

MADRID SUMMIT 2022 · NATO FACES A CHANGE OF ERA



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NATO and the middle east in 2050: the faint shadow of a memory

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This intellectual exercise of imagining the Alliance in the year 2050 has as its main objective to establish the elements of current analysis of the situation and to understand the prospective dynamics by identifying those key elements. It also has a double value. First, it invites us to reflect on the future consequences of our mistakes. Secondly, it allows us to explain (or at least to try to explain) the reasoning that Westerners who were active in 2022 had for continuing to stumble over the same stone. The misstep, although painful, is not malicious since, due to manifest incapacity, the cognitive element and, consequently, the volitional element are missing.

I do not believe that NATO will exist in the year 2050. Because current events do not invite us to think that the key elements can survive for another 28 years. The main reason is that NATO has always been composed of states that have managed to concentrate power in three stages:

1. The struggle for Western primacy (1945-1989),
2. The stage of unipolarism (1989-2001).
3. And, with nuances, the period of multipolarism (2001-present).

An observation of the three previous moments invites us to an in-depth analysis of the third of the historical moments and, above all, of the reaction to it. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States, together with several of its allies, decided to pursue a policy of intervention in Afghanistan and to combine elements of a foreign policy of neoconservative ideology that mixes Wilsonian idealism with military power. A centaur composed half by falcon, half by idealistic man, whose objective was the construction of democracy in territories marked by great historical, social and cultural complexity. Ignoring that democracy is not only a political system. And ignoring the dynamics of a world that does not respond to a reductionist and universalist system based on the cultural and social development of the United States and Western Europe.

Since that foreign policy was not based on empiricism and was evaluated neither in terms of effectiveness nor in terms of desirability, the liberal dogma spread throughout the developing world carrying with it the key elements: democratization, security sector reform and social engineering as key elements of the Democratic Peace Theory, whereby two or more democratic states never go to war with each other. Theory that is not such a theory since practice has shown its inapplicability. By authors such as Hess and Orphanides (2001).

Liberal dogma continued to generate foreign policy failures in Iraq (2003), Libya (2011), Egypt (2011) until non-Western actors began to increasingly intervene in the conflicts, preventing the West from being able to fulfill its objectives. Assad's Syria is perhaps the paradigmatic element with Russia and Iran as allies. The antibodies generated by these interventions are key when analyzing the current situation and looking to the future.

However, an evident situation of loss of power in the world and of obvious change of international paradigm has not yet dismantled this dogma. Dogma that is not subject to experimentation or questioning.

The 2022 Ukrainian war highlights the Western weakness since it has allowed an actor such as Russia to have the real capacity to invade a sovereign state. And it has done so in an environment where most Westerners - including their elites - believe they live in a world regulated by international norms. And they are complied with. Even if every now and then there is an alienated, a crazy murderer who calls into question the mental castles we have built in the sand. And our power has meant that we have not had to face, until now, reality. The harsh reality.

Thus, the discussions taking place in the Alliance as of 2022 are based on assuring that NATO is a club of democracies. This has important inconsistencies in the cases of -among others- Turkey, Poland and Hungary. This is further complicated by the fact that, since democracy is a process, it is not very clear at what point a country becomes or ceases to be a democracy, much less who determines when this milestone has been reached or when the democratic label is lost. There is always the hope that Hungarians will learn to vote well and that there will no longer be pressures from outside that lead them to be uninformed and to want a different government than the one expected. They will come back to the fold. In the meantime, one can continue with the strategy of pressure. Which has proven to be very ineffective.

On the other side of the Atlantic, President Biden has stated that he wants to build "a coalition of freedom-loving nations" in Europe, America, Asia and Africa to oppose Putin and has stated that "I spent countless hours unifying our European allies. We shared with the world in advance what we knew Putin was planning and precisely how he would try to falsely justify his aggression," "And now that he has acted, the free world is holding him accountable." "In the battle between democracy and autocracy, democracies are rising to the moment, and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security," "This is a real test. It's going to take time".¹

¹ <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2022/03/battle-between-democracy-and-autocracy-leads-bidens-first-state-union/362643/>

Already earlier, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg had delivered a speech on November 30, 2021 that contained the following elements:

"First, we must protect the values that underpin our Alliance.

