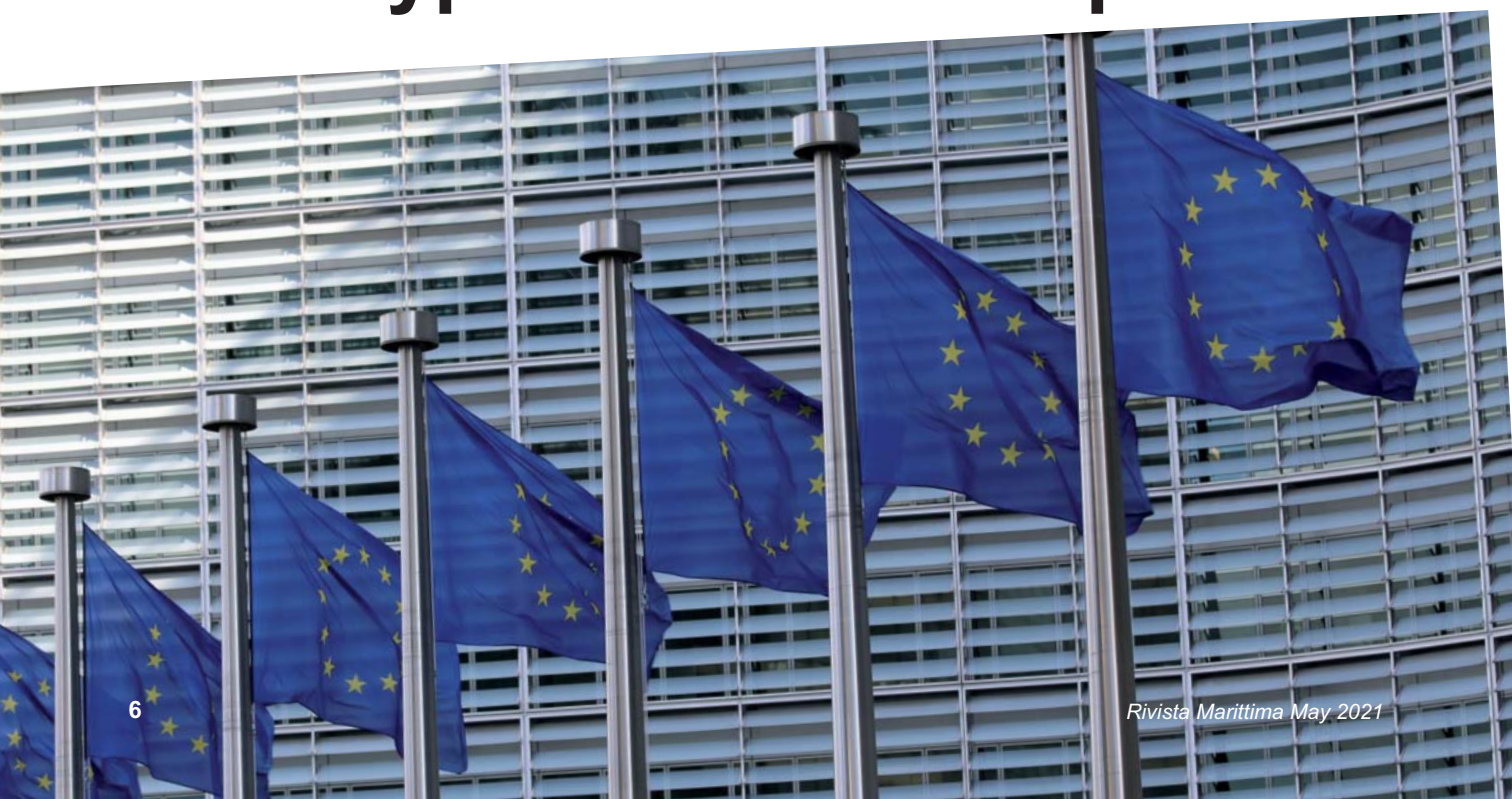




NATO and UE in new security scenarios. What type of relationship?



