

2022 NATO Madrid Summit: The Response of the Atlantic Alliance

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Introduction

Between the 28 and 30 of June, the 2022 Madrid Summit gathered the heads of state and governments of NATO Member States and partners, representing a crucial point for discussing the future of the Atlantic alliance. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has, in fact, forced NATO to come up with an agreement on further measures in response to Moscow. At the same time, the Alliance also had to define a new collective security doctrine to follow throughout the future global scenario. As for the first objective, the Summit has returned four fundamental measures: the deployment of brigade-sized formations; an increase of NATO response forces; the decision to pre-position equipment and facilities, especially in Eastern Europe; and the formal invitation of Finland and Sweden to join the organisation. Looking at the future, the Madrid Summit resulted in the elaboration of the New Strategic Concept, a document aiming to orient the Alliance actions over the next decade. As stated by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, these fundamental decisions sealed the 2022 NATO Summit as “historic and transformative (...), demonstrating the Alliance's unity and the ability of NATO to adapt when the world is changing”.

A Fundamental Shift to Deterrence and Defence

The necessity to increase the measures in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine has first encompassed the decision to deploy brigade-sized formations, scaling up the current multinational battlegroups. This commitment, to be implemented “where and when required” (Madrid Summit Declaration, para 9), comprises a significant involvement of U.S. forces that will deploy a Brigade Combat Team in Romania, additional forces in the Baltics, and especially a first permanent American base in Poland.

Secondly, the Allies have agreed on replacing the current NATO Response Force with a new NATO Force Model that will provide a larger pool of high readiness forces across all domains. More in detail, it envisages the deployment of 100,000 troops in up to 10-days readiness and 200,000 units up to 30 days, thus significantly scaling up the previous model, which provided for 40,000 forces that needed up to 15 days to be deployed. Another fundamental news is the establishment of pre-assigned forces to defend specific allies. As a consequence, France will be ready to deploy a brigade to Romania, while the United Kingdom has already allocated one to Estonia.

Third, following this strengthening of NATO's forces on Russian borders, the Allies have agreed to pre-position equipment and weapon stockpiles. These measures will be supported by more forward-deployed capabilities, including integrated air and missile defence systems, and by strengthening command and control.

These technical and tactical advancements were flanked by the operational - and partially political - decision to invite Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance, a development enabled by the memorandum of understanding that the two countries have eventually reached with Türkiye. Moreover, on the 5th of July, the 30 NATO Ambassadors signed the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden, guaranteeing them the status of “invitees” and the right to participate in the Alliance’s discussions. If Helsinki and Stockholm join NATO, the border between the Atlantic Allies and the Russian Federation will lengthen by 1340 kilometres. In this new scenario of expansion in the Baltic, it might then be up to Europe to manage the future new frontier.

The New Strategic Concept

Presenting how to navigate through the next decade, NATO’s New Strategic Concept keeps its 2010 predecessor’s priorities. The core tasks presented in the document refer to a) deterrence and defence, b) crisis prevention and management, and c) cooperative security. However, the new strategic context, defined first by the Russian aggression on Ukraine, has determined a new understanding of such duties. The Concept reports, in fact, that “the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered the peace and gravely altered our security environment” (NATO, 2022, p. 1). Also it has proceeded to define Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area” (NATO, 2022, para 8). Moreover, NATO confirms its defensive nature, stating that it “does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to the Russian Federation”, while it “will continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a united and responsible way” (NATO, 2022, para 9).

In this framework, NATO also considers the role played by China. The New Strategic Concept clearly recognises that the PRC’s “stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values”, reminding that “the deepening strategic partnership between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests.” (NATO, 2022, para 13). In this way, for the first time, NATO adds China to the list of challenges posed to the security of the Allies. However, NATO members remain open to any constructive engagement with PRC, recognised as fundamental to safeguarding the Alliance’s security interests. Moreover, the importance of the Indo-Pacific region as a whole is strongly emphasised, “given that developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security” (NATO, 2022, para 45). Similarly, the Concept reminds of the importance of the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel region, as they share security threats and challenges strictly linked to the Allies’ interests.

In this broader analysis of the strategic environment in which NATO will operate during the next decade, particular attention is paid to new security challenges related to climate change, hybrid threats and cyberspace. Moreover, in response to the risks posed by the emerging and disruptive technologies, the Concept states that the Allies will “promote innovation and increase our investments to retain our interoperability and military edge” (NATO, 2022, para 24). Following this commitment, during the Madrid Summit, the Allies have brought significant progress for NATO’s Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic – DIANA. The strategic environment described in the New Strategic Concept reminds us well of the relevance of terrorism, that, in all of its forms and manifestations, is defined as “the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and international peace and prosperity” (NATO, 2022, para 10).

Conclusions

Overall, the Madrid Summit can be considered as the formally elaborated response of the Allies to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Especially the likely accession of Finland and Sweden, proposed in the wake of the war in Ukraine, represents a turning point in the history of the Atlantic Alliance. As stated by Secretary General Stoltenberg, “President Putin wanted less NATO. Now he is getting more NATO on his borders” (MSNBC, 2022). The presence of a well-identified enemy, widely recognised as such, has given new strength to the Atlantic Alliance, which in recent times has been questioned about its scopes and *raison d’être*.

The question mark is thus on the role of the European Union, which may see its chances for strategic autonomy fading behind the reinvigorated presence of NATO. However, this new set-up can also represent an opportunity for the Union. In case of Finland and Sweden’s accession to NATO, the EU would be at the forefront for managing these new fragile relations with Moscow.

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