SMART DEFENCE.
THE RECURRENCE OF AN EVOLVING IDEA

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Abstract: *During 2012 NATO Summit, held in Chicago, a new defence planning initiative was launched – smart defence. In fact, this idea seems to mark at a great extent the entire NATO-related debates in the current period of time. Smart defence is often regarded as a saving idea which can guarantee the preservation of NATO ability to fulfill its core missions under the austerity conditions, having at its basis the principle which can be summarized as "more defence for less money".*

The present paper argues that smart defence is not a genuinely new concept, as preoccupations to make defence investment more efficient and equitable are as old as the Alliance. Smart defence is only a new name for an old, but boosted idea brought forth by the current international context.

Keywords*: smart defence; Defence Capabilities Initiative; Prague Capabilities Commitment; world economic and financial crisis; European issues.*

1. Smart defence within the present international context

Ever since the beginning of the world's economic and financial crisis, most of the discussions regarding NATO focused on its relevance in guaranteeing regional security, its role after the withdrawal from Middle East theaters of operations and, especially, on finding innovative solutions to maintain its capacity to accomplish the full range of missions assumed through the Treaty of Washington and Strategic Concept. Actually, this entire rhetoric is about the Alliance's ability to adapt to a changing international security environment, whose dynamic has been much accelerated by the economic and financial crisis, a strategic shock[1] determining recalculations in terms of international policy and national interests.

Nevertheless, NATO's history stands as a proof of its flexibility, of its capacity to continuously adapt to a fluid international security environment, to strategic shocks, of its unalterable capacity to preserve its relevance for the Euro-Atlantic security.

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In this line of thought, we shall not forget that NATO was formed as a political military alliance, meant to counter Soviet threat during Cold War. The fact that, after almost a quarter of a century since the disappearance of its creation's reason, Euro-Atlantic security still cannot be discussed outwith NATO, is extremely relevant in this respect.

For NATO, world's economic and financial crisis came with a serious financial and economic challenge. This phenomenon impacted on all its Member States, inclusively, on their military budgets. Concomitantly, the economic and financial crisis was not the only source of challenges. Conflicts are still a constant in international system, North Africa and the Middle East have experienced an escalation of internal crises at the end of 2010 and, in Syria, there is still an ongoing civil war. The instability associated to these states' transition to other forms of political organization also equal to an increase of terrorist risk for the Euro-Atlantic region, as well as to a proliferation of weak states, organized crime, to greater flows of migrants and refugees. At the same time, we are still living in a nuclear world and counter-piracy and countering cyber attacks also became important security preoccupations. Besides all these, one shall also take into account the fact that Washington decided to pay more attention to security in Asia-Pacific region.

A fresh approach of Euro-Atlantic security at NATO's level was, therefore, more than necessary. But, this was made in the regular manner, namely, by keeping fundamental ideas while adapting them to the current international context and challenges.

At the 2012 NATO summit, held in Chicago, the smart defence initiative was officially launched, being generally looked upon as an innovative solution to maintaining the Alliance capacities to undertake its core tasks agreed in 2010 Strategic Concept. Smart defence regards the generation of defence capabilities under austerity conditions, being a defence-planning related concept, meant to bring a balance in defence burden sharing.

Generally speaking, smart defence involves the development or procurement of necessary defence capabilities, at the Alliance level, which are too expensive to be procured individually by the Allies. Its implementation implies working together in multinational projects, according to three major principles – prioritization, specialization and cooperation.

However, the idea is not genuinely new as there can be found similarities with previous initiatives. Even NATO's official web page describes smart defence as "a

renewed culture of cooperation that encourages Allies to cooperate in developing, acquiring and maintaining military capabilities"[2].

2. Defence planning initiatives before smart defence

The idea of *burden sharing* is as old as the Alliance itself. Basically, it refers to the share of each Ally to NATO's capacity of undertaking its core missions. Also, one of the main issues related to this concept regards the contribution of US compared to the contribution of European Member States to the total budget of the Alliance. Smart defence is also connected to this issue as it was justified by NATO's Secretary General by the need to revise US contribution to the Alliance budget, given the fact that the American contribution was almost 75% of the total NATO budget[3].

