – which altogether affect the cohesiveness and potentially the effectiveness of NATO as a political and military alliance. NATO's operational future over the next decades will be shaped by the ingenuity of the transatlantic leadership in developing new arrangements of institutional cooperation between the Alliance and the burgeoning forms of the "coalition of the willing". The Alliance should nonetheless remain the main transatlantic political forum, given Brexit as well as the rising need for a common political response to the many challenges ranging from migration to failed states. NATO has been relatively successful in adapting to the changing security environment. Its military capabilities remain unparalleled and unrivalled. The more interesting question is however the political one. Namely how the politics of sustaining this Alliance are being shaped by the underlying dynamics that are transforming the global political, economic and military context. The paper is divided in three chapters.

NATO | European defence | European union | Transatlantic relations

keywords

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1. The transformation of the external security landscape

1.1 The early years

Most NATO Strategic Concepts from the Cold War described the main mission of the Alliance as deterring the Soviet Union and defending Allied countries from an attack. This was a very clear and basic objective on which consensus was easily built. The international security environment was based on a major geopolitical confrontation between two blocs that were nonetheless greatly interested in avoiding war (especially nuclear war) and preserving the status quo. In the early 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transatlantic community found itself as "the last man standing". The "end of history"[1] had arrived, marking a decisive win for the West.

In 1991, NATO members tried to mark the change by producing a new Strategic Concept.[2] The tone of the paper was optimistic. The authors foresaw an era of lasting peaceful order. The document advocated for a diminished use of military means and more dialogue. One particular target group for deeper cooperation was the ex-adversaries from Central and Eastern Europe. Hence, in this period several partnership agreements were signed with ex-Warsaw Pact countries.

Affected by the era of optimism, NATO members chose to reduce their defence budgets. The consequences of this sharp shift from a hard to a soft security strategy are still felt today. The euphoria about the end of the Cold War was abruptly

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, The Free Press, 1992.

[2] NATO, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, Rome, 8 November 1991, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

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terminated by the onset of the First Gulf War in 1991 and the Yugoslav Wars (which unfolded between 1991 and 1995 and then again in 1998–99). The latter showed that bloody armed conflicts could still occur in Europe. Even more alarming was the initial divided response of NATO members. Additionally, the phenomenon of failed states offering safe havens to terrorist organisations came to the fore of transatlantic security thinking during this time.

In 1999, NATO published another Strategic Concept.[3] Looking back, the post-Cold War decade was characterised by rising instability all over the world. A long list of previously non-existent or under-the-radar threats came to dominate the agenda. Extremist insurgencies and terrorist organisations filled spaces in failed states. Ethnic conflicts and human rights abuses in Europe, Africa and South Asia resulted in thousands of victims. The increasing global instability was thus reflected in the philosophy of the 1999 Strategic Concept. Transatlantic leaders acknowledged the need for a holistic approach to security. Economic, social, political and even environmental factors were added next to the defence-related core objectives. Also, the Alliance developed a new focus for dealing with post-conflict scenarios in the wake of the Balkan Wars.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were the ultimate proof of the changing security environment. The attack was perpetrated on NATO soil by a non-state actor based in a failed state in a geographically distant region. The security strategy of the Alliance failed to address this threat. For the first time, NATO members discussed invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and activating the collective defence clause in support of the US. The first decade of the 21st century was characterised by three trends for the Alliance: (1) the main threats were now terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; (2) the need to protect both within and beyond borders; and (3) the possibility of unpredictable events.

1.2 The 2010 Strategic Concept

Acknowledging the fast-changing nature of the international security environment, the transatlantic security community produced a forward-looking Strategic Concept in 2010.[4] The document offered a balance between hard and soft security measures to counter the broad array of threats it foresaw for the next decade. It presented three core tasks for the Alliance: collective defence; crisis management; and cooperative security.

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[3] NATO, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington*, 24 April 1999, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm.

[4] NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon*, 19 November 2010, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm.

Collective defence and hard security remained at the very heart of the transatlantic security apparatus. The main goal of the Alliance was said to be to deter adversaries and defend its territory and populations when deterrence fails. This task remained highly relevant in a challenged Western-dominated world order. To ensure the fulfilment of this role, the strategic document called upon Alliance members to fulfil the agreed thresholds for military spending[5] (2 per cent of GDP). In order to keep an effective hard security capability and respond to both conventional and unconventional threats, the Strategic Concept also called for more mobility, flexibility, interoperability, force projection, and technological superiority.

