



THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE THROUGH THE HISTORIAN'S LOOKING GLASS

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Abstract:

The article gives a long-term evaluation of the Atlantic Alliance in the context of contemporary world history. Actually, the American revolution had much more important impact on international relations than the French one and since their origins the United States envisaged a world role. The period of the Cold War was a parenthesis between two epochs in which the approach of the European countries and of the United States to international politics has been quite different, since their culture and historical experience are different. However, even during the Cold War it was impossible to create a real “Atlantic Community” as advocated in the Preamble and art. 2 of the Atlantic Treaty of 1949. The period after the Cold War saw diverging geopolitical perspectives among the NATO allies and President Trump gives rise to doubts on the importance he attaches to the Alliance. In conclusion, while NATO, the military structure, remains a formidable tool, the political alliance struggles to remain relevant.

Key words: Atlantic Alliance. NATO. United States

Título en Castellano: La Alianza Atlántica, vista desde la perspectiva del Historiador

Resumen:

El artículo realiza una evaluación a largo plazo de la Alianza Atlántica en el contexto de la historia mundial contemporánea. En realidad, la revolución estadounidense tuvo un impacto mucho más importante en las relaciones internacionales que la francesa, y desde sus orígenes los Estados Unidos contempló el tener un papel mundial. El período de la guerra fría fue un paréntesis entre dos épocas en las que el enfoque de los países europeos y de los Estados Unidos sobre la política internacional ha sido muy diferente, ya que su cultura y experiencia histórica son diferentes. Sin embargo, incluso durante la guerra fría era imposible crear una verdadera “comunidad atlántica”, como se defendía en el preámbulo y el artículo. 2 del Tratado Atlántico de 1949. El período después de la guerra fría dio lugar a divergentes perspectivas geopolíticas entre los aliados de la OTAN y, en la actualidad, el presidente Trump fomenta las dudas sobre la importancia que concede a la Alianza. En conclusión, mientras que la OTAN, la estructura militar, sigue siendo una herramienta formidable, la alianza política lucha por seguir siendo relevante.

Palabras Clave: Alianza Atlántica, OTAN, Estados Unidos.

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1. Introduction

On 4th April 2019, the Atlantic Alliance celebrated its 70th anniversary. As an historian, I think appropriate to discuss if the Atlantic Alliance and its military arm, NATO, are still historically relevant. I am not questioning the fact that NATO is still useful, certainly the most effective among international organizations and alliances. But, is the Atlantic Alliance a key player in current affairs, an expression of a rather solid community of purpose as it was during the Cold War?

2. The debate among the historians

The question of NATO adaptation to a new phase of international politics is not new, since it was widely discussed more than sixty years ago by the Committee of the “three wise man”, the Italian Gaetano Martino, the Canadian Lester Pearson and the Norwegian Halvard Lange. The Committee was formed after years of discussions on the necessity of creating something more than a simple military alliance, of building a real “Atlantic community.” As I will briefly explain later, the project of an “Atlantic community” remained a dead letter, and in 1978 the Italian Manlio Brosio, who had been NATO Secretary General between 1964 and 1971, remarked that “for a long period the perception of the danger and the necessity of common defence were quite sufficient to prop up the Alliance.”²

This issue of the “Atlantic Community” drew also the historians’ attention. In September 1955, in Rome, the X International Congress of Historical Sciences devoted a session to *Le problème de l’Atlantique du XVIII au XX siècle*, with the participation of prominent historians. The introductory report was prepared by Jacques Godechot and Richard Palmer, who both studied the age of “Atlantic revolutions”, which shook Europe and the Americas between the 1770s and the 1820s. Discussing that report, the distinguished British historian Sir Charles Webster maintained that “the regionalisation of the world had been a theme for discussion since modern historiography began, but the Atlantic was not suggested as a ‘region’ until the Second World War” and added that “the Atlantic Community might be a temporary phenomenon. It was created by the policy of the USSR and if this changed it might change also.”³

Indeed, the Soviet Union has not only changed but disappeared. Paraphrasing Dean Acheson’s well-known remark on Britain,⁴ we might say that the Atlantic Alliance “has lost an enemy and not yet found a role.” The efforts to revive the Russian threat look to me as the lifting of an old lady in search for a new youth.

Another British historian, the Marxist Eric Hobsbawn, agreed with Sir Charles “that this idea [of the “Atlantic community”] has been brought into historical analysis as a result of the political situation since 1945, which might be a very temporary situation.” A few years later, this vision was contested by the Italian liberal historian Vittorio De Caprariis, who was a disciple of the famous philosopher Benedetto Croce. De Caprariis wrote about «a new civilization» which, in Modern age, “was born indeed on the Atlantic”, and on “a coherent

² Brosio, Manlio (1979): “Introduzione”, in AA.VV., *Trent’anni di Alleanza Atlantica*, Roma, Editrice Europea, p. VII.

