

## MADRID SUMMIT 2022 · NATO FACES A CHANGE OF ERA



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### Re-founding NATO: an Alliance for freedom

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In the year 2050 NATO will be 100 years old. If it survives - and I personally am betting on it - it will be by far the longest-lasting political-military alliance in history. An alliance that is an unquestionable historical success with its victory in the Cold War without firing a single shot. NATO has also been revitalized in the wake of Russia's illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine. The addition of new, traditionally neutral members, such as Finland and Sweden, is the best proof that NATO remains the best security guarantee for Europe. But behind the success of the recent Summit held in Madrid, with the promulgation of a new Strategic Concept, there is still the need to adapt the Alliance to a new era characterized by the loss of Western hegemony, the global threat to democracy and the crisis of the liberal world order represented by new authoritarian powers such as Russia and China.

NATO was created three quarters of a century ago with the aim of containing Soviet expansionism after World War II and guaranteeing the survival of democratic regimes in Western Europe. Thanks to this Alliance, and in especially to the nuclear deterrence exercised

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by the US nuclear arsenal, peace and stability in Europe was guaranteed during four decades of the Cold War. The economic, technological and military superiority of the Western countries eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Most of the members of that pact are today in fact integrated into NATO.

The question arises as to why NATO was not dissolved after the Warsaw Pact disappeared. There are several reasons. Firstly, the Washington Treaty rightly made no mention of the Soviet Union and there were therefore no legal grounds for doing so. The Alliance was also based on common values, democracy, freedom and human rights, which were strengthened after the end of the Cold War. Thirdly, it was felt that beyond the Soviet threat, the transatlantic link remained a guarantee of security and stability for Europe, especially at a time of strategic transition. Moreover, the Alliance's strategy was to expand its membership to include those countries freed from communist dictatorships that wished to join the Alliance as a guarantee of their own freedom, stability and security. NATO also established a special relationship with Russia, which it considered a strategic partner until a few years ago.

However, after the demise of the Soviet Union, NATO was orphaned from its original mission. Crisis management and counter-terrorism became its main tasks, rather than deterrence and defense. Missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq followed, in addition to various naval operations against terrorism, piracy and even irregular immigration. These operations were not always successful and sometimes, like the hasty withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan, conveyed an impression of failure. The European allies also rushed to collect the "peace dividends" by significantly reducing their military capabilities, which led to a decline in the Alliance's operability and a growing imbalance in burden-sharing between the two sides of the Atlantic.

The United States began to experience strategic fatigue, especially after the long, costly and increasingly controversial interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Obama initiated a U.S. withdrawal by largely inhibiting himself from the new crises that emerged in Syria or Libya and by reducing the presence of U.S. troops deployed abroad. Trump accentuated this withdrawal by negotiating the U.S. departure from Afghanistan. Both administrations also placed their strategic priority on the Pacific and considered China as the great strategic rival. President Biden

maintained that same line by consummating a hasty exit of his troops from Kabul in an episode that humiliatingly portrayed the deterioration of American leadership.

All this led the Atlantic Alliance into a deep crisis. French President Emanuel Macron went so far as to declare NATO brain dead and US President Donald Trump threatened to withdraw from the organization if the Europeans did not make a greater effort to ensure its defense. The Europeans entered into a crisis of trust in the Alliance and considered endowing the European Union with greater "strategic autonomy" vis-à-vis Washington. NATO increasingly seemed to be a relic of the Cold War that was seen as of no real utility on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **The war in Ukraine and NATO's rebirth**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a radical change in this strategic scenario. The Eastern allies interpreted this aggression as a threat to their sovereignty and territories. Russia seemed to want to review its defeat in the Cold War, expand its borders and regain its areas of influence prior to the fall of the Iron Curtain. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 may have been a first warning about the Kremlin's intentions, but the advance of Russian armored vehicles towards Kiev in February 2022 removed any doubts about what Putin's real intentions were.

Some felt that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was actually a consequence of NATO's eastward expansion. In their opinion, bringing the Atlantic Alliance to the Russian border was a provocation to Moscow that would sooner or later have consequences. The invitation to Georgia and Ukraine to become members of the Atlantic Alliance, issued in 2008, meant crossing a red line that Putin was not prepared to agree to. Ignoring the Kremlin's repeated warnings in this regard was a strategic mistake that had ultimately led to war.