The tasks of crisis management and cooperative security demonstrated that NATO members were aware that hard security was no longer sufficient. Soft security tools were necessary to adequately respond to the new threat environment. NATO forces could not simply launch an operation and solve a problem. They must also create and keep a favourable security context. With such an objective in mind, the Strategic Concept called for expanding NATO's partnerships globally. The idea was that, as threats are global, so should be the approach of the Alliance. The strategic documents highlighted the need for the Alliance to go beyond its borders and cooperate with partners to reduce instability and counter unconventional threats such as terrorism or cyber-attacks.

The document gave NATO a crisis management role. The task was divided between three phases of a conflict: prevent, manage and support stability. NATO should have a role in each of these phases. To succeed in these tasks, the Strategic Concept offers some tools: development of counterinsurgency, stabilisation and reconstruction operations; the building of a civilian management capability; training and equipment of local forces; and more effective sharing of intelligence.

1.3 The current threat environment

Although the 2010 Strategic Concept was NATO's most holistic strategic document, the world has become even more unpredictable than its authors had foreseen. The main threats towards the Alliance are emanating from the grey zone between peace and conflict. These mostly hybrid threats do not have clear boundaries or perpetrators and are forcing NATO forces to be more flexible, interoperable and agile. There are three main perceived threats towards NATO: (1) Russian aggressive posture in the East; (2) instability in the South; and (3) the fragility of democratic institutions within the Alliance.[6]

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[5] Ibid., point 19.

[6] Andrew A. Michta, "A Common Threat Assessment for NATO?", in *Strategic Europe*, 16 February 2017, https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/68017. See also Susi Dennison, Ulrike Esther Franke and Paweł Zerka, "The Nightmare of the Dark. The Security Fears that Keep Europeans Awake at Night", in *ECFR Security Scorecard*, July 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/SECURITY_SCORECARD_267.pdf.

Russia has taken back its seat as one of the primary sources of threat for most Europeans.[7] President Vladimir Putin's aggressive agenda in Eastern Europe has rung alarm bells in most European capitals, with fresh memories of Soviet dominance. Although Putin made clear his intentions to challenge the Western order in 2007, it was not until 2014 and the annexation of Crimea that NATO members in North America and Western Europe perceived a real threat from Moscow. NATO took significant hard security measures to deter Russia from actively undermining the security interests of any of its members, especially in the Baltics. The Allies sought to reassure the Baltic countries by expanding the forward presence of NATO assets in the region. Also NATO deterrence was enhanced by the launch of an air-policing mission to deter Russian planes from violating the airspace of the Baltic countries.

The terms of the conflict with Moscow have changed considerably compared to the Cold War years. Today Russia, under the so-called Gerasimov doctrine,[8] is staging a permanent unconventional campaign against the security of the Alliance and its members. This campaign is staged as a cross-dimensional but sub-threshold set of attacks best described by the concept of hybrid warfare. One key example of such means is cyber-attack against critical infrastructures of NATO or its member states. Moscow also uses the energy dependency of some NATO members as a tool to divide the Alliance. Another important tool used by the Kremlin to interfere in transatlantic politics is disinformation campaigns. Given that today Moscow relies on a broader array of tools, NATO should keep diversifying its means to respond to them.

The 2010 Strategic Concept foresaw mounting instability in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Yet the wave of Arab Spring revolutions and their domestic as well as regional consequences for the broader security of the Alliance had not been contemplated. The instability of the region has created two important sources of threat to NATO. Terrorist organisations have found safe havens in the power vacuums created by the conflict in such countries as Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen. Organisations such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) have managed to gain traction in the region. ISIS went one step further by establishing a proto-state in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2019. The rise of these groups has provided them with greater prestige and more means to spread their propaganda around the world. ISIS, in particular, has directed or inspired several deadly terrorist attacks on NATO territory.

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[7] Stephanie Pezard et al., *European Relations with Russia. Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis*, Santa Monica, RAND, 2017, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1579.html.

[8] Vladimir Putin, *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, Munich, 10 February 2007, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034.

