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CHALLENGES TO EUROPEAN AND EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY

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Abstract: *The current security environment is characterized by uncertainty and multiple transformations in all areas. Mankind as a whole enjoys an extremely favorable context and an indisputable climate of security. However, security challenges are becoming more and more difficult to anticipate. The last few years have brought a new pandemic challenge to all states, which has put all systems to the test. In addition to the pandemic challenge, European and Euro-Atlantic countries face a military challenge that has the potential to directly affect regional and global security and cause shock waves in all areas, especially in the economic, political, diplomatic and military field. To these major challenges are added the challenges that have now faded into the background, such as climate change, the impact of natural disasters, organized crime, terrorism, and so on. In order to meet these new challenges, the European and Euro-Atlantic states must demonstrate cohesion and determination and take effective and decisive action to protect their interests and ensure the security and stability of their allies.*

Keywords: security, challenge, threat, tensions, conflict

1. Introduction

The security environment has undergone many changes in recent decades. After a period of relative calm, in which the world order seemed to have consolidated and settled, with a single pole of power, we have witnessed in recent years multiple attempts to change this world order, whether we are talking about the return of Russia among the great recognized powers, or we are talking about China's assertion as a great global power. Tensions are also rising in different parts of the globe, which have the potential to give rise to regional conflicts, such as the Persian Gulf, the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, the Sea of Japan, the Philippines, Ukraine, and so on.

Military challenges can have major, long-term consequences and have political, economic, diplomatic, etc. repercussions. But these challenges are not the only ones that can mark the evolution of the security environment. To the list of current challenges we can add the challenges related to climate change, energy poverty, drought and water scarcity in certain areas, continued instability in regions of Africa and the Middle East, migratory waves, risks of new pandemics, etc.

2. Global security environment considerations

The global security environment is increasingly complex and unpredictable and is characterized by ongoing global competition, "both above and below the threshold of armed conflict" [1], some actors want to take advantage by using hybrid conflict-specific tactics, to take actions that attract as little attention as possible, by intertwining economic, cultural

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and ideological means, both in the physical environment and especially in the cyber environment, while other actors have created the specific framework through previous actions, and now they have decided to use the military instrument to achieve military and political objectives. Among the goals pursued we can certainly identify the desire to redraw the spheres of influence, the quest for international reaffirmation and even the desire to change the world order.

The shift in world order from the supremacy of Western states to multiple poles of power and the threat to the rule-based global order is determined by a number of factors [2], such as disruptive technologies, terrorism, the assertion of new actors, plus arms control and nuclear deterrence, pandemics and natural disasters, space challenges, misinformation, hybrid and cyber threats [3]. Tensions on the international stage are amplified by the fact that the domination of the United States and Western states gathered under the NATO umbrella is undeniable, and the model promoted by them is seen by many states as a role model, thus being encouraged to approach or even integrate in the politico-military alliance. Due to the lack of effective tools to counteract this influence, some states seem to have lost their patience and decided to act unilaterally in what was intended to be a show of force. The outcome of this approach, at least in the case of Russia, will be decisive and therefore the international response must be strong enough to discourage similar manifestations in the future. An unconvincing response from the international community can encourage other actors to try to achieve their goals through the use of force and the politics of accomplishment.

So far, the response of Western states to Russia's aggression has been quite strong, proportionate to the events, and has demonstrated the cohesion of NATO and the EU in the face of a common danger, these states succeeding in overcoming dissensions and the fact that individual interests are different and accepting the idea that maintaining regional security and stability has a high price, a price that must be assumed in order to avoid repeating history.

The analysis of the security strategies of the main states that have or want to have a say on the international stage (permanent members of the UN Security Council, members of the G7, E7 or BRICS) concluded that the main threats to peace and security are [4]:

“use of force to resolve disputes, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, cyber threats, transnational organized crime, environmental degradation and climate change, migration, economic threats, reduced access to resources”, degradation or lack of infrastructure.

