



NATO Warsaw Summit: Outcomes and Implications

*Dr. Dinoj K Upadhyay **

Introduction

The 27th North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Summit was held in Warsaw, Poland on 8-9 July 2016. Termed as a “landmark” summit, it was a crucial gathering of NATO member-states to decide the next course of security policy in Europe and beyond. Broadly, the stated objective of the Warsaw Summit was to take decision on enhancing ‘the Alliance’s security by strengthening its deterrence and defence, and projecting stability beyond its borders.’² A number of issues, ranging from the political and security situation in Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa to relations with Russia, Afghanistan and non-traditional security threats, including cyber security, and NATO-European Union (EU) cooperation were discussed for future course of policy orientation. Security situation in Eastern Europe and relationship with Russia figured high on the NATO agenda. Poland and Baltic states were expecting declaration of military measures to counter “assertiveness” of Russia in Eastern Europe. They often voice their concerns over Russian military build-up, exercises and its ‘irredentism’.³ At the previous Wales Summit in 2014 held after Crimea annexation by Russia, NATO countries had taken measures to address the security challenges in the region. Although there is continuity in NATO’s approach, political scenario has also relatively transformed. The outcome of the UK referendum on the EU membership has unsettled EU’s political dynamics. However, it is unlikely to impact security architecture of Europe. NATO and the EU emphasized on mutual cooperation.

Security concerns emanating from the European neighbourhood and beyond were also addressed during the Summit. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), political instability in Afghanistan, Middle East and North Africa also pose security challenges to the NATO countries. War in Syria and Iraq caused massive displacement of population, leading to migrant crisis in Europe. Migrant inflow has increased through Libya in recent months. Thousands of migrants were drowned in their risky attempts to reach the Italian coasts.⁴ European countries sought help from NATO to deal with the crisis and curb the network of human traffickers and smugglers active in Libyan territories and Mediterranean Sea. The EU cautiously acted towards Libya and pledged to support security sector reforms and financial assistance.⁵ NATO agreed to increase its role in the Mediterranean Sea.

After transfer of command to the Afghan National Security Forces, international troops are withdrawing. NATO also intended to further minimize its military presence in the country after 2016. However, after assessing current security situation, NATO announced its prolonged presence in Afghanistan. In such a context, the paper analyses the major outcomes of the NATO summit and its implication for regional political and security order.

Approach Towards Russia: Deterrence and Dialogue

Expectedly, NATO decided to enhance its military presence in Eastern Europe. The Ukraine crisis and subsequent developments had led to deterioration of Russia-West relations. NATO has taken various steps to strengthen security of its members at the Wales Summit in 2014, for instance, the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) adopted at the Wales Summit talked about the swift and firm response to the changed security challenges. The Warsaw Summit Communiqué notes, “...*Russia’s recent activities and policies have reduced stability and security, increased unpredictability, and changed the security environment.*” The *Communiqué* further points out that security situation in the Baltic and Black sea regions has changed. NATO has implemented measures of RAP, such as, increasing NATO Response Force (NRF), creating Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), increasing reinforcement ability, enhancing standing naval forces, accelerated decision making process, exercise programmes, strategy for hybrid warfare, etc.⁶

At the Warsaw Summit, NATO leaders agreed to deploy four ‘battalion-sized battle groups’ in Poland and Baltic states. These multinational forces would be deployed on rotational basis. The US has agreed to provide 1000 troops in Poland. The US, UK, Germany and Canada

would work as ‘framework nations’. The US will lead the battalion in Poland. Other NATO members will also lead the battalions in Baltics, for instances, Germany and the UK will lead the battalion in Lithuania and Estonia, respectively. Canada has also decided to provide troops and it will lead in another Baltic state, Latvia. Poland and Baltic states believe that NATO’s military presence in the region would offset growing Russian threat. After the summit, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło stated that summit’s decisions would enhance security of the country.⁷ President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė also called it a ‘historic’ day for security of his country and the region.⁸ Similar responses came from the other two Baltic nations.⁹ Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with President Raimonds Vejonis of Latvia to discuss the bilateral relations.¹⁰ On the contrary, Russia called it as an act of ‘aggression’. Frants Klintsevich, the first deputy head Defense and Security Committee of the Russian Federation Council, said that the NATO decisions would have ‘negative impact’ on the global situation.¹¹ Similarly, Chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee in the Upper House of Russian Parliament, Konstantin Kosachov called it “a summit of deception”. He noted that most decisions have been taken on the grounds of forged allegations of Russian threats.¹²