A second threat emanating from the instability in the Middle East is an unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants. Besides the millions of Syrian refugees, many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have made their way into Europe through a region made much more porous by the collapse of state structures. The situation in Libya has played a critical role. A divided NATO led an intervention in 2011 to topple the country's long-standing dictator, Muammar Gaddafi. While succeeding, the Alliance and its members failed to stabilise Libya as the Strategic Concept required. Libya is still a failed state, with an ongoing civil war and the centre of human trafficking to Europe. NATO also deployed forces to control the refugee flow.[9] NATO's intervention was requested by Germany, Greece and Turkey in 2016 to counter human trafficking and illegal migration. In coordination with the EU's border management agency, Frontex, NATO forces has since been conducting a limited intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance mission in the Aegean.[10]

Last but not least, NATO faces a threat from within. The institutions and values NATO is defending are more fragile today than they have been since the end of the Cold War (and even before that). The main reason for this trend is usually not the decisions of leaders, rather societal developments. NATO populations are highly connected and thus vulnerable to cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns and propaganda. The threat of terrorism linked disingenuously to refugee movements is being used as a potent message by populist platforms. Countries such as Russia, China and Iran, and hostile non-state actors, are operating in grey zones and striving to shape the public opinion of NATO members. The Alliance has no mandate to interfere in the internal affairs of its member states. Yet it can minimise the effect of these threats by increasing its cyber and strategic communication capacities and providing an effective platform for best-practice sharing and cooperation among its members.

Current adversaries of NATO, be they state or non-state actors, challenge the transatlantic security order. They often do this through unconventional and asymmetric means, and in unexpected ways. Their broad array of tools translates into a large list of threats. NATO members are often divided regarding which threat should be the priority. The only plausible way seems to be a 360-degree approach through a better grasp of new threats by the Alliance and a more serious commitment by its members. This evolving external security landscape has provoked a number of internal challenges and dilemmas for the effective functioning of the Alliance.

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[9] NATO, *Assistance for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the Aegean Sea*, 20 June 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_128746.htm.

[10] Ibid.

2. The internal landscape

The external landscape is impacting the internal political dynamics of NATO nations and, as a result, is accentuating a series of existing trends that altogether affect its cohesiveness and potentially its effectiveness as a political and military alliance. Four different trends of such nature can be summarised as disparities in the threat perception, burden-sharing, the challenge of sub-threshold threats and the rise of populism.

2.1 Disparities in the threat perception

The international security environment has rarely been as unpredictable as today. NATO and its member states are facing a broad array of security threats emanating from diverse sources. The main perceived threats by NATO members are terrorism, instability in the immediate neighbourhood, migration, cyber-attacks, foreign meddling into domestic politics, inter-state war and disturbances to the international order. Currently, these threats are emanating from three sources: (1) Russian aggressive posture in the East; (2) instability in the South; and (3) the fragility of democratic institutions within the Alliance.

Almost all NATO members agree on the list of perceived threats, yet with differing orders of priorities. It is not the first time that differences in priorities and perceived sources of threats exist within the Alliance. With the exception of the Soviet threat, NATO members have a long history of divergent views regarding where and how the Alliance should be involved.

NATO members are aware of the most recent threats emanating from the cyber/ cognitive domain. In their domestic politics, most members address cyber-attacks and foreign meddling into domestic politics as two of their top three priorities. Most NATO members see the collapse of states and civil wars in Europe's immediate neighbourhood as major issues of concern. This is linked to the threats posed by terrorism and the risks of emboldening populist movements as a result of refugee inflows. There are only a few countries in the transatlantic community which regard the risk of an inter-state war as an imminent threat. This is usually linked to historical animosities with their immediate neighbours (Greece, Cyprus – Turkey; Finland, Poland, the Baltic states – Russia).

When it comes to threat perceptions, there are two clear groups of NATO members. The first one is made up of mostly North and East European member states. This group is usually perceiving foreign meddling into domestic politics and cyber-attacks as the two most important threats. Severe crises in neighbouring countries (Ukraine) are also seen as a major issue by many of them. Almost all members of this group see Russia as the main source of these threats.

The second group is formed around the perception of terrorism as a major threat and the potentially destabilising political impact of refugees as a major challenge.

The group contains mostly South and West European NATO members including Germany and the UK. This is not surprising as these countries are the ones which have either found themselves under the burden of migration flows or been targeted by terrorist attacks. These two issues are rarely separated from each other in members' top perceived threats lists. Many of these countries also perceive the civil wars in their immediate neighbourhood (Syria, Libya) as a major threat. It is no surprise that terrorist groups and criminal organisations are perceived by these countries as the main sources of threats.