³ AA.VV. (1957): *Atti del X Congresso Internazionale: Roma 4-11 settembre 1955*, Roma, p. 571. The introductory paper was Godechot, Jacques; Palmer, Robert Roswell: “Le problème de l’Atlantique du XVIII^{ème} au XX^{ème} siècle”, in AA.VV. (1955): *Relazioni: riassunti delle comunicazioni. Atti a cura della Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici e Comitato internazionale di Scienze Storiche*, vol. V, *Storia contemporanea*, Firenze, Sansoni, pp. 173-239.

⁴ In a speech at West Point military academy on 5th December 1962, the former Secretary of State said: “Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role”. (In, Acheson, Dean: *Vital Speeches*, vol. 29, n° 6 (January 1963), p. 163).



development of the European and American history.” NATO was “not only the result of a specific contingent situation, it was also the finishing line of an historical process at the same time manifold and univocal.”⁵

3. The United States towards Europe: a challenge or a resource?

In the perspective of diplomatic history,⁶ I tend to agree with Webster’s and Hobsbawn’s opinions. We usually consider the French revolution a much more important event than the American one. Actually, this might be true on the general level, but not for international politics. Certainly the French revolution and Napoleon had a major impact on Europe’s international relations, but in the long term France did not change the traditional system of power politics, while the birth of the independent United States of America marked a major break, which became evident more than one century later, but was immediately perceived at the moment by expert observers. Many founding fathers, from George Washington to James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, envisaged an “imperial” destiny for the young republic.⁷ In 1816, Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, wrote to his predecessor John Adams that “old Europe will have to lean on our shoulders, and to hobble along to our side, under the monkish trammels of priests and Kings, as she can. What a colossus shall we be.”⁸ Actually in 1794 the Spanish minister in Paris had made this comment on the United States: “This federal republic was born as a pygmy, but a day will come that it will be a giant, even a colossus.”⁹ In 1817, the American minister in London and future President John Quincy Adams (son of the above-mentioned John) wrote that “the universal feeling of Europe in witnessing the gigantic growth of our population and power is that we shall, if united, become a very dangerous member of the society of nations.”¹⁰

On the issue of the birth of independent States in Latin America, British Foreign minister George Canning tried to call “the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old,”¹¹ but Washington didn’t follow London’s lead and reaffirmed its unilateralism with the Monroe doctrine, the third pillar of which rejected the *raison d’état* and the European tradition, indicating the republic as the institutional regime most adapted to the American continent. Commenting that doctrine, Prince Metternich rightly observed that the United States “had declared [...] their intention not only to oppose power to power, but also, to speak with greater exactitude, altar to altar.”¹²

From 1815 to 1914, the United States completed the conquest of the West, survived a civil war, and, at the turn of the century, appeared as a new protagonist in the international arena. The United Kingdom had to come to terms with the new situation hoping to control it,

⁵ De Caprariis, Vittorio (1958): *Storia di un’alleanza. Genesi e significato del Patto Atlantico*, Roma, Opere nuove, pp. 18-19, 129. At the end of the XIX century, British historian John Robert Seeley had described the formation of an Atlantic civilization as the key factor of modern history (Seeley, John Robert (1895): *The Expansion of England. Two Courses of Lectures*, 2nd edition, London–New York, Macmillan).

⁶ De Caprariis writes that «maybe the professional deformation of the scholar of diplomatic virtuosités of the last century had veiled the clarity of the English historian’s judgment» (cit., p. 11).

⁷ Cfr. Ferguson, Niall (2004): *Colossus. The Price of America’s Empire*, London-New York, Allen Lane, pp. 1 and 38; Kagan, Robert (2006), *Dangerous Nation: America’s Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, chapter 1.

⁸ Quoted in Boyle, Nicholas (2012): *2014. How to Survive the Next World Crisis*, London–New York, Continuum, p. 65.

⁹ Cit. in Kagan, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Cit. *Ibid.* in exergue to chapter 5.

¹¹ Speech of 12th December 1826 at the House of Commons, *Hansard*, XVI [N.S.], 390-98.

¹² Perkins, Dexter (1960): *Storia della dottrina di Monroe*, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 30; on this subject see Kagan, *op. cit.*, chapter 6.



but, as the Scottish historian Donald Cameron Watt puts it,¹³ the ground was prepared for Uncle Sam replacing John Bull as “imperial power.”

With the First World War, Europe committed a “suicide”, as remarked already in 1916 by Pope Benedict XV.¹⁴ The United States at least aggravated this suicide. In 1917, they were prominent in killing the idea of a compromise peace and in 1918 inaugurated the policy that recently has been labelled as “regime change”, when they refused to negotiate an armistice with Germany unless the Imperial government was replaced by a republic. The Germans complied, but the Weimar republic got no reward for going fully democratic and dragon’s teeth were sown, while Washington plunged into neo-isolationism, or better an “America first” position. The Wall Street crash in 1929 had serious consequences around the world, in particular revived the fortunes of Hitler’s Nazi party.