Giampaolo Di Paola

Admiral (ret). Born in Torre Annunziata (NA) on August 15 1944, he entered the Naval Academy in 1963. After specializing at the Submarine School from 1968 to 1974 he served in various positions aboard submarines and naval units, including as commander of the Garibaldi (Landing Helicopter Assault) in 1989-90. He attended NATO Defense College in Rome (Italy) and from 1981 to 1984 he served in Saclant (Norfolk-Virginia, United States). He held important and prestigious positions in the Navy Staff in 1994, after which he became head of the Military Policy Department of the Defence Staff and on November 30, 1998 head of the Cabinet of the Minister of Defence. Secretary General of Defence on March 26, 2001, he held office until March 10, 2004 when he was promoted to Chief of the Defence Staff, a position he held until February 12, 2008 when he was appointed chairman of the NATO Military Committee, composed of the Chiefs of Staff of the twenty-six countries of the alliance. On November 16, 2011 he was appointed Minister of Defence of the Italian Republic and in this role he also held the position of Chancellor and Treasurer of the Military Order of Italy.

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It seems as if a century had passed, yet it has only been a year or so since Donald Trump, the US President at the time, claimed that NATO was obsolete, while French President Macron declared it to be experiencing brain death.

On the contrary, the Atlantic Alliance would appear to be not only in good form but also very cerebrally active and on the road to reconsidering itself.

Furthermore, the new security scenarios on the one hand and the new US presidency on the other call for a reconsideration and a renewed reflection on the strategy of the Alliance.

NATO Secretary General (SG), Norwegian Jan Stoltenberg, has long called the allies to a new vision of the Alliance, a vision that he called “Alliance 2030” and which he outlined, in numerous public statements, based on the following three cornerstones:

— *a NATO that continues to be a solid and strong military alliance*; that is an Alliance which can invest to a greater extent in its defence, equipped with modern capabilities in an era in which, with the emergence of new dis-

ruptive technologies - such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, new nanotechnologies, and unmanned and hypersonic weapon systems - we are witnessing the advent of a new revolution in Military Affairs which led the Americans to coin the term “Hyperwarfare”, that is, conducting operations at speeds and with decision-making times and very short action/reaction that would have been previously unthinkable;

— *a NATO that boasts a strengthened political alliance*; because NATO is the only place where European and North Atlantic countries meet and work together on a daily basis. Therefore, it behoves us to strengthen this organization and to increasingly use the Alliance as a forum for frank political confrontation on all issues relating to security (from potential Russian challenges, to the Middle East, to Africa and, last but not least, to China the impact of its growth as a global power on our security);

— *a NATO with a more global approach*, because despite being a regional Alliance, the challenges it faces are increasingly global. Cyber threats, Russian assertiveness, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, climate change and China, whose rise is radically changing the balance of Power, shifting the geopolitical centre of gravity from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. China is a systemic competitor in terms of political, economic and

“NATO and the European Union have begun a reflection and analysis process that will bring about a renewal and better adaptation to the future in order to better respond to the challenges and threats of the new geopolitical and geostrategic context” (Heading image source: repubblica.it and iss.europa.eu). Below: NATO Secretary General Jan Stoltenberg who “has long called the allies to a new vision of the Alliance”. Photographed together with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (EC).



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value structure and, broadly speaking, a challenge to our security and to our technological leadership, a challenge that requires a collective and coordinated approach between Europe and the United States to increase our competitiveness and resilience and defend a liberal global order based on the Rule of Law.

Based upon this vision and on the mandate of the



Heads of State and Government of the Alliance, in early 2020 the NATO created a small advisory committee (which includes Italian Marta Dassù) to reflect and make proposals on the NATO of the future, a reflection that would constitute the basis for establishing a new “Strategic Concept of the Alliance” to replace the one currently in force, approved in Lisbon in 2010 and which no longer reflects the current and future strategic context, in which Russia has once more become a global player with power projection on a global — and no longer regional — scale, (and no longer a strategic partner as it was in the first decade of this century), and China has emerged as a new systemic rival.