Geography and historical background are still playing a fundamental role in the prioritisation of threats. Eastern members tend to dismiss threats generated from the Southern flank of the Alliance and focus on Moscow's activities. Far from Moscow, Southern and Western members perceive threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa as more urgent.

2.2 The burden-sharing debate

The evolution of the security environment as described above is known to have led to a "peace dividend" which continues to impact negatively the transatlantic security debate. Washington has long claimed that Europe is not delivering its share in terms of defence expenditures. The burden-sharing debate has bedevilled the NATO discussions even more under the brash rhetoric of US president Donald Trump. There is therefore a need to contextualise this issue to assess its implications for the future of NATO.

**Figure 1** | Military expenditure as a share of GDP, 1988–2018
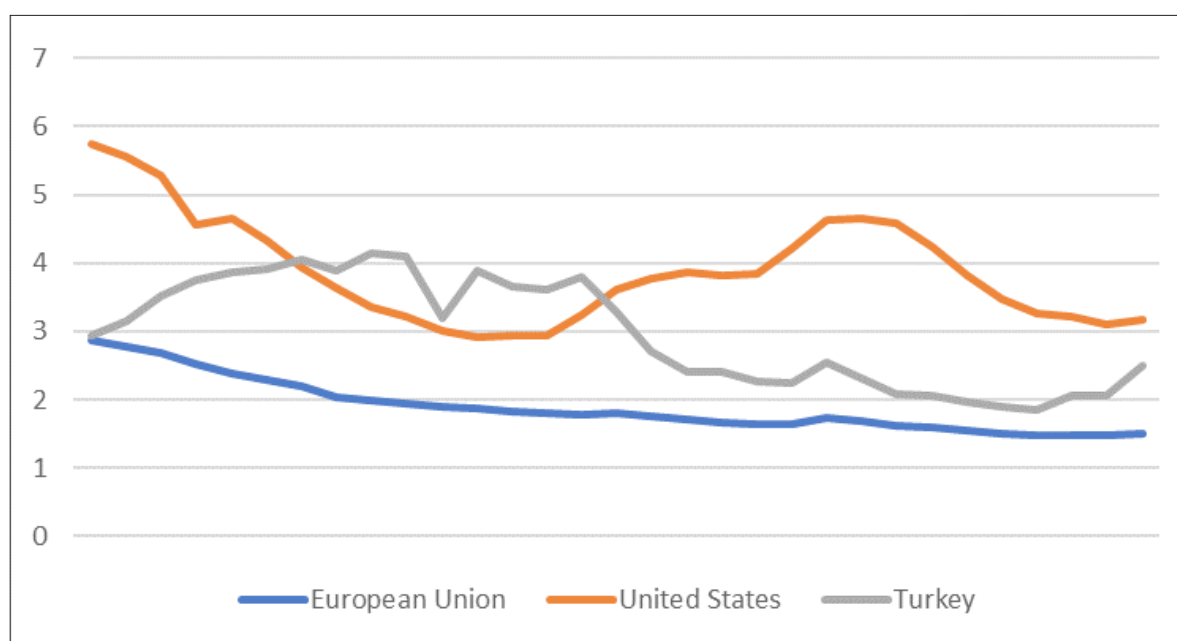
Source: World Bank.

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of military expenditures as a share of GDP for the US, the EU and Turkey between 1988 and 2018. The "peace dividend" is clear. The end of the risk of total war with the Soviet Union has allowed a relative reduction in military spending for the US and the EU. In the US, military expenditure as a share of GDP dropped rapidly from its high point of 5.7 per cent in 1988. The same trend could be observed for the EU, where the ratio dropped from 2.9 per cent in 1988. Military expenditures in the US (as a share of GDP) momentarily reversed course with the Iraq campaign in 2003 while the downward trend continued for European countries. As a group, the military spending in EU countries stood at 1.5 per cent GDP in 2018 while this figure was 3.16 per cent for the US and 2.5 per cent for Turkey in the same year.

Figure 2 shows another dimension of the burden-sharing question. In Europe, not only are military expenditures dropping as a share of GDP, they are also dropping as a share of budgetary expenditures. So the European social contract seems to place much less weight on the need to consolidate or even possibly increase military expenditures than in other parts of the transatlantic community. The share of military expenditures in total budget spending in EU nations stood at 4.2 per cent in 2000 and 3.3 per cent in 2008. The same figure was 9.2 per cent in the US in 2000 and 7.2 per cent in 2018. So military spending is not only being reduced in relative terms as a share of GDP in Europe, but also as a share of total budgetary outlays.