European political discourse on Russia is not limited to military approach. It has necessary elements of support for dialogue and cooperation with Russia. NATO leaders expressed their desire to dialogue with Russia. In his opening remarks, NATO General Secretary stated that they have no intentions to ‘isolate’¹³ Russia. He sought cooperation with Russia. After the Ukraine crisis, NATO has halted cooperation with Russia. After almost two years of gap, NATO-Russia Council (NRC) meeting was held on 20 April, 2016, but it ended without any tangible breakthrough.¹⁴ Politically, NATO too maintains that ‘constructive and meaningful’ talk with Russia is essential to ‘reduce the risk of military incidents or accidents spiralling out of control.’¹⁵ European leaders, French President Hollande and the Czech Republic President Milos Zeman¹⁶, supported dialogue with Russia. President Hollande said, “Russia is a partner” and not a ‘threat’ to France.¹⁷

Recent trends reflect that Russia and EU are inching towards easing tension. Russian President Vladimir Putin argued for restoring cooperation with Europe. Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on 17 June 2016, President Putin said, “We do not hold a grudge and are ready to meet our European partners halfway. But it certainly cannot be a one-way game.”¹⁸ Putin’s speech is probably an important indication towards easing tension with Europe. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, spoke at the forum and met

President Putin. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi also attended the forum.¹⁹ The EU has extended economic sanctions against Russia, but demands for discussion on sanctions have been made by Italy, Hungary and Greece.²⁰ France's lower house of Parliament also passed a resolution - though it was non-binding - to lift sanctions against Russia.²¹

Nevertheless, to a limited extent, military escalation in Eastern Europe could have negative impact on relationship with Russia. It seems against the spirit of Russia-NATO Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, 1997. Russia and the NATO held the NRC meeting to discuss the summit decision on 13 July, 2016.²² Russia's Permanent Representative to NATO Alexander Grushko accused NATO of creating military pressure, but Russia proposes measures to reduce risks and tensions. At the meeting, Russia and NATO could not sort out their major strategic differences. However, it was proposed that use of transponders during flights over the Baltic Sea should be mandatory, which may avoid collision risk of jets. It also emerges from the meeting that Russia and NATO may hold consultations at the military level.²³ Such measures are also discussed with Finland.²⁴ President Putin visited Finland on 1 July 2016, almost a week before Warsaw Summit. Finland has maintained neutrality in the Cold War, it now seems to be moving closer to NATO. Russia has expressed its displeasure. Similar measures, such as military planes not flying with identification devices switched off over Baltic Sea, was proposed in the bilateral meeting.²⁵

Persisting conflict in Ukraine continued to be a bone of contention between Russia and NATO. Political efforts between Russia and the EU, and Russia and the US have been initiated to resolve the crisis. At the Warsaw Summit, NATO decided to continue assistance for facilitating reform in defence sector and develop armed forces in Ukraine. In a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, NATO leaders expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and stressed their non-recognition of Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea. They called on all parties to fully implement the Minsk Agreements.²⁶ Nevertheless, violations of these agreements have been reported. Before the Warsaw Summit, Russian President Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President of France Francois Hollande had telephonic conversions on ceasefire violations in eastern Ukraine.²⁷ US Secretary of State John Kerry discussed the Ukraine crisis and implementation of Minsk agreements with President Putin on 14 July, 2016. Russia accused Ukraine of non-implementation of Minsk agreements, including organization of real direct dialogue with Donetsk and Lugansk, giving amnesty, granting special status to the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, and joint development of the law on local elections.²⁸