To ensure national and international security, states must be prepared not only to defend themselves against armed aggression but also to adapt to new security challenges [5].

The challenges in the security environment are multiple and with a dynamic almost impossible to anticipate. The positioning of the main actors in relation to the main themes, as well as their attempts to change the world order, have the potential to destabilize entire regions or even to provoke high-intensity conflicts, either directly between the main competitors on the international stage or through intermediaries. What is certain is that the long period of world peace, which began after World War II, could end dramatically, with a major confrontation between China and the United States, as a result of China's attempts to assert itself as the only regional or even as a world power, or as a consequence of the escalating tensions between Russia and NATO and the United States respectively, amid the conflict in Ukraine, which has the potential to go beyond current borders in the event of an

attack on an Alliance member state and on the basis of direct or indirect threats to use nuclear weapons in case of need [6]. Of course, there are many other points of pressure where conflicts can arise, but these, in our opinion, do not have the potential to provoke a global conflict, whether we are talking about the Middle East, North Korea or even North Africa. In addition to the threat of a major conflict, the international security environment may face climate and human security challenges in the near future, which are in fact strongly interconnected, whether we are talking about natural disasters, food crises, migratory waves, etc.

Experts, analyzing the international situation, have developed five scenarios for the evolution of humanity towards the horizon of 2040 [7]: the rebirth of democracies, a drifting world, competitive coexistence, enclavisation, mobilization (solidarity) after a humanitarian tragedy. The basis of these scenarios is the analysis of experts who have taken into account a number of variables and courses of action, starting from the current situation. The evolution of society is unpredictable and depends on many factors, and the decisions of each state and how they address the various challenges will bring us closer to one or another of the scenarios.

3. Challenges to European and Euro-Atlantic security

At present the European and Euro-Atlantic space "will face an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the growing spectre of great power competition and conflict, while collective, transnational threats to all nations and actors compete for our attention and finite resources" [8]. Challenges in the international security environment, regardless of their type, form of manifestation and scale, "will intersect and interact in unpredictable ways, leading to mutually reinforcing effects that could challenge the ability to respond, but also introducing new opportunities to forge collective action with allies and partners against both the renewed threat of nation-state aggression and emerging threats to human security" [9]. The United States, along with NATO and EU allies, must meet these challenges, which have the potential to amplify, find new forms of manifestation, and cause a shock wave regionally or even globally, with effects difficult to anticipate and manage.

The analysis of the security environment shows that, in this period of profound transformations, threats and challenges of all kinds are amplifying and finding new ways of manifestation.

Threats to the safety and security of citizens and to the security and stability of states may arise both from the environment and as a result of human, intentional or accidental activities and may occur in all physical environments, including cosmic environment and cyber environment. The most important threats that influence the way society evolves and determine global transformations can be [10]: climate action failure, extreme weather, biodiversity failure, social cohesion erosion, livelihood crises, infectious diseases, human environmental damage, natural resources crisis (including energy resources), debt crisis, geoeconomic confrontation etc (as shown in Figure 1). In addition to these threats, which are more pronounced economically and socially, but also environmentally, we can list a wide range of other threats such as unequal digital development, cyber attacks, limiting access to modern technologies, proliferation of emerging technologies with destructive potential, the uncontrolled development of artificial intelligence, interstate relation fracture, geopolitical resources contestation, critical public infrastructure failure, interstate conflicts, state collapse (due to conflicts, natural disasters, civil war, climate change, economic collapse etc.), terrorism, natural disasters, development of weapons of mass destruction, organized

crime, culminating with the threat of a regional or even global conflict. Taking into account the complexity of international relations and the dependencies between the different domains of human existence, the fact that the effects of independent actions can generate cascading effects, with evolutions difficult to anticipate, etc. it can be said that security threats will continue to evolve and produce political, economic, and military transformations.



