

MADRID SUMMIT 2022 · NATO FACES A CHANGE OF ERA



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For decades, a false dichotomy between Europeanists and Atlanticists has fueled a sterile and unproductive security debate in Europe. Today, few doubt that Europeans must contribute more to the European alliance and security, and that they must develop leadership capacity in future security crises. The question, therefore, is how Europe can best contribute to NATO's mission. Javier Solana, Madrid, Junio 2022

One of the great challenges we face when writing about EU-NATO relations in general is to abstract from a natural tendency to view this relationship either from an "Americanist" perspective or from the approach offered by the historical and strategic framework created in 1989, when the European security order created by the Cold War was suddenly transformed by abolishing the bipolar structure prevailing until then in Europe. We agree that both issues cannot be ignored today, but neither should they condition the development of European defense. Given the current development in different - albeit complementary - directions of both the European Union and NATO, we can nevertheless consider these phenomena as the pentagram on which to create the much-desired European strategic autonomy in defense matters.

Both the influence of the United States and the legacy left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union on the Member States have conditioned the development of transatlantic relations. This conditionality has evolved into a paradox in which a relationship that should be natural is nevertheless burdened with incessant declarations of intent and motives, in which promises of non-interference make coordination more tactical than strategic. In this sense, the last few years have seen a multiplication of joint declarations, meetings and common projects and, although an unprecedented level of coordination of activities and information exchange has been achieved, questions as important as how to make this cooperation substantial and avoid unnecessary duplication or how to solve the dilemma of boosting Europe's defense capabilities without jeopardizing NATO's unity have not yet been resolved. In short, answering the question of whether strategic autonomy and cooperation between the EU and NATO is a threat or on the contrary an opportunity for transatlantic defense relations.

The return of geopolitics and the fierce competition between the main world powers, the current questioning by the United States of its commitment to support Europe at the end of the Cold War or the emergence of other points of strategic interest in the Pacific or North Africa, put the nature of the NATO-EU partnership to the test and make it essential to work on reviving their ideological unity and revitalizing the feeling of trust and solidarity between them so that they cease to be considered rivals. One of the possible derivations of this question would be to raise scenarios in which we are able to see new forms of cooperation in which the EU is on an equal footing although it does not intervene in the same aspects.

1. Origins of the EU-NATO alliance

The fact that the European Union and NATO have tried to pursue separate but complementary paths is undeniable. The fall of the Berlin Wall altered the structure of the European state system and intensified the relationship between military security and economic security, even reversing these aspects. Overcoming the European divide and ensuring the future stability of the European security order depended at that time on the successful transition of the Central and Eastern European states to a market economy and multiparty democracies. For the EEC, this transition provided a great opportunity to pursue its idea of a single market and at the same time push for pan-European unity, as envisaged by many of its founding fathers in the 1940s and 1950s.

For NATO, however, the challenge was to answer the question of whether, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Alliance was necessary in the absence of a "counter".

Although the EU recognized in the new political landscape an opportunity to expand its trade networks by integrating the new states into the emerging enlargement policy, it was not until the 1990s that security and defense began to be established as an independent element of the organization's progress in the commercial and trade sphere and also contemplated the new configuration of the continent as a focus of risks and threats. It was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the Union made its international debut with European Political Cooperation (EPC) - later ESDP - in the framework of the policies of the Member States and it was at the Strasbourg European Council that EPC was included in a novel way in the framework of the EC, thus communitarizing elements of defense. Thus, the historical origins of NATO and the ESDP (CSDP) show more differences than similarities between them. Although both emerged to meet the challenge of ensuring European security, historically there is as little in common between the two types of challenges faced by each organization as there is between the types of responses given to them.

In this sense and with respect to its structural differences, NATO is configured as a fundamentally military organization, and therefore cannot cover the broad spectrum of security needs that its member states, present and future, may need, as the war in Ukraine has shown. On the other hand, NATO has never contemplated expansion on EU terms, but its main objective is the coexistence of its members and their relations with non-member countries, without creating new barriers between them. However, with the integration of the former Soviet republics into the Alliance (promoted mainly by the United States and Germany from 1993 to 1994) a new pan-European security architecture was created in which organizations including many - but not all - European states, increasingly gained strength and played more relevant roles.