After the Second World War, the United Kingdom fully realized that a new American Empire was born. In 1944, Harold Macmillan uttered his famous quip: “We [...] are Greeks in this American empire. You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans – great big, vulgar, bustling people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues but also more corrupt. We must run AFHQ as the Greek slaves ran the operations of the Emperor Claudius.”¹⁵ There is little doubt that the birth of the Atlantic Alliance owed a lot to the Anglo-American special relationship and, more in general, was the product of an Anglo-American-Canadian *inner group* with a cultural and political *background* almost exclusively WASP (*White Anglo-Saxon Protestant*).¹⁶ Still in recent years, maybe “we are faced with a third Anglo-American West strictly Atlantic which is in the middle or over the other two.”¹⁷

The historical studies on the origins of the Atlantic Pact clearly demonstrate that few people in Europe considered the link with Washington something more than a necessity, unpleasant to many, imposed by the political and military confrontation with the Soviet Union. For the Italian statesman Alcide De Gasperi, it was a “marriage of convenience.”¹⁸ Already in

¹³ Watt, Donald Cameron (1984): *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain’s Place, 1900-1975*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ The Pope described the Great War as «the suicide of civilized Europe» in three subsequent occasions, including his famous Apostolic exhortation *Dès les début* of 1st August 1917, published in French and Italian in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis, Commentarium Officiale*, a. IX, vol. IX, part I, Roma, 1917, pp. 417-20, 421-423. The complete Italian text is also published in Monaci di Solesmes (ed.) (1958): “Insegnamenti pontifici”, vol. V, *La pace internazionale*, part I, *La guerra moderna*, Roma, Edizioni Paoline, pp. 131-135.

¹⁵ Sampson, Anthony (1967): *Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity*, London, Penguin Books, p. 61.

¹⁶ Reid, Escott (1977): *Time of Fear and Hope. The Making of the North Atlantic Treaty 1947-1949*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, pp. 11, 62-69. On the importance of the Anglo-American *special relationship* as premise and foundation of the Atlantic Alliance there is a very large literature; for a synthesis and bibliographic suggestions cfr. Ovendale, Ritchie (1998): *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century*, London, St. Martin’s Press, and Id., “La NATO e la «relazione speciale» fra Gran Bretagna e Stati Uniti”, in de Leonardis, Massimo (ed.) (2001): *La nuova NATO: i membri, le strutture, i compiti*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 63-88. For a long-term cultural history, see De Caprariis, *op. cit.*, chapter I, *Gli incunaboli dell’atlantismo*.

¹⁷ Barié, Ottavio (2013): *Dalla Guerra Fredda alla grande crisi. Il nuovo mondo delle relazioni internazionali*, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 219.

¹⁸ Del Pero, Mario: “Gli Stati Uniti e De Gasperi (1945-1953)”, in Ballini, Pier Luigi (ed.) (2011): *Quaderni Degasperiani per la storia dell’Italia contemporanea*, vol. III, Roma, Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi, p. 47. De Gasperi did not share the thesis of the «big American boys» that the attack in Korea could be a general rehearsal of a similar aggression in Europe (*ibid*, p. 43). A stinging remark of the same type was made years later by the Italian President of the Council of Ministers Amintore Fanfani to NATO Secretary General Dirk Stikker: «Christopher Columbus discovered America but could not bring to the New Continent the wisdom and the experience of the Europeans [...] the United States put into NATO strength, the Europeans experience» (Colloqui a Roma con Stikker, 9.10.1961, Archivio Fanfani, Senato della Repubblica, Roma [AF], Sez. 1, Serie 1, Busta 14, Fasc. 17). Similar opinions may be found in the British Foreign Office’s documents at the beginning of 1948 [cfr. de Leonardis, Massimo: “I «tre cerchi»: il Regno Unito e la ricerca della sicurezza tra Commonwealth, Europa e



the early Fifties, the French government feared that the Alliance with the United States might become a kind of Cominform and later General Charles de Gaulle described American President Lyndon Johnson as “the greatest threat to world peace today,” an opinion shared by one third of the French.¹⁹ In the aftermath of the Suez crisis, the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, albeit a staunch supporter of Atlanticism, expressed his solidarity to the French President of the Council of Ministers Guy Mollet with these words: “In this moment, the European countries must unite. It is not a problem of supra nationality. But we must unite against America [...]. The United States is so badly acquainted with the situation in Europe and with European politics that we have to cry.”²⁰ Even the British often expressed, in private, their irritation towards their cousins beyond the Atlantic.²¹ In the Suez crisis, the Americans humiliated their two major European Allies, but soon inherited their problems and their imperial responsibilities.

