

"America and Euro-Atlantic Security: Setting a New Agenda?"

Newsletter prepared by
Juliana Crim, Pavel Havlíček
Gael Hamon, Alexia Fafara, Elodie Thevenin



Institut
Studiów
Strategicznych

Introduction

The international situation at the beginning of the 21st century brought challenges, including new terrorism and cyber attacks. Nowadays, more than 25 years after the end of the Cold War, the international security landscape seems to be changing once again due to new decision makers disrupting the traditional post-Cold War international order. This was the general perception when unconventional Republican candidate Donald Trump entered office as the 45th President of the United States at the beginning of 2017. Trump, known for his political unpredictability, was perceived by most experts as attempting to radically revise US foreign and security policy. Under the new circumstances, it was assumed that the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would diminish, especially taking into consideration that Trump declared the Alliance as outdated. In addition, the new US President further attempted to change NATO's operations by calling for an increase in mandatory financial contributions from its European Allies.¹

However, NATO is not the only organisation affected by uncertainty of transatlantic bonds. What about the impact of the new US foreign and security policy on the European Union? The initial political rapprochement of Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin seemed to confirm the United States' will to reduce its obligations in Europe,² which would consequently threaten the security of US allies in the post-Soviet space, namely Ukraine and Georgia. Although it now seems almost clear that this is not possible and the 'great bargain' or 'great deal' between the US and Russia modelled on old Yalta provisions is out of the question, the divisions within the Western world might still weaken liberal democratic order dominated by the West. This should be of great concern as the risk of a new full-scale conventional war in Europe or terrorist attacks around the world, especially in the EU, is higher than ever.

So far, however, the international community has not witnessed any fundamental shifts in US policy towards the EU or NATO. Is it too early to assess future developments or predict the maintenance of the *status quo* in this area? Is Donald Trump's rapprochement with Vladimir Putin really changing the worldwide geopolitical configuration and if so, will it last? What are the new challenges caused by events not only in Eastern Europe, but also in the Black Sea region and Central Asia?

¹ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/15/this-is-how-nato-ends-trump-europe/>

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-defence-idUSKBN15V1ML>

These are the questions that two panels full of outstanding speakers, such as: Robert Nurick, Marco Overhaus, Roman Kuźniar, Dominique David, Mieczysław Cieniuch, Robert Pszczel, Boris Tarasyuk, Bogdan Klich, Akkan Suver, Istvan Gyarmati moderated by Marek Świerczyński and Artur Gruszczak attempted to answer on 27 March 2017 in Krakow in the Krzysztofory Palace during the XXVI International Security Conference organised by the Institute for Strategic Studies in Krakow.

First Panel

The first panel discussion, ‘The New US Foreign Policy and Its Impact on NATO – Its Priorities, Capabilities and Financing’, addressed the issue of the reorientation of US foreign policy since the election of Donald J. Trump, with special attention paid to relations between the new US administration, NATO, and the US’s European allies. Indeed, there are numerous examples of statements by Trump or his advisors that conceive NATO as an obsolete tool or a waste of US resources, based on the fact that other NATO members ought to contribute more by increasing their military expenditures. Nevertheless, some foreign policy analysts find that there is a substantial discrepancy between Trump’s discourse and the actual policies of his administration.

Therefore, one can say that there are two different ways of understanding Trump’s policy towards NATO and its European Allies. On one hand, some argue that Trump’s presidency will undermine NATO and harbour distrust between the US and its European allies. On the other hand, however, some experts share the opinion that the Alliance as an institution is too deeply rooted in the history of transatlantic relations to be substantially undermined by the Trump administration. Furthermore, it should be brought to attention that Donald Trump is not the only actor shaping US foreign policy, as Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, among other decision makers, are likely to have a significant impact on US foreign and security policy and thus could counteract Trump’s attempts to implement his campaign promises. The latter position was represented in the panel by Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council Robert C. Nurick. Another argument supporting this claim is that the Obama administration already warned NATO member states that the Alliance could not work effectively if only a few NATO member states were meeting the 2% of GDP benchmark in military expenditures.

Consequently, one may conclude that Donald Trump is in fact merely following the precedent set by Barack Obama when it comes to NATO. The only difference might be the way he communicates within the international arena, as Obama used more diplomatic language, while Trump primarily uses his Twitter account to express these views in a colloquial manner. Additionally, it should be remembered that US military troops have recently been deployed to Poland and the Baltic states within the framework of NATO in order to secure the Eastern Flank, thus demonstrating US involvement in NATO's defence, without any revisions after Trump's selection.

Nonetheless, Trump's election remains a generally negative sign for the Alliance, as Trump has on several occasions expressed his aspiration to establish closer ties with Vladimir Putin. In this regard, one may fear that this rapprochement between Russia and the US could potentially take place at the expense of the privileged relations between the US and its traditional European allies. Indeed, the latter remain sceptical towards the new orientation of US foreign and security policy, despite being reassured through statements made by Vice President Pence at the Munich Security Conference and in Brussels in February 2017. However, Donald Trump continues issuing contradictory statements and seems to be rather unprepared to fulfil his duties as the President of the United States, thus harbouring uncertainty among the Europeans. Among other examples, the recent escalation with North Korea has been understood by several foreign policy observers as Trump's inability to shoulder the role of the US as a global peacekeeping actor.³

Consequently, European leaders still do not know how to react to Trump's presidency and thus they might take certain steps in order to establish their own security and defence autonomy in the case of US disengagement from NATO. French panellist Dominique David advocated for the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as a tool already present in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 46, TUE), but that has not yet seen any form of implementation. It is, however, too soon to assess the impact of Trump's presidency on the reshaping of the institutions and framework providing European states with future security and peace.