Figure 1: Main 10 global threats

Among the challenges to regional and global security, which have the potential to trigger a major conflict between the US or NATO on the one hand and other actors with regional or global aspirations, we can list China, Russia, North Korea, Iran. China wants to assert itself as a great power and challenges American domination in the Pacific, trying to use the economic tools at its disposal to consolidate its power, while increasing military power and imposing its own security objectives in the disputed areas, including Taiwan, which China sees as a rebellious province, who needs to be brought back under control. This can only be achieved by military means, but Taiwan, heavily backed by the US with military equipment, promises to oppose China's exaggerated demands. In the context of the Russian intervention in Ukraine, China will most likely moderate its actions because it could see the cohesion of Western states and the impact that economic sanctions can have, especially given that China's economy is much more connected to Western states than the Russian one. China will also seek to strengthen its military capabilities in line with growing economic and cultural influence in various parts of the globe, as is now the case with Africa.

Russia poses a much greater challenge to global security because of its desire to assert itself as a great power by all means and as a result of its actions in Ukraine.

Regardless of the outcome, Russia will emerge weak from this confrontation, both economically and militarily, and as an image because it is and will continue to be marginalized on the international stage. The course of events and the decisions to be taken in the near future will determine the extent to which events will escalate and the extent to which Russia will be directly and indirectly affected. The events in Ukraine and Russia's attitude have effects not only in terms of security, from the perspective of the immediate consequences, but also in terms of the economy because all states will suffer.

Another actor that has the potential to affect regional security is Iran, which remains a source of tension, by direct threat to Israel, by supporting various local militias, by getting involved in regional conflicts, etc., but also by trying to continue research in military nuclear field. Iran is also subject to international economic sanctions that affect its ability to act but continue to develop its military capabilities. A possible escalation of the situation has the potential to give rise to a regional crisis, with potential for expansion due to the direct and indirect impact it would have on the oil supply of European countries in particular.

Another critical point is North Korea, which sees the development of the nuclear program as a way to maintain some regional relevance and maintain internal control. It is quite unlikely that in the short and medium term the situation will degenerate into a direct confrontation because the country does not have the economic and military potential to sustain a conflict and the alliance system in the areas is not favorable to it, although it can enjoy support from China and even Russia.

In addition to the military challenges to regional and global security, we can also identify other major challenges that can affect the economic, energy, environmental and even military security of states and regions. These include climate change and natural disasters, diseases and pandemics, chemical and biological weapons, cyber threats that can be sustained by states and can be a continuation of the state's official policy to create instability and uncertainty, etc. To which we can add migration, organized crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, etc.

4. NATO's role in the current security environment

In this unpredictable international context, NATO remains a factor of stability and an actor capable of intervening in crisis management, as it continues to provide the framework for security and defense across the operational spectrum, whether collective defense, crisis management or security through cooperation. Today NATO has to deal with “a dangerous, unpredictable and fluid security environment, with major challenges and threats from all directions, both from state and non-state actors, cyber threats, terrorism, hybrid warfare, intelligence operations. etc.” [11], all culminating in the outbreak of a “special military operation” [12] in Ukraine, military action that plunged Europe into an unprecedented crisis with the potential to provoke an economic crisis and even escalate the conflict outside Ukraine, while exacerbating the crisis of confidence between Russia on the one hand and Western states on the other hand.

In order to cope with the complex situation and maintain its superiority over potential adversaries, NATO has constantly adapted to changes in the security environment and found solutions to create a regional and even global security climate, ensuring the security of the Member States against any form of threat. However, the fact that NATO has shown adaptability in the past is no guarantee of its future success. In order to survive and remain effective and, most importantly, relevant, NATO must continue to adapt to the new strategic circumstances [13], strengthen the common defense capacity, demonstrate the solidarity of the

Member States and the determination to defend the common interests, regardless of the immediate interests of some Member States. A potential opponent will be interested in weakening the cohesion of the alliance and its determination, will try to sow the seeds of mistrust and to supply the existing sources of tension or to create faults in this common defense bloc. Since failures are created politically, economically, at the level of public opinion, it will be easier for them to be exploited in order to reduce the reaction capacity of the alliance and the desire to act decisively. NATO's adaptation must be continuous to meet the needs of an international security environment marked by a return to systemic rivalry, increased Russian aggression, China's global assertion, increasing the role and impact of emerging and disruptive technologies, while counteracting increasing risks and transnational threats [14].