Others saw in the invasion of Ukraine a first step by Moscow to rebuild the Soviet Union, reestablish its areas of influence and even restore the longed-for Russian empire. This was a return to the old doctrine that the best way to protect Russia's borders was to expand them. Wherever there was a majority of Russians, Russian sovereignty should be restored. Against a West in decline, the Kremlin felt it was time to take historical revenge after decades of

humiliation. Putin even seemed to assume the messianic mission of saving Russia from being contaminated by a West that had perverted its moral values while restoring the imperial grandiosity of past centuries.

In any case, the invasion of Ukraine was preceded by the consolidation of a "boundless alliance" between Russia and China to confront a West that sought to continue imposing a liberal world order based on rules they considered to serve their interests. Thus, China has not only refused to condemn Russia for its aggression against Ukraine and to second the sanctions imposed by the West, but has justified the war on the basis of Moscow's security interests, blaming NATO for the war because of its intention to expand eastward. Peking has so far refrained from involvement in the war in Ukraine, but has given political and economic backing to Russia.

Although numerically a large majority of countries have condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the United Nations Assembly, the number of Asian, African and Latin American countries that have avoided condemnation and have refused to apply the sanctions imposed by Western countries has been very revealing. A clear symptom that Western leadership in the world is in crisis and that the influence of China and Russia is growing. Moreover, in terms of population there is a majority that supports Russia against the position of the United States and Europe or at least they declared themselves neutral in that conflict.

The war in Ukraine in turn generated a strategic earthquake within the Atlantic Alliance. As we have already pointed out, Russia has gone from being a "strategic partner" to being the main threat to the Alliance in NATO's new strategic concept.

Regarding the defense budgets of the European allies, Germany in particular has increased it considerably and the others have accelerated their commitment to reach 2% of GDP for military spending within a short period of time. The United States has reinforced its presence in Europe and the allies have substantially increased their deployments on the Alliance's eastern border. NATO has also become the main political forum for a coordinated response to Russian aggression. Despite some initial hesitation, the allies as a whole are, to a greater or lesser extent, supplying aid and weapons to Ukraine. The Alliance is in the process of incorporating Sweden and Finland as new partners after overcoming Turkey's initial reluctance. In short, NATO has regained a leading role as a security guarantee against the Russian threat, the United States'

commitment to Europe's security has been reinforced and its military capabilities are being strengthened.

However, looking ahead, some challenges remain concerning NATO's future. Firstly, with regard to the end of the conflict in Ukraine itself, two conflicting positions are taking shape within the Alliance. On the one hand, countries such as Germany, France and Italy are in favor of a negotiated end to the war as soon as possible, even if this requires Ukraine to cede part of its territory. On the other hand, the United States, the United Kingdom or most of the Eastern countries would seek a military defeat of Russia that would eliminate the threat of future aggressions for decades. As the conflict drags on and its economic consequences on Europe worsen, the divergence of this position will foreseeably tend to widen.

On the other hand, the majority position in Washington continues to be that beyond the war in Ukraine, the main strategic challenge for the United States will continue to be China. Once the conflict is over, it is likely that the Americans will once again prioritize the Pacific over the Atlantic and concentrate their military capabilities on the Indo-Pacific scenario, instead of Europe. Their aspiration is that the Europeans will take responsibility for their security so that they can devote their efforts to contain China, a much more powerful and dangerous power in the long term than Russia.

In contrast, most Europeans do not have the same perception of China as the United States. Firstly, because European interests in the Pacific are much more distant than those of the US. Secondly, because China has traditionally been more of an economic partner for many European countries than a strategic rival. It is true that, at the behest of the United States, China has been considered "a challenge" in the new strategic concept approved in Madrid, but this commitment does not hide a divergence of perceptions on both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, the United States does not seem to show great interest in involving NATO in the policy of China's containment and has formed specific alliances such as AUKUS, together with Australia, Japan and the United Kingdom, which have left out the rest of the European allies. The creation of this association was not only done behind the back of the European Union, but also generated a confrontation with France when Australia canceled a contract to acquire French conventional submarines and opted for nuclear submarines of Anglo-Saxon technology.

Finally, the rumblings of the war in Ukraine have overshadowed the debate on European strategic autonomy, but some European allies, especially France, are not renouncing it. In fact, the increase in defense resources could provide the Union with greater capabilities and thus reduce its military dependence on the United States. A stronger European pillar of NATO could result in a more capable and balanced Alliance. Europe could also take greater responsibility for its own defense, freeing up resources from the United States to focus on the Pacific. In theory, Europe is intended to acquire an autonomous capability that would enable it to conduct operations in scenarios where the Americans feel their security interests are not compromised. But at best, this intended autonomy presupposes that U.S. and European security interests will not always be aligned.