Most authors maintain that, although the enlargements of both organizations in this period did not follow an official coordination, unofficially their policies towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were at all times related, since both organizations were fully aware that, if carried out without a specific order, they could directly destabilize the former Soviet republics and, therefore, the entire European continent, affecting the interests of both organizations.

For the European Union, the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to a wave of membership applications which, supported by Article 49 of the TEU - "any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 TEU and is committed to

promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union" - seriously affected relations with Russia. NATO, for its part, decided to maintain a friendly stance towards Russia and limited itself to closer relations with the former Soviet republics but without contemplating immediate enlargement (with the consequent criticism from the dissidents of the Soviet Union era, who, after its fall, would become political leaders and would blame NATO for not having watched over their transition and remind it of its responsibility as inciters of the revolt against the USSR that would culminate in its dissolution).

2. Towards strategic autonomy

Taking this situation as a reference point, an attempt was made to strengthen and institutionalize the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in order to create a partnership between NATO and Russia, and thus increase Russian participation in a pan-European economic space. But although, for example, the security provisions concerning German unity were very precise, the declarations of intent on integrating Russia into a new European security order, the West was from the outset unable to reach a substantial consensus on this issue. While German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher repeatedly warned of the need for a pan-European security framework with the CSCE and Moscow as an equal partner, these proposals were invariably rejected by the United States and the United Kingdom who saw the new Russia more as a regional power with weak economic and political influence. US influence has irremediably marked European security since its origins and specifically security, establishing as a strategic paradigm a European defense in close collaboration (even in some cases, subordination) with NATO.

The decisive impulse for the creation of an EU Security and Defense Policy (ESDP, now known as the Common Security and Defense Policy - CSDP) took place at a Franco-British summit held in Saint-Malo in December 1998. It was this growing concern of the EU to become a major player in the field of international security that prompted the Union to establish relations with NATO in the early 2000s, relations that marked the beginning of the institutionalized cooperation between NATO and the EU that has lasted to this day.

These contacts were initially well received by NATO, even by non-European Allies such as the USA and Turkey - which was considering EU membership at the time (Turkey was granted candidate country status following the Helsinki European Council in December 1999). Thus, in 2003, the EU-NATO partnership was consolidated with the adoption of

the "Berlin Plus" agreements, agreements by which the European Union already had access to NATO military assets and planning capabilities for EU-led operations without having to resort to the formal launching of a NATO-led operation (however, these operations were in any case subordinated to the NATO-led operations), these operations were in any case subordinated to the Alliance's "right of first refusal", a right restricting what the EU could undertake and decide until the issue had first been discussed within NATO).

In December 2017, the Council of the European Union, initiated the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) which was intended to take defense cooperation between the EU member states participating in this initiative to a new level. However, to this day we can affirm that this launching has not meant an autonomy in European defense beyond a political positioning, as the capabilities made available by the participating Member States are also available within the framework of NATO or the United Nations. The same applies to the mutual solidarity clause between the member states of the Union in Article 42.7 TEU. Although it is a step forward to consider the European Union as a defensive regional organization for the member states of the two organizations, it is still merely symbolic, since the lack of consensus to define and delimit the possible use of armed force by the EU in the framework of the CSDP brings out the nature of both organizations, making it clear that the European Union is not going to become an organization of a military nature despite progress in this area, nor is NATO going to cease to be the defense organization of choice for EU member states.

Both provisions seem to be more an update of cooperation between member states in security and defense matters than an alternative to NATO. In this sense, European defense continues to seek a balance between the intergovernmental and the community, which ultimately means a search for its own legitimacy to intervene in these matters. This scheme is reproduced in every sphere of the European Union and takes the form of an ambiguity so evident that it occurs every time the states try to unite their wills with the objectives of the organization.

Despite the efforts made in the framework of intergovernmental cooperation between member states, NATO is still considered today as the first resource for maintaining European defense, coinciding as they do with vital issues for transatlantic relations and European security: the uncertainty in the continuity of the current Western liberal order, the challenges presented by economic growth, the lack of control over migratory flows, the rise of populism in Europe and collective security issues in the East-South arc of the EU.