Figure 2 | Military expenditure as a share of total budgetary expenditure, 2000−2018
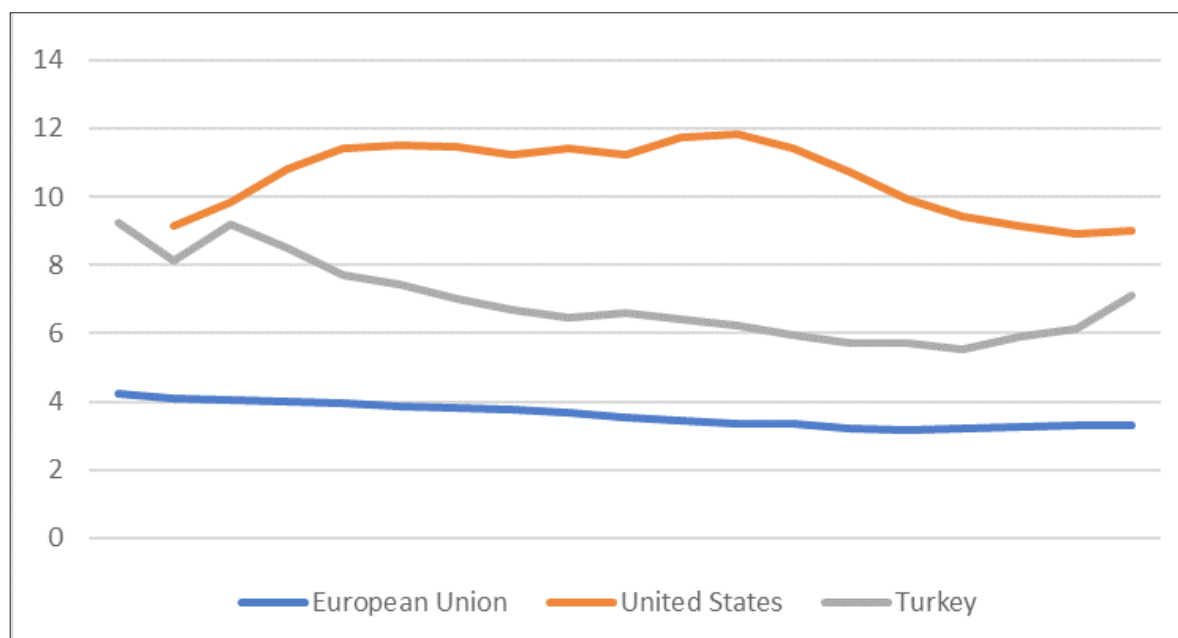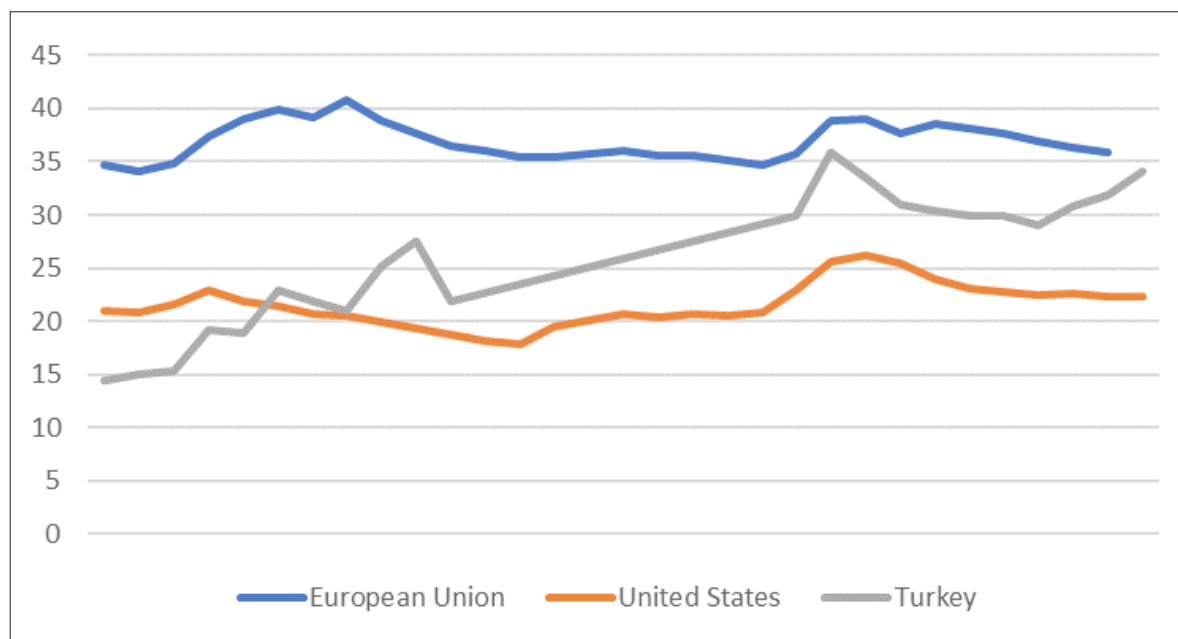