Russia and the US explored areas of cooperation in Syria and Ukraine. Both discussed potential areas of cooperation which may make a difference in unfolding events in Syria.²⁹

NATO-EU Cooperation

NATO and EU decided to step up their cooperation in areas of hybrid warfare, cyber security, defence industry and research & development.³⁰ The Joint Declaration issued by NATO and EU notes, “a stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing.”³¹ It states that NATO and EU urgently need to ‘boost (their) ability to counter hybrid threats, including by bolstering resilience, working together on analysis, prevention, and early detection, through timely information sharing and, to the extent possible, intelligence sharing between staffs; and cooperating on strategic communication and response.’³² Hybrid warfare has also non-military dimension and presently NATO lacks major capacity to address it.³³ NATO and EU membership are overlapping. They have around 22 common members. The objective of enhancing cooperation between the two may evolve with the nature of hybrid war and cyber security. The EU has competence to political and social aspects of hybrid warfare, promoting comprehensive research and development in these areas. The EU needs NATO support to curb migrant inflow. European coast guard agency or member states’ agencies are not able to effectively deal with migrant crisis. Germany, Greece and Turkey asked for help from NATO. The Joint Declaration mentions migration, and the EU and NATO focus on ‘operational cooperation’ and they agreed to expand their cooperation in areas of ‘maritime situational awareness’ and ‘mutual reinforcement of activities’.³⁴ The EU and NATO’s emphasis is on rapid implementation. The European External Action Service (EEAS) and NATO International Staff would develop coordination and will take steps for implementation.

Prolonged Stay in Afghanistan

After political transition and transfer of command to Afghan National Security Forces, security situation in Afghanistan is yet to be stabilized. The country faces frequent insurgent attacks. President Ashraf Ghani called for reconciliation with Taliban to restore peace and stability. He reached out to regional countries to seek support to bring Taliban to the negotiations. His efforts paid initial success, for instance, Taliban and Afghan government held peace talks in July 2015 in Pakistan, attended by US and Chinese officials. It was also reported that some Afghan female lawmakers and a member of the High Peace Council held talks with Taliban representatives in

Norway in June 2015.³⁵ Afghan officials and Taliban also held informal talks in the UAE and Qatar.³⁶ However, reconciliation process could not achieve any considerable success. After insurgent attack in April 2016, it seems that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has changed his approach.³⁷ He asked Pakistan to take military action against Taliban's 'sanctuaries and leadership based on its soil'.³⁸ Taliban now have reinforced their stand and demand complete withdrawal of foreign troops.³⁹ The fate of reconciliation process, thus, seems to be uncertain. Political efforts did not yield result on the ground. Afghan National Security Forces are also not found to be fully effective in dealing with security challenges. NATO has maintained its presence in the country for more than a decade since 9/11 attacks.

Afghan President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah participated in the NATO Summit in Warsaw. Decisions were made to extend the Resolute Support Mission's future beyond 2016. NATO decided to provide funds and assured that NATO forces would stay in the country. NATO allies pledged that they would provide around US \$ one billion per year over the next three years to facilitate training of the Afghan National Security Forces. Reportedly, there are about 12,000 NATO troops in the country.⁴⁰

NATO's extension of military presence in Afghanistan may also be seen in the context of changing security dynamics in West Asia and Europe's growing engagement with Iran. European countries are quite keen to expand economic ties with Iran after the nuclear deal in July 2015. Secondly, it is also feared that ISIL may utilize the unstable political and security scenario in Afghanistan. Thirdly, crisis causes displacement; Europe wants to reduce migrant pressure. Number of Afghan asylum seekers increased in Germany in 2015.⁴¹ Germany sent back Afghan asylum-seekers;⁴² it launched media campaign to discourage Afghans to move to Europe. Therefore, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is essential for both geostrategic and geo-economic purposes for European countries.