The development of relations between the EU and NATO, while respecting the independent nature of both organizations, has been a constant challenge. The European defense architecture is a utilitarian one, unafraid to abandon half-baked projects in order to start new ones. This means that we are not able to have a European defense model tailored to our needs and therefore have to rely on what the Atlantic Alliance offers us. However, in the face of the current challenges and taking advantage of the development of the EU's external action, NATO needs to cooperate with the EU beyond the operations offered by PESCO. The EU has a privileged position in the Western Balkans (with Croatia as a member state since 2013, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania as official candidates and with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as potential candidates, the Stabilization and Association Process, initiated in 1999 by the EU keeps Russian influence in the area balanced). Also Turkey and the countries of Eastern Europe - with which the EU already has Partnership Agreements - North Africa, the Middle East and Asia are areas where the EU already has some influence and require an integrated approach including NATO action.

In March 2022, the European Union approved the Strategic Compass, which proposes for the European Union an ambitious action plan to strengthen the EU's security and defense policy by 2030. This initiative is planned with the intention of making a positive contribution to global and transatlantic security, but is defined as complementary to NATO, which remains the basis for the collective defense of its members, including those of the Union. In this regard, given the rapid development of both organizations, it is desirable that attempts to define a grand strategic relationship be abandoned as both the EU and NATO are evolving very rapidly and along different lines. In the medium term, we are likely to see sectoral arrangements - contracting, capability development, intelligence and information sharing, logistics, etc. - within the framework of these initiatives rather than a grand bargain or pact.

3. UE sanctioning capacity

Both organizations agree that they have gone through a searching cycle in recent years, motivated by the change in the security and defense paradigm that has taken place at the global level due to the change in the challenges and threats that international society must face. At the Madrid Summit, NATO recognized the value of a stronger European defense capable of contributing positively to transatlantic and global security and complementary and interoperable with NATO and there is no doubt that in the long term, these agreements will help them to have a healthier relationship without

hindering their growth and development but it is unlikely that we will see more than periodic high-level meetings, joint statements and communiqués, and joint training and projects since each is positioned as a defender of the protection and defense of different interests (although they are based on the same values).

It is here that the European Union, through its sanctioning competence and the restrictive measures established by means of Council Decisions on common foreign and security policy (CFSP), can have a great influence on the commercial services of the countries it sanctions and can therefore complement NATO's deterrence strategy.

These measures, which take the form of a Regulation setting out the precise scope of the measures and the details for their implementation, are, as a legal act of general application which is the Regulation, binding on any person or entity (economic operators, public authorities, etc.) within the EU and can therefore exert a pressure on the states concerned, in particular their financial systems, which, if, by analogy, were exercised through defense structures, would have dire consequences for the civilian population. Although it is already estimated that the European sanctions on Russia will cost the citizens of the Union about 3.3 billion euros in export revenues alone, and that other problems will have to be faced, such as the recent Russian claim for legal action in the WTO framework for what they have called "illegal limitations" carried out by Western states, it is clear that the EU can significantly complement NATO's operability when it comes to "pressure".

The European Commission - along with the United States, United Kingdom and Canada - withdrew Russia from SWIFT, a global messaging service that connects financial systems, as part of tougher measures to remove Russia from the international financial system. The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication is used by more than 11,000 financial institutions to send secure messages and payment orders - expelling Russia from it was seen as a "nuclear measure." Only Sberbank - Russia's largest bank - and Gazprombank - through which Russian gas exports are paid - two of the country's strongest banking institutions, have been spared such exclusion because they manage their payments thanks to energy goods, such as oil or natural gas, which is purchased on Russian territory and because through them the EU pays Russia's energy bill. In this sense, it seems unlikely that we will be able to count on security and defense independence if we do not have energy autonomy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, bearing in mind that today a large part of the challenges to global defense border directly on the European Union, the structural consequence of this proximity to conflict should be to provide the Union with the necessary instruments to defend its borders, beyond the influences of other States or historical patterns. Although the European Union has its limitations as a strategic actor, we cannot forget that we have made our "supranationality" a hallmark of our identity. We have established a global strategy in foreign relations through the EU, European integration guarantees the basis of our political and economic power and the Member States can generate military power through the organization itself (including sanctioning capacity). We are, therefore, a security power in the making, it only remains for us to find a way to bring this influence to bear.