In 1973 American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger “remarked that he was beginning to draw melancholy conclusions about the cohesiveness of the [Atlantic] alliance. It never cohered on anything except the one thing least likely to arise: a military attack on Western Europe.”²²

4. The debate on article 2 in the 1950s

The Preamble and art. 2 of the Atlantic Treaty of 1949 expressed the intention of building something more than a mere military alliance. As a matter of fact, art. 2 was never put into practice, not even after the end of the Cold War, when there has been much talk about the political role of NATO in respect to its military role; on the contrary, the Atlantic has become “larger.”²³

We could briefly recall the failed efforts in the Fifties of the XX century to develop an “Atlantic community.” In September 1951, the Atlantic Council in Ottawa, with the participation of Foreign, Defence and Economy ministers of the member States, deliberated the formation of a five members²⁴ ministerial Committee for this purpose. On 30th October, one of

«relazione speciale» con gli Stati Uniti (1948-1949)”, in Barié, Ottavio (ed.) (1988): *L'alleanza occidentale. Nascita e sviluppi di un sistema di sicurezza collettivo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 29-30]. Later Britons pointed their cards on the *special relationship* with Washington, but stinging judgments of British statesmen towards the United States are not lacking.

¹⁹ Kahler Miles, “US politics and transatlantic relations: we are all Europeans now”, in Andrews, David M. (ed.) (2005): *The Atlantic Alliance Under Stress. US-European Relations After Iraq*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 81-101.

²⁰ Adenauer à Mollet, *Compte-rendu d'un entretien*, 6.11.1956, in *Documents diplomatiques français* [DDF] (1989), *Série après 1954*, vol. VIII, tome II, 1^{er} juillet-23 octobre 1956, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, n. 138, pp. 231-38.

²¹ For example Harold Macmillan, in his diary, once labelled as «stupid» a speech of the American Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, (Macmillan, Harold (1973): *At the End of the Day 1961-1963*, London, Macmillan, p. 123) and on a previous occasion lamented with strong words the treatment the British received from the Americans («a mixture of patronising pity and contempt») and gave a very critical description of their character (Macmillan, Harold (2003): *The Macmillan Diaries, The Cabinet Years, 1950-1957*, London, Macmillan, pp. 187-188, diary of 27th September 1952). As Winston Churchill, Macmillan had an American mother.

²² *Cromer to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 25.10.1973, *Ceasefires in ME War*, National Archives – London, FCO 93/295. E 371. NFW 10/16 part A (Rowland, III Earl Cromer, was Her Majesty's Ambassador to Washington and a grandson of the famous colonial proconsul).

²³ Also on this topic there is a very large historical and political literature, for which I refer to the bibliographies in de Leonardis, Massimo (2001): *Europa-Stati Uniti: un Atlantico più largo?*, Milano, Franco Angeli and Id. (2016): *Alla ricerca della rotta transatlantica. Le relazioni tra Europa e Stati Uniti dopo l'11 settembre 2001 durante la presidenza di George W. Bush*, Milano, Educatt.

²⁴ With representatives of Belgium, Canada, Italy (the Minister of the Treasury Giuseppe Pella), the Netherlands and Norway. The topic of this paragraph is examined at length in de Leonardis, Massimo: “L'atlantismo italiano



the committee's working groups presented a report of 51 pages.²⁵ The issues considered were the "co-ordination; and frequent consultation on foreign policy, having particular regard to steps designed to promote peace," a "closer economic, financial and social co-operation; designed: to promote conditions of economic stability and well-being, both during and after the present period of the defence effort, within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or through other Agencies," the "collaboration in the fields of Culture and Public Information." However, it was remarked that some members of the working group "were very dubious" whether some of these topics «ever would or should become matters of active consideration within NATO," but this did not prevent listing a long series of recommendations.²⁶ Certainly, it was a "list of wishes", which found a modest realization, as for example the formation on 18th June 1954 of the *Atlantic Treaty Association* and in 1955 of the North-Atlantic Parliamentary Assembly, moreover two bodies formally independent from NATO.

The first détente seemed to provide the great occasion for activating art. 2. In December 1955, the Atlantic Council in Paris recognized that "recent developments in the international situation made it more necessary than ever to have closer co-operation between the members of the Alliance as envisaged in Article 2 of the Treaty."²⁷ The Committee of the "three wise men" was charged to present a report on "non-military co-operation in NATO." During its works, two crises, the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Anglo-French military expedition in Egypt (concocted with Israel), attenuated the hopes of détente, stressed the permanent necessity of keeping a high military readiness and marked a very serious break between the United States and their two major European allies.