³ http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/04/17/guy-sorman-le-gouvernement-trump-demontre-son-ignorance-grave-du-dossier-nord-coreen_5112423_3232.html

Second Panel

The second panel, 'Beyond NATO's Borders: The Impact of New US-Russian Relations on Eastern Europe, the Black Sea Region and Central Asia', focused on relations of the US and NATO with the countries in the post-Soviet space, primarily Ukraine and Georgia. The words of Senator Bogdan Klich were fitting for the overall tone of the discussion:

'When planning the conference months ago, they thought that it would be easier to talk about American policy, because it should have become clearer. However, months after the election of Donald Trump, it is still not easy to predict what will be the next policy towards Europe, especially in the Central and Eastern European region.'

Even after more than four months in office, the new US foreign and security policy towards the CEE and Black Sea regions remains unclear. Though it seems that the US will not be able to reach any form of compromise with Russia, at the expense of Ukraine, the *de facto* annexed Crimea or the US sanctions imposed on Putin's regime, as was clearly visible during US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's first official visit to Russia,⁴ some of the messages from the new US administration are rather worrying, such as one echoed by Tillerson during the G7 summit in Italy, where he asked: 'Why should US taxpayers be interested in Ukraine?'⁵ Even if the question was then played down by the US State Department as a mere 'rhetorical device', it should be of concern for the Ukrainians and their European allies as well. The question itself hides the unpredictability and the business-rationalist approach of the new US administration, including President Trump himself, to international relations and US alliances around the world, including traditionally strong partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine. Nevertheless, Tillerson's visit to Moscow illustrated the great discrepancy between the US and Russian positions concerning international affairs and especially the Syrian crisis, in which the new US administration took more active position than its predecessor. At the same time, the US attack on Bashar al-Assad's forces following the use of chemical weapons put a clear limit on the visit of the US senior official in Moscow and illustrated the structural incompatibility of a US-Russian partnership in the world politics. Therefore, it is essential to analyse the US-Russian relations and the US approach to the CEE and Black Sea regions not only through the prism of Trump's personal opinions, but rather as a complex issue involving a number of domestic

⁴<http://www.dw.com/en/us-secretary-of-state-tillerson-in-moscow/a-38378280>

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/us-taxpayers-should-care-about-ukraine-heres-why/2017/04/14/7c628bfa-2082-11e7-ad74-3a742a6e93a7_story.html?tid=ss_fb-bottom&utm_term=.44f5c2d2391c

players on both sides, including, for example, the US Congress, Secretary of Defence James Mattis and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, among others.

Nevertheless, the continuing unpredictability, a business approach to international relations and a certain level of incompetence among some members of the new US administration is unlikely to disappear in the months to come. For the CEE and Black Sea regions, this means a growing problem and further pressure on their own foreign and security policies and alliance building to counterbalance the influence of the regional power, the Russian Federation. Like any other of NATO's European members, the Central and Eastern European countries will have to rely primarily on their own capacities and regional alliances, such as the Intermarium project proposed by the Polish government.

Conclusion

The two panels of the XXVI International Security Conference were devoted to relations between the US and NATO from the CEE perspective and to the impact of new US-Russian relations on Eastern Europe, the Black Sea region and Central Asia. Many outstanding international scholars and practitioners took part in the debate and brought various perspectives from both the US and Europe.

While discussing the approach of the new US administration to NATO, the first panel came to the conclusion that there are essentially two different ways to view this. The first is based on a more sceptical point of view claiming that NATO represents an obsolete international structure and the US is only wasting their own resources in order to protect their European allies, blaming them for a lack of contribution to the Alliance. On the other hand, the second school of thought is based on a more positive notion that NATO is too ingrained in the transatlantic security system and its role cannot be decreased without strong opposition from both sides of the Atlantic. Whereas the debate was based on an optimist-pessimist scale, recent developments hint that the former will prevail in the future.

As for the region beyond NATO's borders, the second panel discussion was much tenser and even more unpredictable, as countries like Ukraine lie in the security vacuum between NATO and the Russian Federation. Thus, the implications of the US presidential elections were even higher for these countries. Nevertheless, the recent events in Syria and the visit of the US

Secretary of State to Moscow clearly showed that neither the US nor Russia are able to make a 'great deal', as hoped for by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Due to the structural incompatibility of the US and Russian points of view on the world order, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson left Moscow deeply disappointed due to disagreements on a number of fronts. This might leave the countries of CEE and the Black Sea region relieved; however, their own security will be at stake anyway, even if not threatened by the new US-Russia partnership.

The final conclusion of both panels was therefore a suggestion that both NATO's European members and the countries of the Eastern Partnership should lessen their reliance on the US while at the same time enhancing their own capacities to build a regional alliance and increase their own defence capabilities and thus the possibility to resist the influence of the revisionist regional power, the Russian Federation.