Source: World Bank.

This is happening within a time period when budget expenditures as a share of GDP have been increasing in Europe. This figure was 34.8 per cent in 1988. It had increased to 35.9 per cent by 2017. For the US, this ratio was 21 per cent in 1988 and

22.3 per cent in 2018.

Figure 3 | Total budgetary expenditure as a share of GDP, 1988–2018

Source: World Bank.

The conclusion is that once military spending could be reduced in Europe as a result of the "peace dividend", the diffuse nature of the new threats proved to be just too weak a stimulus for European domestic constituencies to back higher military spending. As a result, European governments are politically constrained in their quest to reach higher levels of military spending and their ability to comply with the NATO thresholds.

2.3 The challenge of sub-threshold threats

As described above, the new environment is marked by a more various, diffuse and asymmetric threat landscape. The multiplication of below-the-threshold threats means that the task of ensuring policy cohesion within the Alliance for a vast number of greater and yet diffuse threats has become more complicated. It was far easier to manage the consensual politics for a small number of recognised "existential" threats than a larger number of smaller-impact security challenges.

A related difficulty is that the diversification as well as the diffusion of potential threats has also required a "democratisation" of the threat response. In other words, when the main challenge was defined as collective defence, the domestic institutional division of labour within the nations of the Alliance was relatively simple, with the Defence Ministry in the lead. In today's environment, a sound policy response requires a much more complicated inter-agency process involving several different Ministries (Home Affairs, Health, Disaster Management,

Justice and Law Enforcement, Information and Telecommunications, and so on). Therefore, the task of planning and coordination related to the emerging security challenges has become more difficult even at the domestic level. This difficulty is compounded when international cooperation is required. NATO's established procedures were designed for the challenges of yesterday in an era when territorial defence was the lead concern. Therefore, the Alliance had essentially to ensure the engagement and the collaboration of the foreign policy and military establishment. But the nature of the contemporary threat environment means that other state institutions have become possibly even more relevant than the Defence Ministries to address the identified security challenges ranging from the issue of refugees to pandemics, from cyber threats to disinformation campaigns.

Despite ongoing and justified efforts to modernise its Strategic Concept, doctrines and capabilities, NATO's role remains hindered by this ever-expanding set of domestic stakeholders now closely related to the world of security. While NATO was and remains the most effective transatlantic platform to engage the traditional security providers (foreign policy and the military establishment) of the Alliance nations, the question is whether it can ever play this role with the same degree of efficacy when the Health Ministries are leading the fight against a pandemic or the Home Affairs and Justice Ministries are leading the response to a refugee crisis.

At the same time, Allied nations are not only exposed to the challenge of managing a global environment marked by a multiplicity of threats and the complicated politics of maintaining the political cohesion of the Alliance. They are also challenged by the simple and inevitable outcome that the multiplication of threats also raises the probability of divergences within the Alliance on the importance of these threats. Syria is a recent case in point. For the United States, the main security challenge related to Syria was terrorism. The response therefore was the elimination of the Islamic State. For Europe, the threat was the Islamic State combined with the challenge of mitigating the negative political impact of refugee flows. For Turkey, the threat was Kurdish terrorism and the Islamic State combined with the huge challenge of managing refugee flows. As a result, coordination between Ankara, Washington and Brussels and other European capitals in relation to the security spillovers of the Syrian conflict was deeply handicapped for the simple reason that each capital held a different and sometimes incompatible prioritisation of the threat landscape.