The Report²⁸ noted that "inter-Allied relations have also undergone severe strains. [...] An Alliance in which the members ignore each other's interests or engage in political or economic conflict, or harbour suspicions of each other, cannot be effective either for deterrence or defence. Recent experience makes this clearer than ever before."

Creating "a sense of Atlantic Community" had not been "the decisive, or even the main impulse in the creation of NATO. Nevertheless, it gave birth to the hope that NATO would grow beyond and above the emergency which brought it into being." This hope had found expression in the preamble and in articles 2 and 4 of the Treaty, which contained "at least the promise of the grand design of an Atlantic Community [...] because of this insistent feeling that NATO must become more than a military alliance [...]. There is the even more far-reaching question: 'Can a loose association of sovereign states hold together at all without the common binding force of fear?' [...] Strengthening the political and economic side of NATO is an essential complement to - not a substitute for - continuous cooperation in defence." On the "out of area" issue, the Report remarked that "NATO should not forget that the influence and interests of its members are not confined to the area covered by the Treaty, and that common interests of the Atlantic Community can be seriously affected by developments outside the Treaty area."

da Alcide De Gasperi a Gaetano Martino: l'art. 2 del Patto atlantico", in Ballini, Pier Luigi (ed.) (2011): *Quaderni Degasperiani, op. cit.*, pp. 181-207.

²⁵ Atlantic Community Committee, at http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/2/5/2581/AC_10-D_1_ENG.pdf. On 16th November was circulated an updated version: http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/2/5/2593/AC_10-D_2_ENG.pdf.

²⁶ Attachment n° 1 of the document was a list («in no way exhaustive») of 26 International Organizations (including the Universal Postal Union!) and 13 other non-governmental bodies at world or regional level the tasks of which were of interest for NATO.

²⁷ C-M (55) 128, in http://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/2/5/25149/C-M_55_128_ENG.pdf.

²⁸ *Report of the Committee of Three*, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17481.htm?selectedLocale=en.



At the Atlantic Council in Paris of December 1956,²⁹ discussing the report the Canadian minister of Foreign Affairs Lester Pearson admitted that perhaps the States with greater responsibilities “must get a little tired of hearing those of us who represent States without so much power and responsibility talking so much about consultation.” The British Foreign Secretary John Selwyn Brooke Lloyd recalled London’s worldwide responsibilities and declared his agreement to consultation if it was aimed to share the burden and not simply to express criticism and give way to obstructionism. This approach was strongly endorsed by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who stated that, in the light of United States’ global commitments, the coordination of all the aspects of foreign policy was impossible, also because sometimes it was necessary to act before consulting. Therefore, he shared the Report’s and agreed to approve it in general terms, but its concrete application had to be verified on a case by case basis.

The result of the Atlantic Council was a list of good intentions, but in practice little was realized; during the entire Cold War, NATO continued to remain what had been since its origins, a military alliance with a precise *casus foederis* and a well-delimited geographical outreach. After all, the “three wise men” themselves had remarked: “It has not been difficult to make these recommendations. It will be far more difficult for the member governments to carry them into effect.”

Moreover, the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1957, satisfied the aspirations to a community of interests in the non-military domain; the military field remained as a NATO’s exclusive competence.

5. Increasingly diverging perspectives after the Cold War

The period of the Cold War was a parenthesis between two epochs in which the approach of the European countries and of the United States to international politics has been quite different, since their culture and historical experience are different. The Cold War was a period with unprecedented characteristics in the field of international relations, which no longer exists. During the Cold War, inside the West, intended as Europe and the United States, disputes, even bitter ones, did not lack, but were downplayed or shelved since there was an agreement on the identification of the common enemy and on the means to face it. However, even during the Cold War it was impossible to create a real “Atlantic community” and of course today it’s almost completely unrealistic with an Alliance which includes 29, and not 15 members.

There is no sign on the horizon that NATO might become a global alliance for freedom and for the Western values and interests as advocated ten years ago by former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar in tuning with a good number of Americans inside the George W. Bush administration. This was the only strategic idea advanced for the future of the Alliance and called for a stronger collaboration with non-Atlantic countries belonging to the Western civilization, like Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

As I said at the beginning, NATO is still the most effective among international organizations and alliances: “the question for the foreseeable future may not be whether the alliance will persist, but whether or not it will be of increasing or diminishing value to the participants.”³⁰

²⁹ The access to the minutes of the various sessions of the Atlantic Council is at <http://archives.nato.int/verbatim-record-of-meeting-final-25;isad>.

³⁰ Sloan, Stanley (2010): *Permanent Alliance? NATO and the Transatlantic Bargain from Truman to Obama*, London–New York, Bloomsbury, p. 287.