Definitely, the war in Ukraine has revalued the Alliance as a guarantee of collective security, but at the same time it opens up new questions about NATO's future. The strategic concept approved at the Madrid summit provides a satisfactory response to the new strategic juncture generated by the Russian threat, but it does not resolve the more long-term challenges that the new scenario will generate, such as the global threat posed by totalitarian regimes to our democracies and the world order. The world of 2050 will be so different from the world in 1950 that more than a new concept will be needed to meet the new challenges. At that point, the time will be ripe for a true re-founding of the Alliance.

### **Refounding the Alliance**

The Atlantic Alliance has been able to survive its own success and is on its way to becoming a century-old organization. The war in Ukraine has also given it back its strategic sense and NATO has become the best, if not the only, security guarantee against the threat from Russia. The Madrid Summit has certified the strengthening and enlargement of the Alliance, adapting it to the new strategic scenario with the approval of a new Concept.

However, looking to the future, the Alliance needs not only a new concept, but also a re-foundation that involves updating the Washington Treaty. Today's world is very different from that of 1949, but in the coming decades it is foreseeable that this change will be even more radical. There are some disturbing trends of change. China aspires to become the world's leading

economic and perhaps military power, overtaking the United States. Europe will continue its demographic, economic and strategic decline. Democracy is in decline in much of the world. New countries may gain access to nuclear weapons. Globalization will be threatened by the emergence of geo-economic blocs and protectionist policies.

Looking at the world of 2050, a refounding of the Alliance based on the following pillars will be necessary:

### **1. An Alliance for freedom**

The preamble to the Washington Treaty states as the essential object of the Atlantic Alliance "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of its peoples, based on the principles of democracy, individual liberties and the rule of law". Today these values, which constitute NATO's *raison d'être*, are once again threatened by the concerted action of totalitarian powers that have singled out Western civilization as their main enemy.

NATO must not therefore be only an alliance that defends the common security interests of member countries, nor guarantee only their territorial integrity, their sovereignty or the security of their peoples, all of which are essential. NATO is above all an alliance based on values that it is willing to defend because they are part of our common heritage, our civilization and our way of life.

The Strategic Concept approved at the Madrid Summit re-emphasizes the idea by stating in its preamble that safeguarding freedom and democracy is the *raison d'être* of the Alliance and calls for reaffirming "our unity, cohesion and solidarity, based on the enduring transatlantic bond between our nations and the strength of our shared democratic values".

However, this defense of freedom needs to be carried into the Treaty itself, not only as the *raison d'être* of the Alliance but also as its essential mission. NATO is not about promoting democracy in the world, let alone imposing it, but about defending our democratic systems against external aggression of any kind, from terrorism to disinformation campaigns.

Any candidate for membership of the Alliance should meet a minimum democratic standard and it would be good to introduce an opt-out clause in the Treaty if any of its members drifts into a totalitarian direction.

## 2. A global Alliance

NATO was created in 1949 to defend Western Europe against the Soviet threat. After the war in Ukraine, Russia has been redefined as "the most important and direct threat to the security of the Allies and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area". But Russia is no longer the only threat to deal with. In fact, looking into the future, it is not clear that Russia will remain the main threat for much longer.

Among the new threats, the new strategic concept highlights "terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations as the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity." It is clear that terrorism is by nature a global phenomenon that is not confined to a specific geographical area. NATO's counter-terrorism missions in Afghanistan and Iraq bear witness to this.

On the other hand, new dimensions of security are opening up, such as cyberspace, which are themselves global in nature. As the 2022 strategic concept points out, "malicious actors seek to degrade our critical infrastructures, interfere with our government services, extract intelligence, steal intellectual property and impede our military activities".

The Atlantic Alliance's areas of interest and action have in turn expanded geographically. Thus, "conflicts, fragility and instability in Africa and the Middle East directly affect our security and the security of our partners". NATO has in fact been involved in recent years in missions in the Mediterranean to control irregular immigration and all types of illicit trafficking.

Finally, China emerges as the main strategic challenge that the Alliance will have to face in the future. As the Strategic Concept approved in Madrid points out:

"The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC employs a broad range of political, economic and military tools to increase its global footprint and project power, while remaining opaque about its strategy, intentions and military build-up. The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security. The PRC seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure,

and strategic materials and supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and enhance its influence. It strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains. The deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests."