NATO was created to defend democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

These values define who we are.

They are not optional.

And they must continue to guide us in a more complex world.

These values are under pressure.

Both from outside our Alliance and from within our own nations.

Authoritarian regimes are pushing back on the international rules-based order,

They promote alternative models of governance".²

Does democracy in 1949 mean the same thing as democracy in 2022 or 2050? In a world that was preparing in 1949 for American hegemony, in full competition with the USSR, were we reflecting on the same thing?

In the elections that took place on Sunday, April 3, 2022, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Victor Orbán, won the elections with an absolute majority. In a context of various accusations of democratic deficit, of being an "illiberal" democracy and of being very close to Russia. Is Hungary a full democracy? If it is not a full democracy, what is it doing in the EU/NATO? Can anyone expect that finally Hungarians will "stop being deceived" and finally vote for a government that meets the "criteria"? Isn't this element an axis of friction? Why doesn't Prime Minister Orbán decide to take his country out of the EU/NATO? Does no one in Brussels realize that there are tens of millions of people who do not share their values but who, for the time being, enjoy a higher level of development resulting from EU funds? Is it so difficult to understand that development does not necessarily go hand in hand with a change in the perception of values (in this case liberal values)?

It is perhaps complex to understand other contexts. And it is complicated to realize the importance of interests, especially when you are operating under a dogma.

² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_189089.htm?selectedLocale=fr

In World War I, Romania was a neutral country between July 28, 1914 and August 27, 1916, then they made the decision to ally with the Triple Entente until December 9, 1917, until they signed an armistice with the Triple Alliance from December 10, 1917 until May 7, 1918. Then they decide to take a non-combatant status between May 7, 1918 and November 10, 1918, and finally enter the war - again - this time within the framework of the Triple Entente during the hours between November 10 and 11, 1918.

In the Second World War, Romania decided to be neutral between 1939 and 1941, when it joined the Axis, a decision that was reversed in 1944 when King Michael I placed his troops at the disposal of the Allies.

If the past is the best predictor of the future, does this not allow us to affirm that perhaps Romania (among others) can adapt its foreign policy decisions after monitoring what is happening around it. Is Romania a historical exception? Can there not be more states (perhaps starting with Eastern Europe) that seek a more convenient marriage? Why do we take it for granted that we live in a time of consolidated alliances?

Perhaps the Spanish bias of analysis, the fruit of our history and our national values, is causing us to make a mistake and we are projecting ourselves, forgetting that Don Quixote is our national work. It is not the work of other nations.

In a vote that took place in the United Nations General Assembly on March 2, 2022 on the war in Ukraine, resolution ES-11/1, which could not be carried out in the Security Council as one of its five permanent members has veto power, China and India abstained.

India. 1.4 million inhabitants. A democracy. The largest democracy. Do they share our values? Is their caste system compatible with our liberal democratic system? Are they eligible for NATO membership? What does NATO membership mean? Should we conduct a social engineering campaign to make sure we like what the Indians do better?

NATO and the Middle East

Only after a brief introduction to the current situation in 2022 can we begin to reflect on the future relationship with NATO. Without understanding the problems of our time within the West, we cannot delve into an unidealistic, illiberal and rather cynical region for whose analysis the average Spaniard/Westerners needs to go back to the purest state of nature.

Once that is done, the main challenge of analysis arises in a relationship between an actor such as NATO, which states that what it has in common with each other is its democratic character. That it is an association of states that share a series of values as opposed to others that do not. And not only do they not share them, but they are managing to establish power relations that allow them to maintain and survive, more and more comfortably. Thus questioning the universal liberal dogma and the consequences of not abiding by it. Erroneous from every point of view.