In any case, there is no hope that, to use the expression of De Caprariis, NATO might be “the political brain of the West.”³¹ Indeed, while at the origins of the Alliance British Labour Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin talked of creating “a sort of spiritual federation of the west,”³² nowadays the West is losing ground and does no longer appear as united as during the Cold War. NATO is quite focused on its core task, the defence of the territory of the member States ex art. 5 and Russia is again perceived as the major threat,³³ at least by a number of countries which have understandable reasons for thinking so. This view is contested by other countries and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in June 2016 spoke out against recent NATO military exercises in Poland and the Baltics, describing them as “sabre-rattling”: “the one thing we shouldn’t do now is inflame the situation with loud sabre-rattling and warmongering [...]. Anyone who thinks a symbolic tank parade on the alliance’s eastern border will bring security is wrong [...]. We would be well advised not to provide a pretext to renew an old confrontation.”³⁴ The process of enlargement shows NATO’s bulimia and, after having been a factor of stabilization, now risks to provoke destabilization, pushing the Alliance’s posture very close to St. Petersburg.

NATO has failed to recognize that Islamic fundamentalism has replaced Communism as the major threat,³⁵ given also that a formal ally, Turkey, is progressively returning to her Islamic traditions.

Donald Trump during the electoral campaign expressed an “America First” position, declared that NATO is “obsolete,”³⁶ and warned that the United States will no longer foot the largest part of NATO’s bill (a position shared also by Obama). The quest for national interest sometimes implies making deals with authoritarian regimes, but this is nothing new for the American Presidents since in the ‘30s Franklin Delano Roosevelt described Anastacio Somoza as «our bastard».

Moreover, Trump seemed not antagonizing Russian President Vladimir Putin³⁷ and supported protectionism. However, the umpteenth *reset*³⁸ with Russia did not materialize, above all because President Trump was under the permanent blackmail of the *Russiagate*, a surreal and inconsistent affair. The relations with Russia worsened, while, the Brussels NATO

³¹ De Caprariis, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

³² See de Leonardis, *I «tre cerchi»*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

³³ An interesting news is that Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Denmark’s Prime Minister from 2001 al 2009 and NATO Secretary General from 2009 to 2014, has gladly accepted the post of Adviser to Ukraine’s President Petro Poroshenko and his first statement was in favour of strengthened sanctions against Moscow.

³⁴ Huggler, Justin: “German foreign minister accuses Nato of ‘warmongering’ against Russia”, *The Telegraph*, 18 June 2016, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/18/german-foreign-minister-accuses-nato-of-warmongering-against-rus/>.

³⁵ Already in February 1995 NATO Secretary General Willy Claes had remarked that «Islamic fundamentalism is at least as dangerous as Communism was», an opinion shared by Lord Dahrendorf, but was immediately compelled to recant (see Claes, William: “NATO’s Agenda for a New European Order”, *The Financial Times*, 23 February 1995 and his interview in *Corriere della Sera*, 15 February 1995). In his (1949): *Sociologie du communism* (Paris, Colin), French sociologist Jules Monnerot described Communism as the «Islam of the Twentieth Century». In 2003, German historian and philosopher, Ernst Nolte, compared Islamic fundamentalism to Communism.

³⁶ “NATO is something that at the time was excellent. Today, it has to be changed. It has to be changed to include terror. It has to be changed from the standpoint of cost because the United States bears far too much of the cost of NATO”, in “Highlights from Our Interview With Donald Trump on Foreign Policy”, *The New York Times*, at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-interview-highlights.html?_r=0.

³⁷ In his interview, appeared both on the *Sunday Times* and on the *Corriere della Sera* on 19th June 2016, Trump advocated an agreement with Russia, which would have benefic effects over the entire world.

³⁸ As remarked by the American ambassador Russia Jon Huntsman, after the Cold War, every President tried unsuccessfully a new departure in the relations between Washington and Moscow. Obama’s attempt was marked by a blunder: Secretary of State Hillary carried to Moscow a big red push-button with the caption *reset*, but the Russian translation instead of *perezagruzka* (*reset*), read *peregruzka* (*overload*).



summit in 2018 re-balanced the Alliance's attention towards the MENA region. Trump claimed this as a success of his own and no longer criticized NATO, while continuing to stress that the burden must be divided more fairly between Europeans and Americans.

During the entire Cold War, already during the negotiations for the Atlantic Alliance when Washington stressed the principles of self-help and mutual aid, the United States raised the problem of *burden sharing*. All American Presidents, with more or less energy, repeated the exhortation to the Europeans to spend more, particularly when they felt that Europe was a growing economic competitor.³⁹ In particular this was true during the Kennedy and Nixon administrations.