When the main threat is seen in Washington as the emergence of a jihadist entity, the policy response can take and has taken the form of a partnership with a local armed group that can fight back against the jihadis. But viewed from Ankara, the Washington solution was deeply inimical to Turkey's national security given that the priority challenge was the terror campaign led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an entity organically linked to the group identified by Washington as its partner in the fight against the Islamic State, namely the Syrian-Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). So, the multiplication of asymmetric threats to the Alliance nations, in this particular case the dangers posed by armed non-state actors, was shown to lead to scenarios of divergent prioritisation and even clashing

and incompatible policy responses.

There is no reason to think that the dilemma posed by the Syrian crisis for the Alliance nations is a unique and non-iterative phenomenon. On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that the incongruity of the policy reaction within the Alliance as illustrated by the Syrian crisis can be the new norm. Indeed, we need to assess the effectiveness of NATO as a "policy convergence machine" in the contemporary security environment marked by the prevalence of sub-threshold threats. A common prioritisation of threats was inherently possible in an era when dangers to the territorial integrity of the Alliance nations were real and palpable. But as this threat became more diffuse, ensuring a symmetric prioritisation of the perceived threats within the Alliance has become ever more complex if not impossible.

2.4 The dilemma of populism

NATO's effectiveness as a political-military organisation focusing on transatlantic security is intricately linked to the ability of the NATO leadership to maintain a minimum degree of political cohesion. Of key concern is the possible divergence between the US and European pillars of the Alliance. In particular, one needs to assess whether the current antagonism demonstrated by the brash rhetoric of the US president on NATO and the European Allies is contingent on Trump's personal fixations and therefore a reversal to normalcy can be expected in the post-Trump phase or, on the contrary, whether the disdain of multilateralism in general and scepticism about the transatlantic alliance in particular will remain as an element of Washington's foreign outlook even under future administrations.

In a way, the public discussion about the value of NATO has become enmeshed with the more general debate about globalisation and multilateralism. The domestic constituencies critical of the multilateral system, swayed by populist arguments, generally defend viewpoints that belittle the role of the Alliance. The mistrust of the multilateral system has therefore eroded the perception of NATO as an effective alliance capable of addressing the national security concerns of its member states. In this respect, NATO could be viewed as the unfortunate target of an overriding public concern about the functioning of the international system. The backlash against globalisation shapes a political environment within the Allied nations inimical to the continuation of the inter-Alliance solidarity necessary to sustain close military and political cooperation. The populist attack on multilateralism is fed by the perceived threat to cultural identities as well as by fears about economic prospects. This worldview blames multilateral institutions for exposing the average person to economic risk by imposing a set of rules with no democratic accountability. These arguments have gained traction, abetted by the negative impacts ascribed to globalisation such as rising income disparities and job insecurities.

The real reasons for this very real impact on our societies are certainly more complicated than these simplistic claims. The combined impact of trade, technology and open markets have indeed transformed the workplace and the dynamics of economic competition. And unlike the populist discourse, there are also no simple or easy solutions to this conundrum apart from efforts by the political leadership of transatlantic nations to defend multilateralism while launching policies to mitigate the negative impact of globalisation. The pervasiveness of the problems posed by globalisation also means that NATO will continue in coming years to be exposed to the vagaries of populism in the Allied nations albeit with different characteristics on the two shores of the Atlantic. For the US, populism takes the form of isolationism, creating confusion about the willingness of the US to stand behind its commitment to NATO. In Europe, right-wing populism is coloured with pro-Russian temptations. And finally in Turkey, populism is mixed with a nationalism intent on emphasising a more independent path for the protection of Turkey's national security. But ultimately populism tends to affect how nations view their national interest. The political leadership is pushed towards a narrower re-definition of their country's national interest in a way that is less accommodative of the interests of other nations, even if they happen to be NATO Allies.

3. The way forward

This analysis aimed to explore the structural risks to NATO's long-term effectiveness. The adopted approach was to focus on the main elements of the post-Cold War transformation of the external security environment as the driver of the underlying structural challenges faced by the Alliance. It was posited that the evolution of the threat landscape indeed presents the NATO leadership with significant challenges going forward.

In contrast to the more traditional analysis on the future role of NATO that tends to prioritise solutions aimed at enhancing NATO's capabilities and readiness, this study has opted to put emphasis on the political trends that could potentially handicap over the longer term the effectiveness of the transatlantic Alliance. One significant advantage of this "holistic" approach is to develop a more thorough understanding of how global political trends affect the functioning of the Alliance. But at the same time, to the extent that these trends become the source of the frictions that bedevil the cohesion and effectiveness of NATO, the policy options become much less prescriptive. Instead, the value of this angle of analysis is to clarify the limits on NATO's future transformation in a world marked by increasing policy divergence.

