



The 13th International Scientific Conference
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
IN THE 21st CENTURY”**
Braşov, November 8th-9th 2018



**EAST VERSUS SOUTH DILEMMA – CAN NATO
COHESION BE SAVED?**

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Abstract:

Alliance cohesion—a crucial requirement to successfully implement the Warsaw commitments and tackle current security threats—is increasingly being tested. These tests arise from security challenges in NATO’s eastern and southern flank but also from other areas, such as domestic politics, which have spillover effects on the willingness of the Alliance to work together. With different threat perceptions and national preferences, NATO countries must ensure the Alliance’s cohesion in order to maintain the credibility of its collective defense commitment. Indeed, southern Europe is more concerned about developing NATO’s capabilities in the southern flank to face what it sees as more pressing threats to its security. The yawning gap between Allies’ threat perception risks undermining NATO’s ability to simultaneously address threats coming from different directions.

Key words: cohesion, NATO, east initiatives, south mechanism, collective defense

1.Introduction. The regional context and the new decisions

At 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO Allies drew attention to “security challenges and threats that originate from the east and from the south”[1]. They noted that the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), agreed at the 2014 Wales Summit, “responds to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighborhood, the Middle East, and North Africa”[2], and established a framework for the south, aiming at improving situational awareness, strategic anticipation and projecting stability through partnership and capacity building.

At their July 2018 Summit in Brussels, Allies builded on their work since Warsaw to further upgrade their collective defense, and to project stability in Europe’s neighborhood.

Of course, the southern border of NATO must not be neglected, especially as the conflicts in the Middle East are still hot, and a strong alliance must defend all its members, including the southern flank.

Poland and Romania are strong supporters of a robust NATO presence on what is called the Eastern Flank of the Alliance, from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Both countries are strong opponents of Russian domination in Eastern Europe and critics of its military and political aggression, and they are both trying to keep the flank high on NATO’s agenda. For its part, Turkey has been more preoccupied for the past few years with events in Syria and on NATO’s Southern Flank, making it a distant partner to both Poland and Romania.

Where to give more and where less? I am not a follower of such an approach. For the south, there are functional mechanisms and partnerships between the member states in the area and the partner countries, as they have also outlined for the eastern area.

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These must be the recipe for success, a cohesion between the South and the East, to strengthen the alliance and to respond as well as possible to the whole spectrum of threats, considering their type and the regional specificity. We do not have to question the possibility of achieving this cohesion, because it is crucial for the alliance's existence, and all member states need to realize that this organization is based on the one-for-all and all-for-one principle.

Indeed, there are political sensitivities, due to the influence of Germany and, ultimately, the national interests of the member states, which inevitably will create polemics.

However, at strategic level, the solution is only one. Both frontiers must benefit from appropriate initiatives and mechanisms.

In this respect, the Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg nonetheless summarized NATO's broad objective: "to protect our territory, we must be willing to project stability beyond our borders. If our neighbors are more stable, we are more secure" [3].

Russia acts on both flanks of the Alliance, seeking to keep a stronghold on both, so a counteracting strategy has to include and consider both flanks. While both the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea and Russian support to the Assad regime and securing its bases in Syria at first glance appear unrelated, they are actually synergetic both militarily, as Crimea is an excellent port to supply Russian bases in Syria, and geopolitically, as Russia maintains its influence in the vicinities of Europe, increasing the pressure on both the Alliance and the EU.

The South Flank on the NATO's agenda

If we analyze NATO's last steps on the South as well as the eastern side, we see a complementarity of the measures taken.

On 5 September 2017, Ambassador Alejandro Alvargonzalez, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy and Admiral Michelle Howard, Commander at Allied Joint Force Command inaugurated the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub, a centre designed to promote and enhance cooperation amongst the Alliance and partners.

This centre was built to face evolving security challenges and promote partnership, cooperation, and dialogue with Middle Eastern and North African partners.

The NSD-S Hub in Naples will serve to challenge the current and evolving security issues that face the Alliance and partners. These issues include, destabilization, terrorism, radicalization, migration, and environmental concerns. The plethora of issues that the centre is focusing on is considered the crucial starting steps for developing and deepening relationships with partners.

Moreover, the NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, highlighted the continued political dialogue that both the Alliance and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) have engaged in. Ambassador Alvargonzalez emphasized the culture of cooperation and promoting interoperability with partners which has in turn strengthened dialogue between the Alliance and partner countries. [4]

Also, after many years of focusing on its East, NATO took steps toward a more robust strategy South at the Brussels Summit in July 2018 where it adopted a Package for the South [5]. It outlines three core objectives: to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defense against threats emanating from the south; to contribute to international crisis management efforts in the region; and to help NATO's regional partners build resilience against security

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threats. As Southern partnerships are set to be at the core of this new strategy, it is worth considering the expectations of NATO's Mediterranean partners.

2. The new initiatives for the eastern flank

The Warsaw Summit in July 2016 was only the second meeting of NATO's heads of state and governments since Russia annexed Crimea and intervened in Ukraine in early 2014, and at the time, a number of NATO countries were concerned the alliance was still not adequately prepared to defend all its members.

At that summit, NATO underscored its renewed emphasis on collective defense and deterrence by announcing the rotational deployment of roughly 4,000 troops from various countries to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

The last of those four multinational battle groups [6] became operational in August 2017, and they remain on station in those four countries, numbering in just over 4,500 troops and civilians in total.



Fig.1. The multinational battle groups making up NATO's enhanced forward presence in Eastern Europe, as of June 6, 2018.

NATO is working on other initiatives to increase readiness and the ability of its forces to work together. At a meeting of defense ministers earlier this summer, in July, the alliance approved the formation of two new commands, adding about 1,200 personnel to NATO's command structure.

The defense alliance also agreed to the NATO Readiness Initiative [7], a plan called the Four Thirties.

The plan, pushed by US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, would require NATO to have 30 land battalions, 30 fighter aircraft squadrons, and 30 warships ready to deploy within 30 days of being put on alert. A battalion varies from 600 to 1,000 soldiers across US and European militaries, but the proposed plan did not include specific troop numbers.

NATO has also a forward presence tailored to the southeast of Alliance territory and in the Black Sea region. Allies are contributing forces and capabilities on land, at sea and in the air.

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The land element in the southeast of the Alliance is built around a multinational brigade, under Multinational Division Southeast in Romania and is coordinating multinational training through a Combined Joint Enhanced Training Initiative. In the air, several Allies have reinforced Romania's and Bulgaria's efforts to protect NATO airspace.

This means more NATO forces, and more exercises and training under Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast (in Romania), which became fully operational in June 2017. Tailored forward presence contributes to the Alliance's strengthened deterrence and defense posture, to Allies' situational awareness, interoperability and responsiveness.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, NATO has addressed measures for the both south and eastern border and flank, with the mechanism that fits better to their specificity. As I already mentioned, I consider that there is a false issues. NATO doesn't have a dilemma or a lack of cohesion when about the east and south. The Alliance make progress for the both region and develop mechanism and initiatives that can be accessed when needed it. This is the best strategy. To be prepared.

NATO define the readiness not only in the east, but for entire Alliance.

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