Stepping-Up Efforts in Middle East and North Africa

NATO has decided to project stability beyond its borders. Terrorist threats from ISIL are a cause of concern for NATO countries. Although ISIL has lost considerable territory, it remains a potent organization to unleash violence and launch terror attacks.⁴³ NATO has decided to train the security forces in Iraq and use of airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft to support the global coalition to counter ISIL.⁴⁴ As European countries have witnessed

unprecedented migrant crisis caused by political instability and war in their neighbourhood, NATO has stepped its role in assisting to control the flow of migration and human trafficking. NATO members want to enhance military surveillance in the Mediterranean Sea. NATO leaders decided that Operation Sea Guardian would have a broad scope, which will include providing situational awareness, countering trafficking and terrorism, upholding freedom of navigation and contributing to regional capacity building.⁴⁵

NATO backs the UN-supported government in Libya. NATO recognizes the Government of National Accord as the legitimate government in the country. A few weeks before the summit, Libyan Foreign Minister Mohamed Taha Siala met the NATO General Secretary to discuss the political and security situation in Libya. NATO and Libyan Government of National Accord discussed the security cooperation to deal with security challenges faced by the country. European countries are quite concerned about political instability, consequently, proliferation of terrorism and migration. European countries with support from NATO have stepped up security to reduce migrant pressure and check human traffickers. They have also provided financial assistance and offered to assist capacity building and training to Libyan security forces. The US and European countries are now willing to supply arms to the Libyan government. However, it is feared that arms may go to terrorists or wrong groups. The UN has banned arms exports to Libya, however, the US said that there is a scope for exception and international community would support the Government of National Accord.⁴⁶

Political instability and security crisis in the Middle East forced NATO to recalibrate its strategy. European countries are facing the implications of political instability and social chaos in some countries of Middle East and North Africa. Great powers rivalry persists in the region, military interventions could not bring peace and order. European countries are making efforts to bring stability in the region. However, they are yet to make considerable impact on the ground. NATO too was preoccupied with Central and Eastern Europe and its relations with Russia. However, a decade ago, it indicated to increase its engagement with Middle East.⁴⁷ But current situation is far more complex. War-torn countries - Syria, Iraq and Libya - are not showing any sign of returning of normalcy. Warsaw Summit as well as diplomatic talks with Russia stressed importance of multilateral cooperation to bring stability and pace in the region.

Conclusion

NATO has adopted a mixed approach of 'deterrence and dialogue' towards Russia. It will continue

to enhance the deterrence, but, will seek dialogue to explore political solutions of crises. It is unclear how will it help in easing tension with Russia. Some European countries also realize that showing military strength would not help security situation in Eastern Europe. However, Baltic countries and Poland insist on multinational battalions in the region. Russia has categorically stated that policy of confrontation would lead to deterioration in the security situation.

In Warsaw, NATO leaders have also looked beyond the security concerns in Europe. NATO has decided to prolong its presence in Afghanistan, which may be helpful in maintaining security in the country. International support is required to strengthen capacity of Afghan forces. However, Taliban demanded withdrawal of all foreign troops to join the reconciliation talks with Afghan government. Geographical positioning of Afghanistan is crucial. An effective and strong Afghan security forces are necessary for fighting not only insurgents in the country, but also countering threats of ISIL.

Middle East and North Africa would also be a priority area of the NATO engagement. European countries are vulnerable to threats from war and political instability in Syria and Iraq. Terrorist groups exploit fragile environment for unleashing violence and attacks in European countries. Libya is also a cause of concern. In addition to threat of ISIL, migrants and refugees enter Europe through Libya. NATO has already provided assistance to counter human traffickers in the Mediterranean Sea. To sum up, Warsaw Summit has taken steps, which would have long-term implications for political and security scenarios of Europe, nearby regions and beyond.

** Dr. Dinoj K Upadhyay is Research Fellow with the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.
Disclaimer: Views expressed are of authors and do not reflect the views of the Council.*

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