By its very regional idiosyncrasy, the Middle East is a democracy-averse area of the world. In fact, no country in the Middle East or North Africa is considered a full democracy, despite all the social engineering efforts made by the West to make it so. There are many, many explanations for this, ranging from historical to social, religious and/or cultural factors. Bernard Lewis' 1996³ article made clear certain elements that have gone unnoticed by Western elites. That also included that perhaps it was better for liberal democracies to let Saddam and Hafez choose their sons as successors in Iraq and Syria respectively. The alternative - as we have seen - has been far worse for everyone.

Thus, inexplicably, the West has conditioned its foreign aid, and even refraining from using force, on the majority of states converting to democracy. With exceptions. Because it has also been carried out with great inconsistencies. One may think that the exception was made with the strongest States and the West has been more permissive with those States that contributed more. It could be oil, as in the case of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, or it could be stability and help in the fight against terrorism, as in the case of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

This has not been particularly easy for them because they have had to work as a funambulist in addition to having to manage a very complex environment. In other words, the rulers of Middle

³ Islam and liberal democracy: a historical overview.

Eastern countries are required to be able to operate in two parallel systems. Their own (feudal or even pre-feudal) based on the balance of power within the various human groups: religious, ethnic, tribal, clan... and also to deal with the constraints of the imposition of an extra-regional actor, unpredictable and subject to the public opinion of their states. We cannot forget that the opinion leaders of Western states have the power to put issues on the agenda, to ensure the approach that is in the interest of political objectives and to put a given government at risk.

To take a historical example, in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, few Americans could answer basic questions about Iraq. Neither what their capital city is, nor what language they speak, not even what their religion is: in the sense of probably ignoring the two million Christians who inhabited the country. The important message is that President Saddam was very bad. Not like the rest of the leaders in the region. He was bad and he enjoyed it. So the United States decided to invade Iraq, depose its president, and try, out of sheer ignorance, to impose a new model. The story, as we know, ends badly.

As already discussed, there have been other models, but they have always feared Western unpredictability when acting in that area. A documentary on human rights in a Middle Eastern country or an "awareness" campaign on the situation of women or the LGBTI population can put the spotlight on one of the states in the area and start a destabilization campaign that can end badly. Bad for everyone. Except for the States that are patiently waiting for our mistakes in order to benefit from them. Mainly China and Russia. And many others will join them. Once the recipe gives its results and the sign appears: "total liquidation due to closure/retirement". A new owner must be found.

As long as there is an actor in the system with a lot of power, who acts unconsciously and irrationally, but since there is no alternative (our model since 1989), there is no risk for that actor, in this case the West. The problem arises when the number of actors who have suffered the consequences becomes too numerous to be able to maintain the *modus operandi*. And when alternative powers emerge that act much more pragmatically and are much more predictable. In addition, what they negotiate is much more tangible. It is much easier to talk about barrels of oil than values. A thousand barrels is a thousand barrels. But "democratizing" or similar, it is not very clear what it means. And in that the charlatans have an advantage. Because inventing a thousand barrels is complicated. Talking, not so much.

Conclusions

One of the great causes of the loss of Western power -which is clearly palpable in the year 2022- and whose continuation is foreseen in this publication is, precisely, the inability to nurture a debate on what it means to be Western. And, by extension, what is the concept and function of NATO.

Being Western cannot mean being naïve. Nor can it be linked to being incoherent.

In the Middle East the West is often much scarier than any other extra-regional actor. Because the beginning of the conversation starts from one fact: you have to democratize. You have to change who you are. Quite unsympathetic. China or Russia want things, first of all, more tangible and secondly more respectful, at bottom, of their dignity.

One of the most interesting lines to continue with this research would be, in addition to the question of what it is to be Western, in what way Protestantism has determined this approach towards the other, the need for change and has perhaps joined with Catholic universalism. In that working hypothesis, we would be exporting the worst of both systems.

It is probably too late to make a Copernican turn. And most likely we will not. May those who read us in 2050 judge us with affection. And may not repeat obviousness. Publius Siro - born in present-day Syria - said that *Stultum est timere quod vitare non potes*. That it was stupid to fear what cannot be avoided. Our foolishness, however, is reckless.

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