Everyone therefore accepts that NATO's sphere of action is no longer confined to Europe and the North Atlantic, but that the Alliance now has a clear desire for global action. However, most partners believe that NATO should remain, for various reasons, a regional alliance with a global projection.

Beyond the resistance to change and the risks of undermining an organization that has proven its historical success, the Americans prefer not to make their decisions in other scenarios conditional on a multilateral arena, such as the Atlantic Alliance. On the other hand, they believe that the contribution that their European partners can make in the projection of force to distant scenarios is more than limited. Finally, they are more in favor of seeking specific alliances, such as AUKUS or QUAD (processes that seek to end China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific), with partners that provide more added value and in which American leadership is more easily exercised.

For their part, the European partners do not want to be drawn into possible conflicts far from their borders, consider that U.S. interests do not always have to coincide with those of Europe, for example vis-à-vis China, and consider that an alliance of a global nature could distort the transatlantic link when their top priority is to maintain the U.S. commitment to Europe's security.

Some even consider that an alliance of democracies would foment a new cold war by generating two clearly defined blocs that would inevitably enter into a confrontational dynamic. They therefore consider it wiser to seek alliances with non-democratic countries on the basis of possible common interests.

Despite all these objections, in my opinion the Atlantic Alliance will only survive in the long term to the extent that it is able to transform itself into a global alliance. Firstly, because the threat is

a common one. Beyond specific national interests or competition between powers, today the main line of confrontation is between those who defend democracy, the rule of law and a liberal world order based on rules and those who consider freedom as the main threat to their authoritarian regimes, use force without any restraint, want to subvert the current world order and become the hegemonic powers. Only through the union of all democratic countries can we overcome this challenge.

On the other hand, the formation of an anti-Western bloc is increasingly evident. Russia and China, despite their historical disputes and often conflicting interests, have established a "boundless" alliance whose main, if not sole objective is the defeat of the West. Other totalitarian regimes, from Iran to Venezuela to North Korea, do not hesitate to join this axis to confront the West on all its fronts.

This is an absolutely global confrontation. The presence of Russian mercenaries in Sahel countries or the projection of China in Latin America is part of this struggle. If democratic countries are not capable of uniting, defining a common strategy and implementing it, they have a good chance of being defeated.

Despite the underlying reluctance, the Atlantic Alliance has already begun to take some timid steps towards its transformation into a global alliance that transcends the geographical limits imposed by the Washington Treaty. Thus, the new strategic concept establishes as a principle that "partnerships are crucial to protect the global commons, enhance our resilience and uphold the rules-based international order.", adding that "partners make an important contribution to NATO-led crisis management. We will continue to ensure sustained political engagement and military interoperability with partners who express an interest in contributing to our missions and operations."

In this regard, NATO intends to work with new partners "to tackle shared security threats and challenges in regions of strategic interest to the Alliance, including the Middle East and North Africa and the Sahel regions", as well as to strengthen "dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests".

NATO's transformation into a global alliance will be a progressive, long and complex process, but the first steps have been taken. The presence at the Madrid Summit of countries such as Australia, Japan and South Korea marks a line of work that will conclude at some point in history with the modification of the Washington Treaty and the full incorporation of all the world's major democracies into the Alliance.

### **3. A technological Alliance**

A global alliance for freedom should be based on three fundamental pillars. A political alliance based on common values, a military alliance based on common threats and an economic alliance based on a free trade zone and technological cooperation.

Maintaining Western hegemony in the coming decades will depend to a large extent on our ability to maintain our technological superiority. A global alliance for freedom must therefore to a large extent be a technological alliance.

One of the main risks of the current economic crisis, following the Covid-19 pandemic, is the introduction of protectionist policies that impose trade, industrial and technological barriers even among democratic countries. One of the lessons we are learning, not without suffering, from the current war in Ukraine is that in the future economic warfare will be as relevant as the battlefield itself. Establishing a free trade zone that would allow democratic countries to jointly develop economically should be a fundamental pillar of the new alliance.

There is a special inclination to close defense markets given the strategic nature of military systems. However, the technological revolution underway demands a degree of innovation, competitiveness and efficiency that will be difficult to achieve in closed markets. The new alliance should particularly encourage the implementation of joint industrial programs, the acquisition of common capabilities and technological cooperation in defense and security among member countries. To this end, an effective regulatory and institutional framework should be developed to promote such cooperation.