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# Is NATO obsolete ?

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In January 2017, US President-elect Donald Trump affirmed<sup>1</sup> that NATO is obsolete, which caused worry in the alliance. The question of the obsolescence of NATO is relevant regarding its actions over the past 25 years. Born in 1949, NATO is an alliance of security communities on both sides of the North Atlantic. Its longevity, as well as its members in large numbers, is an exception comparing to the history of other alliances<sup>2</sup>.

### **The historical context**

At that time, the Soviet danger emerged and overshadowed the German one. The Atlantic Pact promised mutual assistance in case of threat of aggression. Any attack on one of the allies will be considered as an attack on all. NATO thus has three facets: a diplomatic alliance, a military organization and a political community. To evoke them, General Lord Ismay, its first secretary-general had found a formula a little cynical but in the end true: “The object of NATO was to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down”. A quick glance at the present situation is sufficient to see how these three realities have become anachronistic. Communism is dead and the Soviet Empire dismantled. The German problem is solved. No need to monitor the unpredictable reactions of a frustrated people. NATO, this victorious alliance was not supposed to survive to the conditions that resulted in its birth. However, this has been the case because it has adjusted to the reality. After the end of the Cold War, some<sup>3</sup> who considered NATO as a defensive alliance have questioned its survival. Because the Warsaw Pact was no longer in force, Russia hoped that logically, this would lead to dismantlement of NATO. Whereas, France<sup>4</sup>, the main military power in Europe, hoped to play a major role in the European defense strategy. The persistence of NATO is due to profound institutional transformations, through which the early defensive alliance has become a generalist operator of international security. NATO intervenes in Bosnia in 1995 and in Kosovo in 1999. It participates in large-scale military operations with bombing campaigns. This is a tangible reorientation of its status and shows its capacity for renewal<sup>5</sup>. The participation of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in 1999 and the Baltic States in 2004 confirmed NATO's perpetuation.

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<sup>1</sup> Full transcript of interview with Donald Trump, The Times, January 1-, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, « Back to the Future. Instability in Europe after the Cold War », *International Security*, 15 (1), 1990, p. 5-56 ; Kenneth N. Waltz, « The Emerging Structure of International Politics », *International Security*, 18 (2), 1993, p. 44-79.

<sup>4</sup> Kori Schake, « NATO after the Cold War 1991-1996: Institutional Competition and the Collapse of the French Alternative », *Contemporary European History*, 7 (3), 1998, p. 379-407.

<sup>5</sup> Sten Rynning, *NATO Renewed: The Power and Purpose of Transatlantic Cooperation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 ; James Sperling, Mark Webber, *NATO: Decline or Regeneration?*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

After the attacks of September 11, NATO is part of a strategy of war against terrorism. The Middle East becomes the main theater of American foreign policy. The Iraqi conflict, this "Clotwitzian" war, was an inextricable mess that has become a sanctuary of the Islamic state. For Afghanistan, the difficulties encountered by the ISAF<sup>6</sup>, which has been operating there since 2001, are questioned the role and the effectiveness of NATO in the region. Over time, the unifying character of NATO has become more flexible, becoming a coalition of the willing<sup>7</sup>. The investment of the allies becomes punctual but this reflects a debate on burden-sharing, risk-sharing, and blood-sharing mainly in Afghanistan<sup>8</sup>.

Despite all these elements, NATO remains an institution that everyone is attached.

### **NATO is necessary because the others actors are relatively inefficient**

NATO remains an organization to which Europeans remain fundamentally attached, as it symbolizes the transatlantic partnership in its double dimensions: common values and security. America's commitment to seek the security of Europe leads to peace, reconciliation between adversaries and Europe building. For the United States, the military presence in Europe is essential for the projection of US power in the Mediterranean. The enlargement policy initiated by the EU in the late 1990s was closely associated with the expansion of NATO with the launch of Partnership for Peace program in January 1994 in Eastern country. In this context, France's reintegration into NATO command structure was a fatalistic way of acknowledging that the European Union refused to fully assume its own security and that France should therefore reintegrate the Atlantic Alliance to have a greater impact. In Eastern Europe, if the US was advantaged in the 1990's, the Russians had gained a large power advantage over the past three years as they were facing to a very hesitant European and American diplomacies. The intense presence of NATO on the boundaries of the former Soviet can be psychologically reassuring for Europeans - especially those in the East - in a context where the European Union (EU) cannot play this role. However, EU has strengthened its ability to have more common actions in foreign and security policies, in contribution to the rule of law (police, justice), and even for military purposes. EU remained in position of inferiority. NATO maintains a heavy military structure inherited from the Cold War. In the name of "non-duplication," a specialization has been established. NATO is in charge of high-intensity missions, and the EU

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<sup>6</sup> The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was a NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan, established by the United Nations Security Council in December 2001. Its main purpose was to train the Afghan National Security Forces and assist Afghanistan in rebuilding key government institutions, but was also engaged in the 2001–present war with the Taliban insurgency.