On 22nd January 1963, President Kennedy spoke these words at a National Security Council meeting: "One effort we must make, the President continued, is to seek to prevent European states from taking actions which make our balance of payments problem worse. For example, we maintain large forces in Germany. We must firmly oppose West Germany if it increases its agricultural production to our detriment. We have not yet reached the point of wheat against troops but we cannot continue to pay for the military protection of Europe while the NATO states are not paying their fair share and living off the 'fat of the land.' We have been very generous to Europe and it is now time for us to look out for ourselves, knowing full well that the Europeans will not do anything for us simply because we have in the past helped them. the European allies were not paying their fair share and living off 'the fat of the land'."⁴⁰

At the beginning of the Seventies, President Nixon raised forcefully the problem, deeming unacceptable that Europeans, protected by the Americans, would prosper through the economic competition with the United States. His appeal was met in particular by Western Germany, thanks to its Defence Minister Helmut Schmidt; Bonn strengthened his role of key ally of Washington, a connection today inexistent. In 1971 the Democrats' leader in the Senate Mike Mansfield table a resolution to half the American troops in Europe. In the same year the Nixon administration unilaterally terminated convertibility of the US dollar to gold, effectively bringing the 1944 Bretton Woods system to an end. Before Trump, Nixon, was the President which championed with great strength United States' national interest, in the framework of a vision of international politics which took inspiration from the XIX century European concert of Great Powers, of which his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was a prominent scholar. However, the American nuclear arsenal was the ultimate assurance of Western Europe's security, something which made not imperative the appeal to re-balance the *burden sharing* between Europeans and Americans.

Since 2006, the member states of the Atlantic Alliance pledged to spend for defence at least 2% of their GNP; reiterated periodically, with particular emphasis in 2014, in 2017 this commitment was met only by five states (Estonia, Greece, Poland, United Kingdom and United States). At NATO summit in 2017, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg mentioned three criteria to be taken into account: "cash, capabilities, and contributions." The reference to contributions is relevant, because, for example, Italy spends much less than 2%, but is one of the major contributors to NATO missions, while Greece spends 2.38%, but this is the expression of the rivalry with Turkey and Athens contributes little to NATO missions. If anything, the target of criticism must be Germany, which neither spends nor participates.

³⁹ Creswell, Michael; Gavin, Victor: *A History of Vexation: Trump's Bashing of NATO is Nothing New*, at <https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/a-history-of-vexation-trumps-bashing-of-nato-is-nothing-new/>. However, this article quotes (inadvertently?) President Eisenhower's words from a fiction.

⁴⁰ Remarks of President Kennedy to the National Security Council Meeting, in United States. Department of State (1994): *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, Volume XIII, Western Europe and Canada, Washington, USGPO, doc. 168.



It should be remembered that NATO is an inter-governmental organization of sovereign States; therefore, it cannot sanction the countries not complying with the parameters, unlike the EU, which however does this with a benign eye toward some and a surly attitude towards others. In any case the major stakeholder may bash the defaulter, as Trump did targeting just Germany. During the Cold War and until some years ago, diplomacy used in public a soft language and harsh comments were kept confidential. Now there is a disgraceful habit of tweeting all the day rude comments. Trump's foreign policy raised much astonishment. However, we must remember Shakespeare's admonition: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."⁴¹ Trump's guiding principle is "America first." A serious evaluation of Trump's foreign policy cannot be based on his impromptu or electoral utterances.

In the *National Security Strategy*,⁴² released in December 2017, we read: "The United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals. The United States remains firmly committed to our European allies and partners. The NATO alliance of free and sovereign states is one of our great advantages over our competitors, and the United States remains committed to Article V of the Washington Treaty. [...] The NATO alliance will become stronger when all members assume greater responsibility for and pay their fair share to protect our mutual interests, sovereignty, and values." EU does not appear, but already in the previous Obama's document of 2017 it benefited of just one cursory quotation.

The role of NATO is even more stressed in the summary of the *2018 National Defense Strategy*.⁴³ This document has a significant sub-title, *Sharpening the America's Military Competitive Edge*, and it is inspired by the urgency to face the strategic challenges: "We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by the decline of the long-standing rules-based international order – creating a security environment more complex and volatile [...]. Interstate strategic competition, not terrorism is now the primary concern in U. S. National Security." We might comment that just Trump is accused of weakening the international liberal order. A paragraph of the NDS is titled *Fortify the Trans-Atlantic NATO Alliance* and states: "A strong and free Europe, bound by shared principles of democracy, national sovereignty, and commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is vital to our security. The alliance will deter Russian adventurism, defeat terrorists who seek to murder innocents, and address the arc of instability building on NATO's periphery. At the same time, NATO must adapt to remain relevant and fit for our time—in purpose, capability, and responsive decision-making. We expect European allies to fulfil their commitments to increase defense and modernization spending to bolster the alliance in the face of our shared security concerns." In the NDS, EU is not mentioned at all, but this is perfectly understandable, since its aim is to describe how to sharpen the American sabre.