NATO, as the main player in the regional security environment, faces multidimensional challenges to the collective security of its eastern flank that originate in Russia and can be amplified and deployed in strategic depth in non-physical areas [15].

The destabilization campaigns seek to overthrow the current global order that Russia considers hostile to its own strategic interests, and to achieve this change Russia seems willing to bear significant costs and consequences and uses specific actions of information warfare, interference in the domestic policy of various states, sponsorship of cyber attacks, energy blackmail and other active measures considered appropriate and effective. Russia's determination to change the current situation and return to the situation during the Cold War when it received the support of satellite states and a significant buffer zone is also evident in the proposals it made to NATO states before the start of the conflict in Ukraine: the withdrawal of NATO forces from Eastern Europe, the renunciation of any kind of enlargement, but also the granting of the right of veto to Russia regarding the major NATO decisions concerning the organization of exercises or the deployment of defensive forces [16], which affects the very essence of the alliance - the concept of collective defense. Russia's demands, seen by some as a legitimate concern, cannot be met by NATO because that would mean accepting that Member States are not equal, of equal importance, and cannot enjoy the same security guarantees.

6. Conclusions

The current security environment is characterized by a number of challenges, both military and non-military, that have the potential to irreversibly affect regional and global security. In recent years, the security environment has been marked by the emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic, which has tested the health care system, the economy, but also the resilience of people, communities and states, as well as their ability to adapt to new situations. The global pandemic has caught all the attention and issues such as the impact of climate change, drought, poverty, human migration, etc. faded into the background. In parallel with the complex challenges associated with the pandemic, there has been an intensification of cyber actions, attacks that have behind them individuals, organized crime groups or even states. Cyber attacks have highlighted the vulnerability of modern society to hostile activities in the cyber environment and led the states to identify countermeasures. The cyber environment has started to be used more and more to influence people or decision makers, being a real battlefield of information warfare, in which currents of opinion are formed, the results of elections are influenced or the attention of public opinion and decision makers is directed. On the other hand, there is an escalation of the energy war and an attempt to use energy resources as a blackmail tool to determine the action or inaction of some states on the

current issue of utmost importance. At the same time, the tactics of hybrid warfare have been increasingly used to create faults between states, within alliances, etc., all to prepare the ground for challenging the world order based on rules and to consolidate the international position. The culmination of developments in the security environment is the invasion of Ukraine, based on Russia's strategic fears and non-existent rights to decide the fate of other states. This invasion is the biggest security challenge today, but also a test of international solidarity and cohesion. It seems that the EU and NATO have passed this test by managing to put aside sometimes dissenting objectives and interests and implementing soft power measures, especially in economic, diplomatic and political filed, in order to punish aggressive behavior and to discourage other actors from following the same path, such as China trying to gain control of Taiwan. NATO and the EU's refusal to get directly involved in the conflict is a realistic approach, which seeks to reduce the risk of the situation degenerating and this local conflict turning into a regional or even global conflict with potentially devastating consequences. The economic price paid by all states outweighs the benefits at international level and shows that the use of force is not a solution to resolving disputes, the current crisis is a strong signal that NATO must adapt to meet the challenges of the security environment because of efforts Russia to "undermine and threaten the alliance and its partners and due to China's increased global role, the threat posed by climate change, and crises in Europe's neighborhood, the allies are again forced to adapt to make NATO fit for purpose" [17].

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