<sup>7</sup> Rajan Menon, *The End of Alliances*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> T. Farrell, S. Rynning, « NATO's Transformation Gaps: Transatlantic Differences and the War in Afghanistan », *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33 (5), octobre 2010, p. 673-699.

is responsible for less strategic missions. A relationship of dependence is established between these two structures that neoconservative Robert Kagan<sup>9</sup> depicted by "the United States are making the dinner and the Europeans are doing the dishes."

### **The problem of NATO is in the imbalance of its two pillars**

There is too much weakness in Europe and too much power in the United States. Defense spending by the United States is three times than of all NATO European partners. The "European pillar" of the Alliance, defended by Kennedy in 1962<sup>10</sup>, did not come into being.

The creation of a "European caucus" within NATO, which would speak on equal terms with the United States, is unlikely and undesirable in the eyes of both Americans and Europeans. In reality, the difficulty of NATO and the EU to be complementary is due to structural and political causes. NATO is a Euro-Atlantic organization whose scope of action is limited to defense and by extension to the security of Europe, while the EU is a political, global, evolving project reserved for Europeans alone. Until now, the Europeans have decided to have "culture of dependence" and a lack of responsibility for their defense. However, the rebalancing of the American strategy towards the Asia-Pacific region makes this situation paradoxical and dangerous for EU.

### **Our recommendations for the continuation of NATO albeit rebalance the European and American weights**

The transatlantic link is the fundamental pillar of Western security and NATO remains its military tool. Nevertheless, Europeans should be more responsible and more involved in their security; otherwise the transatlantic link would be ruined. The Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) of the European Union are complementary to NATO, but this complementarity is in fact subordination. The reasons are many, among them; the agreements signed that stipulate the right for EU to use NATO assets and capabilities, The European weaknesses and dependence upon American military means, U.S. leadership and engagement in NATO.

NATO and CSDP developments must therefore move to a new transatlantic partnership with more balanced relationship between the United States and the EU. A position should be displayed to strengthen the EU as a global security actor. A particular approach to crises must be defined. The European Union can and must be in the future a force for reform and stability in the world, and for the defense of European interests and the promotion of European values. It should avoid acting in a disorderly manner, and reactive fashion, addressing only specific problems, and

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," Policy Review, No. 113 (June and July 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Elliot R. Goodman, *The Fate of the Atlantic Community* (New York: Praeger, 1975 ), pp. 148–9.

sometimes resulting in a succession of crises: Brexit, Trump's coming to power oval in power, Russian position in Syria and so on.

Some proposals have already emerged, particularly in the context of the recent discussions between France and Germany. In June 2016<sup>11</sup>, the French and German foreign ministers proposed in a document entitled “A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties<sup>12</sup>, ”a “European superstate” with the construction of a new European security pact, which meets European citizens' expectations of protection. Due to the structural continuum between internal and external security, such a pact would necessarily integrate defense issues. Alongside the proposals for strengthening the Euro area, or the EU energy independence, a project that can meet the expectations of citizens in terms of protection, security and defense would represent a genuine progress.

The US political and military presence would be maintained in Europe mainly the missile defense system and the American part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). However, a relative balance would be achieved with a decrease in the overall US involvement in Europe. NATO would still exist, but European would finally be on a greater share of the burden of their own security. By such actions, Russia will be limited in its attempts to regain the post-Soviet space.

NATO is a privileged and valuable organ of Euro-Atlantic cooperation but the EU is the crucible of European cooperation. It is therefore natural for the EU to be the framework for the pooling of European capabilities. So far, the ambition and the powers of the CSDP have been perceived by some states as competing with NATO, the result has been a competitive environment between the two organizations.

The competence restrictions of the EU due to the presence of NATO lead some to see in the alliance an obstacle to the development of European capabilities. NATO and the EU can be complementary only if the EU is recognized (unrestricted) as a genuine actor in defense and security, capable of acting, according to the circumstances, autonomously or in cooperation with United States. The support of each European country to US according bilateral relationship can be only incidental in the field of defense. The only thing that makes sense and works well is the Euro-Atlantic complementarity, i.e Europe as a group of developed and democratic countries speaking with one voice to the United States.

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<sup>11</sup> June 30, 2016, New observer website : <http://newobserveronline.com/german-french-foreign-ministers-propose-eu-superstate/>.

<sup>12</sup> The document first leaked by Polish state television broadcaster Telewizja Polska (TVP) <http://s.tvp.pl/repository/attachment/d/5/1/d51736df11c6ad23221e46543829f1df1467008961919.pdf>.