An assessment of Trump administration's policy towards NATO must carefully distinguish between public rhetoric and reality. As a matter of fact, Washington's long standing commitment to NATO remains unchanged. Actually, the number of American troops stationed permanently or temporarily in Europe raised from 63,000 in 2016 to 74,000 in 2018. Trump increased the American commitment while the attitude of the American administration is more

⁴¹ Shakespeare, William: *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2, Polonius referring to Hamlet.

⁴² *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017): White House, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁴³ *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (2018): U.S. Department of Defense, at <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. The complete document is classified.



bombastic,⁴⁴ and Washington raised its tones prodding the Europeans to be more serious in their pledges and to make concessions on international trade and other issues.⁴⁵ Understandably it has been regretted that Trump decided unilaterally the end of the engagement in Afghanistan; however, Obama behaved similarly in 2011 and in 2014. The Europeans have little standing for protest after dragging their feet for many years.

Moreover, three further facts must be considered, at least. The American establishment remains pro-Atlantic and General Mattis' resignation from Defense will not change this orientation. The expenses for NATO amount only to 15% of the Defence budget. Finally, it is unlikely that the United States take their distances from NATO, which, among other things, guarantees important benefits for their industries of armaments.

We must keep in mind the conceptual and practical distinction between the Atlantic Alliance and NATO.⁴⁶ The second is in better shape than the first: from the military point of view NATO posture is impressive. The exercise *Trident Juncture*, the most important since many years, which took place in Norway from 25th October to 7th November 2018 involved about 50,000 troops, 250 aircrafts, 65 warships and about 10,000 vehicles from 31 countries (members and partners). NATO is the military arm of a political alliance based on common values and interests. Since thirty years these bonds are weaker than during the Cold War. The geopolitical situation drastically changed and since many years Europe is no longer the main focus of Washington's attention. However, this does not authorize to think that the United States are no longer interested in Europe's security. Considering the values, these were never identical, the differences widened, but, from this point of view Europe and North America remained the closest geopolitical area in the world.

The Atlantic Alliance's health certainly is not optimal; however, there is a long list of crises overcome by NATO during and after the Cold War. The alarms became frequent since the Nineties, provoking some ironic remarks; an article in 2004 opened with the sub-title "*NATO is dying – again*," while already then years earlier another author mocked the syndrome of the little boy "crying wolf."⁴⁷ Certainly the Transatlantic link has weakened; indeed, the entire West is in relative decline and China is rising. The decline of Europe in the world balance of power is particularly dramatic, for complex and long-term reasons. This decline has been aggravated by those who misgoverned EU in the recent decades.

In conclusion, the defence of Europe is still assured by a consolidated certainty, NATO, while the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is a *wishful thinking*, largely to be built. Old debates of the '90s of the last century are rehearsed, like the dilemma between a

⁴⁴ Trump «broke decisively with the elite consensus about how the US should handle its relationship with the rest of the world. Previous presidents had either denied the erosion in American power, or sought quietly to manage it. By contrast, Mr Trump acknowledged American decline — and sought to reverse it. His method was to use US power more overtly and brutally, in an effort to rewrite the rules of the global order to America's advantage, before it was too late. Unconstrained by the politeness of his predecessors, Mr Trump bullied friends as well as enemies» (Rachman, Gideon: "Trump embodies the spirit of our age", *The Financial Times*, 22 October 2018).

⁴⁵ Zandee, Dick: *NATO in the Trump era: surviving the crisis*, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/nato-trump-era-surviving-crisis>. Cfr. Kaufman, Joyce P.: *The US perspective on NATO under Trump: lessons of the past and prospects for the future*, at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/INTA93_2_01_Kaufman.pdf.

⁴⁶ On 4th April 1949 the Atlantic Alliance was born as a political alliance based on deterrence towards the Soviet Union. As a consequence of the Korean war, between 1950 and 1952 NATO, the political and military organization, was created, putting in place a real defence.

⁴⁷ Cornish, Paul: "NATO: the Practice and Politics of Transformation", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, n° 1 (2004), pp. 63-74; Cucchi, Giuseppe: "La crisi d'identità della NATO", *Relazioni Internazionali*, n. 20 (December 1993), pp. 19-26.



European Security Defence Identity (ESDI) inside NATO and ESDP⁴⁸. There are however two new facts. The United States have shifted their strategic priorities to the Indo-Pacific and the United Kingdom is abandoning the EU. According to fervent supporters of EU the first circumstance makes ESDP more urgent while *Brexit* removes a major obstacle to it. In the author's opinion, Washington remains in any case committed to NATO and a ESDP without the United Kingdom would be a rather poor thing.

⁴⁸ Cfr. Howorth, Jolyon: *EU-NATO Cooperation and Strategic Autonomy: Logical Contradiction or Ariadne's Thread?*, at https://www.polsoz.fuberlin.de/en/v/transformeurope/publications/working_paper/wp/WP_90_Howorth/WP_90_Howorth_WEB.pdf.



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