The result of the work of the advisory committee, co-chaired by American A. Wess Mitchell (diplomat and senior US official) and by German Thomas de Maizière (former German Minister of Interior and Defence) was set forth in a substantial report presented to the NATO SG and member countries in November 2020 entitled: *NATO 2030 - United for a new Era*.



Diplomat and senior US official A. Wess Mitchell (useu.usmission.gov) who co-chairs, along with German politician and former German Minister of Interior and Defence Thomas de Maizière (opposite) (financialtribune.com), the small advisory committee set up in early 2020 to reflect and make proposals on the NATO of the future.

As Marta Dassù reminds us in an article written for the Aspen Institute (1), the “vision” and conclusions of the report may be summarized in the following three key messages:

- *first*: the security context in which NATO operates has greatly changed since 2010 and is dominated by competition between great powers and increased global risks and requires a new strategic concept. Russian assertiveness, has become more pronounced and dangerous (Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Belarus, the poisonings of Skripal and Navalny and more recently, and as far as Italy and the Italian Armed Forces, are concerned the case of alleged military espionage). Simultaneously, China has preemptively emerged as a systemic “rival”; the southern flank is being ravaged by numerous conflicts, and disruptive technological revolution is having a destructive impact on the security environment.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that NATO must acquire a global perspective in order to remain relevant to the security of its member countries and to contribute to international stability. This means having a more comprehensive approach to security which, for example, strengthens the partnership with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

It is interesting to observe how this reflection recalls

and is in accord with the position recently taken by the United States under the Biden presidency to re-establish collaboration between the democracies of the Indo-Pacific, the so-called Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, United States, Japan, Australia and India) (2) in terms of competition and containment of China.

Similarly, in addition to confronting Russia with an effective deterrent, NATO will have to address the ongoing threat of terrorism, the emergence of new challenges and risks in the Arctic region and the instability of the Southern European flank, because as the report states “when NATO’s Southern Neighborhood is more stable, NATO is more secure”;

- second: the second decade of this century saw the growth of authoritarian powers whose aim is to weaken Western democracies and the liberal-democratic global order that has been consolidated in the last seventy years, since the end of the Second World War.

But beyond that, the security of NATO allies is being subjected to global threats stemming from climate change, pandemics and the dangers of malicious use (malware) of the cyber domain. In essence, we are living in an era of strategic simultaneity, where security threats and challenges are multidimensional. The second key message is based on this observation, namely that NATO, while remaining a strong military Alliance, in order to gain and maintain public support of the citizens of the Alliance, that is vital in democracy, must also actively support the *aspect of “Human Security” and resilience of our democratic societies*.

Consequently, a new chapter continuous adaptation of the Alliance, a chapter that is needed in order to avoid the risk of decoupling in the assessment of the challenges, risks and threats between the US, focused on the Asia-Pacific region (the famous “pivot to Asia” pursued by the Obama administration), and the European allies, essentially focused on European theatre and neighborhood.

This potential risk lead us to the third key message;

- third: the relationship between NATO and the European Union is absolutely central and essential. The development of an effective and efficient European defence dimension must certainly be encouraged, however within a framework of complete synergy and complementarity with NATO and in a context of



The leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) have recently re-established collaboration between Indo-Pacific democracies. From left: Indian Prime Minister N. Modi, the 46th President of the United States, Joe Biden, the Japanese Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga, and Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia (yahoo.com).

stronger institutional and political ties between the two organizations without exclusion or exceptionist for non-Eu European NATO countries.

This last key message of reflection concerning NATO brings us to the European perspective on the security dimension.