The analysis of how the evolving threat environment has impacted the domestic political context of national security decision-making and by extension the Allied countries' expectations about and resolve to contribute to the aims of NATO has highlighted a critical question: Are we asking too much of the Alliance? In other words, given the historical success of NATO in defending its members from a

range of traditional threats, is NATO becoming the victim of its own past success?

The diversification of the threat landscape has almost by default led the Alliance members to adjust their expectations of NATO without thinking too deeply about whether it could ever be equipped to deal with this more diverse, asymmetric and diffuse threat environment. The analysis has demonstrated that the changing nature of the political context driving the security conversation within the Allied countries has in itself become the biggest barrier to NATO's ability to fully address the expectations of it. In reality, the institutional response in the West to some of these challenges has taken the form of ad hoc setups known as the "coalition of the willing". Some examples include the initial phase of the Libya operation or the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh. Also of relevance are examples such as the Financial Action Task Force in the area of counter-terrorism or the G20 summit statements on norms related to cyber-attacks. In view of the external and internal environment described in this analysis, NATO's operational future over the next decades will be shaped by the ingenuity of the transatlantic leadership to develop new arrangements of institutional cooperation between the Alliance and these burgeoning forms of the "coalition of the willing".

Despite these challenges, NATO will remain a valuable institution for its members. Going forward the Alliance can espouse a changed but nonetheless stronger role as the main transatlantic political forum. There are two reasons for this claim. The first is that the evolving global and regional threat environment is elevating the need for a common political response by the transatlantic community given the political source of many of these challenges ranging from migration to failed states. As a result, the political role of NATO is likely to be strengthened even if at the end of the day, the Alliance structures end up being increasingly used for non-operational objectives and more for an exchange of views by the political leadership of the Alliance nations.

Secondly, Brexit will similarly upgrade the value of the NATO Alliance and its political role. Post-Brexit, the UK will find itself in a position of being a non-EU member of NATO. The UK's association with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) will have to be remodelled accordingly. But given the recalcitrance of the EU members to open the critical aspects of CFSP such as decision-making to the participation of non-EU members, London may shift its political weight to strengthen NATO's role in the areas that fall outside of collective defence. With the UK becoming a non-EU NATO country, NATO will be in an even more unchallenged position as the forum for any meaningful discussion related to transatlantic security.

And finally, on the perennial question of burden-sharing, current developments are already positive with a growing number of European allies intent on fulfilling their commitments on defence spending. But more importantly with the reshaping of the security environment with the emphasis on asymmetric threats and hybrid warfare, the linkage between military expenditures and a nation's capacity to contribute to the NATO goals becomes less linear. The contributions of Allied

nations to the capacity of managing the risks posed by sub-threshold threats could also be re-evaluated under a new light. Military capabilities linked to hard security and deterrence cannot be the only yardstick used to assess contributions if the new security environment is evolving away from challenges related to collective defence. But at present, the transatlantic community has no framework to quantify and assess contributions under these parameters. A core difficulty in this respect is the complexity of the NATO–EU relationship. A caucus of EU nations within NATO continues to resist the overhaul of NATO's role. For them, a clear division of labour should be maintained between NATO and the EU, with NATO being responsible for collective security and hardcore deterrence and the EU responsible for the "soft" security issues. This stance obviously hinders the evolution of the burden-sharing in a way that discounts European nations' contribution to the security of the Alliance.

In this respect and notwithstanding the political difficulties that have bedevilled the original Berlin Plus arrangements regulating cooperation between the EU and NATO,[11] the creation of a Berlin Plus arrangement "in reverse" between NATO and the EU could perhaps be contemplated. This would allow NATO to increase its role in crisis management and therefore in responding to some of the more diverse threats identified in this analysis. It would also cement and formalise the non-defence-spending contributions of the European Allies to overall transatlantic security. Such an arrangement could therefore help to assuage, for good, the transatlantic acrimony over the asymmetries in defence spending.

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[11] The Berlin Plus agreement refers to a comprehensive package of arrangements finalised in early 2003 between the EU and NATO that allows the EU to make use of NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis management operations. For more information see European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shaping of a Common Security and Defence Policy*, 8 July 2016, https://europa.eu/!mY73BK.

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