Nevertheless, in our opinion, this is a consequence of NATO's need to readapt to the international context. Not only during the Cold War, but also in its aftermath, NATO was considered a framework for the US to guarantee European states security. Corroborated with Washington's financial resources, this state of facts allowed this lack of balance in Member States' contribution to NATO's budget.

One of the first initiatives in defence planning was launched in 1999, at Washington summit, together with a new strategic concept. *Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI)[4]* was the result of the lessons learned during NATO's operations in Western Balkans, an adaptation to non-article 5 missions. In fact, it reflects the needs of improvement in the aftermath of the first actions carried together by the Allies on the battle field. DCI objective was to "improve defence capabilities to ensure the effectiveness of future multinational operations across the full spectrum of Alliance missions in the present and foreseeable security environment with a special focus on improving interoperability among Alliance forces, and where applicable also between Alliance and Partner forces"[5].

DCI lays a great emphasis on improving capabilities in *multinational* formations, interoperability in out-of-area operations, deployability and mobility of the forces, on their sustainability and logistics, on improving command, control and information systems, training personnel and standardization. Also, developments in interoperability and critical capabilities were expected to strengthen European pillar in NATO[6]. Coordination and harmonization among the relevant planning disciplines as well as NATO standardization are part of DCI.

However, despite DCI relevance for the international context in which was

launched, it didn't provided the expected results because Member States weren't subjected to the need of a clear commitment in capabilities' improvement, nor did they set a scheduled implementation, milestones or assignments to designated states. As a result DCI is mostly considered an unsuccessful initiative and the reason for which the next defence planning reform at NATO's level also comprised references to this aspect, which contributed to a greater success on this line.

In 2002, at Prague Summit, the Allies launched another initiative meant to improve operational capabilities – *Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC)* due not only to uneven improvements under DCI, but also to the fact the Alliance had to adapt to another major strategic shock – 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In 2002, at Prague, the Allies also decided to create NATO Response Force (NRF) which was considered to be a "catalyst for focusing and promoting improvements in the Alliance's military capabilities"[7]. Also, PCC implied commitments of Member States to improve their capabilities in eight key areas: a) CBRN defence; b) intelligence, surveillance, and target acquisition; c) air-to-ground surveillance; d) command, control and communications; e) combat effectiveness; f) strategic air and sea lift; g) air-to-air refueling; h) deployable combat support and combat service support units.

Similarly to smart defence, projects under PCC developed on a multinational basis, in close cooperation between the Allies, aimed at acquiring critical capabilities which were difficult or even impossible to be procured on an individual basis. Improving military capabilities through PCC also supposed *multinational efforts*, *role specialization* and *reprioritization* and, sometimes, additional financial resources[8].

Another common issue on defence planning initiatives is represented by the European states' role in this context. Thus, soon after Prague Summit, NATO and EU issued a "NATO-EU declaration on ESDP" (16th December 2002), which reconfirmed EU's access to NATO planning capabilities for military operations led from Brussels. In March 2003, "Berlin Plus arrangements" offered the basis for NATO-EU cooperation in crisis management, allowing EU access to NATO's collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations. Additionally, it was set a NATO-EU Capability Group, meant to guarantee the coherence of NATO and EU military capabilities development. In Prague was also established a new Command Structure as there were set two strategic commands – an operational and a functional one.

In the same timeline with PCC, EU laid the bases for EU Battle Groups (EU's equivalent of NATO Response Force, but which has never been used) and the European Capability Action Programme. Both of them were meant to complement NATO's initiatives.

3. Smart defence – a renewed model of defence planning

Smart defence is focused on generating the necessary but very expensive military capabilities which cannot be afforded by the Allies on an individual basis, a state which has been amplified in the context of the economic and financial crisis and the subsequent military budgets' reductions.

As mentioned before, smart defence was launched under the circumstances of the economic and financial crisis, having at its basis the need of recalibrating Member States' financial contribution to NATO's budget. Similarly to the previous defence planning initiatives, smart defence also appeared on the background of a strategic shock – the world economic and financial crisis – and its necessity was emphasized by a military operation which revealed shortcomings and gaps in the Allies' capabilities endowment – Operation Unified Protector (Libya). Thus, smart defence is meant to bring a balance between US and European capabilities. Additionally, smart defence initiative has been preceded by an equivalent effort at EU's level (pooling and sharing/ European Defence Agency[9]), and, implicitly, by the stringent need of cooperation and coordination between the two organizations.