It is clear that Macron’s claim that NATO was “experiencing brain death” was a hyperbole of controversy aimed at awakening the EU and its members from what he believed to be strategic lethargy. Moreover, Macron himself, on February 19, 2020, in his speech at the special remote edition of the traditional Munich Security Conference, stated: “I do believe in NATO, I do believe NATO needs a new political momentum and clarification of its strategic concept”(3).

As a matter of fact, starting from the approval of the *Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy* in June 2016, where, for the first time ever, some reference was made to the concept of strategic autonomy and to “the EU need for to be strengthened as a

security community: European security and defence efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing in undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO", the EU has begun a progressive path of institutional and operational strengthening of its capabilities in the security dimension. I am referring to PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) but also to the European Defence Fund which, for the first time ever in the history of the Union, allocates common resources for technological research and the development of military capabilities in the Defence sector of the order of approximately 8 billion euros in 5 years, certainly not much but it's a start.

However, in the face of a Union that was still proceeding timidly both with regard to political will and in terms of Defence capabilities, Macron relaunched the initiative for a strong strategic autonomy of the Union in the field of security with the acquisition of important High End military capabilities to be developed and acquired in Europe also through the consolidation and strengthening of the European defence industrial base. This French vision was recently reiterated by President Macron in his speech at the aforementioned Munich Security Conference last February during which he stated: *"the concept of strategic autonomy for Europe does not mean an attempt to distance Europe from the United States damaging NATO, but actually the opposite, because if you look at the issue of "burden sharing" in the Alliance, you will see how a large part of the investments and commitments are incurred by the United States. I think that this (the strategic autonomy of the Union) is the way to rebalance the transatlantic relationship and prove to our American ally and friend that we (the Europeans) are a reliable and responsible partner and I also believe that having a European Union that invests much more in defence makes us much more credible as members of NATO"*(4).

However, the debate on the strategic autonomy of the Union relaunched by France is still perceived with some reservation by Germany, which looks at a more militarily assertive and muscular policy by the Union with caution, even fear, dreading the risk of a potential decoupling from NATO and the United States, a risk that is more strongly perceived by northern and eastern

European countries which view a strong NATO and US presence in Europe as the only guaranteed effective deterrent and defence from any possible Russian threat.

Political and strategic thinking circles of the US ally appear to be of two minds regarding the issue of European strategic autonomy. Indeed, on the one hand, there is a desire to see Europeans substantially increase, both financially and operationally, their contribution to common defence, while on the other there is fear that the concept of strategic autonomy may in the long run imply, even unintentionally, a "decoupling" effect, with a consequent weakening of the Alliance.

The most recent European initiative in the security sector must be framed within this context, that is, the ongoing elaboration of a "Strategic Compass" for the Union in the field of defence and security. The exercise, which is in its initial phase, should be completed within one year and has the primary aim of bestowing greater concreteness and strategic direction to the European ambition of becoming a more significant Security Player. To this end, the strategic compass will begin with the assessment of the security threats and challenges facing the Union, in order to identify concrete capabilities needed to make the Union more capable, more effective and more operationally ready and able to respond in a timely manner to crises and to provide security. The Union will have to increase its resilience also through secure access to the so-called "Global Commons" (such as: cyber, maritime spaces, space); to determine its vulnerabilities and gaps in the security and defence sector, and to increase mutual assistance and solidarity between EU member countries.

Within this context, as represented by General Graziano (5), president of the European Military Committee, in his hearing on the *Strategic Compass* at the Senate Defence Commission in late March this year, the military component of the Union feels the need to equip itself with robust command and control systems, advanced planning capabilities, more effective force generation processes, more effective procedures for the development of military capabilities in every possible scenario, including the most demanding ones that require a Full Spectrum Force Package, that is high end military capabilities (as is said in operational military jargon).