The decision to withdraw NATO forces from the Middle East theaters of operations (Iraq and Afghanistan) is also relevant for the significances of smart defence initiative as it means a transition from operational engagement to operational preparedness[10]. Thus, smart defence initiative was launched together with Connected Forces Initiative (CFI), which is a solution to maintain NATO forces at a high level of readiness and preparedness even when they aren't be engaged *de facto* on a theater of operation. CFI is, therefore, focused on "expanded education, training, increased exercises and better use of technology"[11].

Smart defence is only a part of the comprehensive plan established at Chicago in 2012 as it offers the path and the framework for pooling and sharing defence resources, but is accompanied by CFI, providing improved training and exercises and Force 2020 – the long-term plan for the type of NATO forces and of the results they shall produce at the end of this time line[12]. Also, in Chicago, was decided a new Command Structure.

CFI was thought to be aimed at creating an "organic jointness", namely at creating forces capable not only of acting as one, but also of thinking as one[13]. Given these circumstances, both CFI and Smart Defence involve fostering cooperation, integration and balance between the Allies. Smart Defence and CFI can be considered the two sides of the same coin – the financial solution and the actual framework of implementation.

It is also noteworthy another major similitude with PCC – the constituent components. In PCC case, capabilities development implied *multinational efforts*, *role specialization* and *reprioritization*. Smart defence also has three main dimensions – prioritization, specialization and cooperation within multinational projects. The two initiatives are different neither from the perspective of the context in which they appeared, nor in the terminology they use.

4. Comparative study

Defence planning reforms at NATO's level seem to happen in certain similar circumstances and contain a rather constant line (for a bird's eye view, see Table 1). DCI was launched in the context of Western Balkans conflicts, the first occasion for the Allies of acting together in this quality, revealing the need of improving interoperability and standardization. At the same time, it was about out-of area operations, which required a great emphasis on deployability, self-sustainability, information sharing and force protection outside NATO's territory.

As it can be seen in the figure below, there is a clear connection between the strategic contexts in which these initiatives were launched, the existence of a strategic shock having happened at a rather short time before and recent missions revealing shortcomings and gaps necessary to be overcame in order to maintain the Alliance's relevance and capacity of fulfilling its core missions.

Thus, with DCI, NATO adapted to a new strategic environment, to a unipolar one, where the main threats were connected to regional and ethnic conflicts. Its entire *raison d'être* needed to be adapted to this major strategic context change. PCC marked the need for developing the proper capabilities to approach the terrorist threat at the extent gained after 9/11 events and to adapt the Alliance's capacity of engaging in a new type of warfare. Additionally, there can be easily observed that DCI was less structured than the subsequent initiatives. Even more, given the fact that both DCI and PCC are based on the experience from Western Balkans missions and that their strategic context required the adaptation to non-article 5 missions, we

can assume that DCI was a prologue for the much better structured PCC, a source of lessons learned for a better defence planning reform at NATO's level.

Table 1. Comparative study DCI – PCC – Smart Defence. Context and content

	Defence Capabilities Initiative (1999)	**Prague Capabilities Commitment (2002)**	**Smart Defence (2012)**
Strategic context	- Unipolarity - First actions of NATO on theaters of operations - Non-article 5 missions - Regional conflicts	- Unipolarity - NATO Enlargement - Need for out-of area missions	- Emerging multipolarity - Withdrawal from – Middle East - "Arab Spring" - Need for keeping operational preparedness
Strategic shock	USSR implosion	9/11 terrorist attacks which determined the first invocation of article 5	World economic and financial crisis
Recent launch of a new strategic concept	X	-	X
Recent missions	Western Balkans	Western Balkans	Unified Protector Operation (Libya)

	Adapting capabilities to a new security environment	Develop new military capabilities for modern warfare in a high threat environment.	Generating modern, expensive defence capabilities in times of austerity, by pooling resources and sharing capabilities.
Objective of the initiative	Adapting capabilities to a new security environment	Develop new military capabilities for modern warfare in a high threat environment.	Generating modern, expensive defence capabilities in times of austerity, by pooling resources and sharing capabilities.
Force organization correlative	-	NATO Response Force	Connected Force Initiative
Command restructuring	**X**	**X**	**X**
EU's echo	Foreshadow of operations led by Western European Union	EU Battle groups	Pooling and sharing
Capabilities development dimensions Prioritization	-	**X**	**X**
	-	**X**	**X**
Cooperation	-	**X**	**X**

Smart defence is the current solution to a changing security environment which determines changes not only to the Allies' strategic priorities and resources of power, but also to NATO's role, organization and functioning. Thus, if PCC force organization correlative was constituted by the creation of NATO Response Force, flexible, mobile, deployable, self-sustainable forces adapted to the evolutions in terms of security risks and threats, smart defence is related to CFI, focused on education, training and exercises, meant to preserve NATO's preparedness and

Allied forces' interoperability even in the absence of an actual NATO-led mission.