In conclusion, both NATO and the European Union have begun a reflection and analysis process that will bring about a renewal and better adaptation to the future in order to better respond to the challenges and threats of the new geopolitical and geostrategic context, which have been dealt with in the first part of this article. The mother of all challenges will be to ensure complete and strong strategic and operational coherence to the two processes so as to avoid any risk, albeit veiled and unwanted, of a decoupling of the two organizations, all the while respecting their respective decision-making autonomies and simultaneously increasing European military capabilities to a significant extent, in a European and Atlantic framework, so as to ensure that Europeans play a more significant and balanced military role and capability within the Atlantic Alliance.

In this challenge, Italy (together with France, Germany as well as our British partner) can and must play an important role. Italy's conviction and commitment, both within NATO and the transatlantic relationship, as well as in the growth of the security role of the European Union, is not only traditionally known but also above suspicion. This is particularly the case today with the current government of national unity under the leadership of Prime Minister Mario Draghi and the institutional supervision of the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella. Furthermore, on the operational level, the Italian Armed Forces are engaged in an important process of modernization in terms of technology and capabilities, further supported by a valid and effective industrial base.

Just to name one, the following is an example. Top-level operational capabilities such as the F-35, available today to both the Italian air and naval forces (the *Cavour* aircraft carrier, which is currently in the United States operating the *Joint Strike Fighter*, has recently been awarded this qualification), make the Italian mil-




“The top-level operational capabilities such as the F-35, available today to both the Italian air and naval forces (the Cavour aircraft carrier, which is currently in the United States operating the Joint Strike Fighter, has recently been awarded this qualification - the image depicts the aircraft on the flight deck of the unit), make the Italian military instrument a participant in a very small transatlantic elite equipped with this exclusive and advanced capability”. Alongside: the president of the Military Committee of the European Union, General Claudio Graziano according to whom “the military component of the Union feels the need to equip itself with robust command and control systems, advanced planning capabilities, more effective force generation processes, more effective procedures for the development of military capabilities in every possible scenario” (Image source: difesa.it).



itary instrument a participant in a very small transatlantic *elite* equipped with this exclusive and advanced capability. Furthermore, the substantial ongoing renewal of the national naval component places Italy in the position of playing a leading role in the maritime dimension both in NATO and European contexts, aspect domain that acquires even more weight and relevance in the face of the global rise of China.

This military potential and capabilities rightly bestow an important role on Italy in the adaptation processes of the two organizations which we are part of and which must be supported and directed with coherent political and political-military guidance that can ensure complete and more advanced coordination, complementarity and interoperability between NATO and the European Union.

In a nutshell: *“more Italy in Europe, more Europe in NATO”*. 

NOTES

- (1) Marta Dassù, *La nuova NATO e la sfida con Pechino*, December 7, 2020, [aspeniaonline.it](https://aspeniaonline.it/la-nuova-nato-e-la-sfida-con-pechino), <https://aspeniaonline.it/la-nuova-nato-e-la-sfida-con-pechino>.
- (2) Roberto Menotti, *Biden, il «Quad» indo-pacifico e la diplomazia costruttiva*, March 15, 2021, [aspeniaonline.it](https://aspeniaonline.it/biden-il-quad-indo-pacifico-e-la-diplomazia-costruttiva), <https://aspeniaonline.it/biden-il-quad-indo-pacifico-e-la-diplomazia-costruttiva>.
- (3) [europeanaffairs.it](https://www.europeanaffairs.it/blog/2020/02/21/conferenza-di-monaco-macron-guarda-ad-oriente), February 21, 2020, <https://www.europeanaffairs.it/blog/2020/02/21/conferenza-di-monaco-macron-guarda-ad-oriente>.
- (4) [europeanaffairs.it](https://www.europeanaffairs.it/blog/2020/02/21/conferenza-di-monaco-macron-guarda-ad-oriente), February 21, 2020, <https://www.europeanaffairs.it/blog/2020/02/21/conferenza-di-monaco-macron-guarda-ad-oriente>.
- (5) *Un compasso strategico per la Difesa europea. La linea del gen. Graziano*, <https://formiche.net/2021/03/strategico-compass-graziano-difesa-europea>.