At the same time, despite the similarities between PCC and smart defence in terms of their content and context of launching, at their basis lay different impulses. In PCC case, it was about adapting the Alliance to a new typology of warfare, while smart defence is mostly about endowing NATO with the necessary capabilities in a context characterized both by financial austerity and by the preservation of notable security risks and threats, as well as by the need of keeping the forces prepared even if there isn't any operation underway.

Equally relevant is these initiatives' echo at EU's level. In our opinion, this aspect is closely connected with the level reached by the Union in developing its security and defence dimension. Within DCI, the Allies still referred to the EU security and defence as a constituent part of NATO, stressing that "improvements in interoperability and critical capabilities should also strengthen the European pillar in NATO"[14]. Also, it is taken in consideration Allies' ability to undertake Western European Union-led missions.

Latter, in 2002, after the European Security and Defence Policy development had already registered some progresses, the need for inter-organizational cooperation and coordination was clearly expressed – "our efforts to improve capabilities through the PCC and those of the EU to enhance European capabilities through the European Capabilities Action plan should be mutually reinforcing, while respecting the autonomy of both organizations, in a spirit of openness"[15]. In 2012, coordinating NATO and EU defence planning activities becomes an aspect of crucial importance for the success of the initiative – "Working together as Allies also means seeking cooperation with players outside NATO. NATO and the EU are facing a similar challenge, that of reconciling the urgency of savings with a modern defence. NATO and the European Union, in particular the European Defence Agency, are working together to avoid needless duplication with the pooling and sharing initiative"[16].

To all these, the issue of a "responsibility-sharing" between NATO and EU should be also added, as it makes even more important for the EU to develop its necessary military capabilities. As mentioned before, smart defence was launched after Washington decided to concentrate its strategic interests more on Asia-Pacific, meaning that US needed more reliable Europeans partners, able to tackle their own security issues as well as those of their close vicinity. This is another cause of the stringent need for the European to reduce to the capability gap in relation with the US.

Another notable difference between DCI and PCC, on the one hand, and

smart defence, on the other, is represented by the American vision on Europe. Thus, in the aftermath of Cold War end, Europe was seen as a subject of security provision, as "its most important strategic playground"[17], but, under the conditions of the stability gained by this space, of the financial austerity as well as of the emergence of new major players on the international arena (China, for instance) and of new areas with high conflict potential (North Africa), Europe is needed as a reliable, equal partner for the US.

Conclusions

NATO defence planning reforms and efforts to boost military capabilities usually follow a strategic shock, requiring an adaptation of the Alliance. Thus, major changes to NATO's vision on burden sharing and endowment needs and procedures appear as symptoms to significant evolutions in the strategic context. Nonetheless, NATO defence planning is founded ever since its beginning on the principle of defence burden sharing, a principle which generated different forms of capabilities generation initiatives in accordance with the characteristics of the international security environment.

Also, a constant aspect is related to the security guarantees offered by Washington through NATO and to the increasing pressure on the European allies for a more consistent and assumed implication in generating the necessary capabilities and in providing more their security and of their close neighborhood.

In conclusion, smart defence doesn't turn up as a genuinely innovative idea, but as a long term tendency, considerably amplified and stressed by the current strategic context. Also, in our opinion, smart defence has more chances to be a successful idea as the Allies can already benefit from past experiences in this domain, but also due to the financial and strategic conditions which do not leave any other observable alternatives for maintaining NATO's relevance on the international arena and for guaranteeing Euro-Atlantic security and stability.

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5 *Ibidem.*

6 When Defence Capabilities Initiative was launched European Security and Defence Policy hadn't acquired an official, institutionalized form. Even more, the European defence and security dimension was expected to develop within the Alliance.

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