



EVOLVING NATO PARTNERSHIPS IN THE LIGHT OF THE MADRID AND VILNIUS SUMMITS

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ABSTRACT

The Vilnius Summit was of particular importance for NATO moving forward towards credible defence and enhanced deterrence. The Russian Federation's actions in defiance of international law (2008 Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea, invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022) have radically changed the strategic and security environment. The Vilnius Summit in line with the Madrid Strategic Concept focused on the challenges, risks and threats on the eastern flank of the Alliance, the military reinforcement, strengthening and development of response capabilities have been a priority. Finland as a fully-fledged member country participated at the Vilnius Summit. This paper deals with developments in the framework of the partnership initiatives. The establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Council was one of the most important decisions taken at the summit. Furthermore, priority was given to the like-minded countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and attention has been paid to the Balkan region, the Middle East and Africa.

Keywords: Defence and deterrence, partnership initiatives, Vilnius Summit, NATO-Ukraine relationship, Asia-Pacific region

INTRODUCTION

In the post-bipolar era, the rapidly changing security environment and events on the European, Asian and African continents have led to an increase in the frequency of NATO summits. The summits are important in NATO's life, they set policy, provide guidance, speed up decision-making and mark important, historic events. This was particularly true in 2022 when Russia attacked sovereign, independent Ukraine in violation of international law. The year 2022 was historic in many ways. For the first time in NATO's history, three summits were held in one year. On 25 February, the day after the Russian invasion, NATO heads of state and government met in virtual space (NATO, 2022a). This was followed by the Brussels Summit on 24 March 2022 and the Madrid Summit on 28–30 June 2022 (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022c, p. 67; NATO, 2022i). Unlike in previous enlargement rounds, preparations for the accession of Finland and Sweden were swift in Madrid (Csiki Varga-Tálas, 2022, p. 4). The fourth strategic concept of the post-Cold War era was adopted. Important decisions were taken to strengthen deterrence and defence, – including on the Eastern flank after the Russian invasion of Ukraine – the issues of transatlantic solidarity and proportional burden-sharing were discussed, the Alliance's response capacity was improved and agreed on the introduction of a new NATO force model (NATO, 2022e).

1 MADRID SUMMIT, KEY DECISIONS ON THE PARTNERSHIP

The Strategic Concept and the Summit Declaration adopted at the Madrid Summit set out the political orientation of the Alliance and defined the most important tasks in the changed international situation, including those concerning partnership relations (NATO, 2022c; NATO, 2022h). The Madrid 2022 Strategic Concept called NATO's enlargement rounds a historic success and reaffirmed the open-door policy of Article 10 of the Washington Treaty.

The path to membership is open to all European countries that share NATO's core values, accept the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose membership contributes to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. They have declared that sovereign countries' decisions should not be subject to interference by third parties. It was stated in the Strategic Concept that China poses a systemic challenge to the interests, security and values of the Alliance (NATO, 2022h, p. 5).

The deepening strategic partnership between China and the Russian Federation was seen as worrying. For the first time, NATO has invited the four Pacific Partners (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea) to the Summit. There is a strong convergence of objectives between NATO's Global Partnership and the ambitions and interests of the Asia-Pacific countries. In the region, the presence of a rising China and Russia, the unresolved territorial and island disputes, and nuclear-armed countries (North Korea, India, China, and Pakistan) pose serious security challenges, risks and threats (Siposné Kecskeméthy-Sipos, 2022, p. 166). Neither NATO's military capabilities nor its infrastructure allow its presence in the region. Despite the expanding NATO relationship¹ the main ally of these countries remains the United States of America, and the US presence in the region remains crucial. Finland and Sweden were the flagship countries of the Partnership for Peace.

NATO, which is expanding northwards, invited Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance in Madrid (NATO, 2022c). Following the Madrid Summit, Finland and Sweden concluded accession negotiations in Brussels on 4 July 2022 (NATO, 2022b). On 5 July, the Allies signed the Protocol of Accession of Finland and Sweden, after which the two countries became invited members and could participate in NATO meetings (NATO, 2022d). In the case of Finland, all Allies have ratified the Accession Protocol and will be welcomed as the 31st member state of the Alliance in Vilnius in 2023. In the case of Sweden, the ratification process was not completed in two member countries (Turkey and Hungary) before the Vilnius Summit. The strategic concept also covered regions such as the Western Balkans, the Black Sea, the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel and the Indo-Pacific. It analysed the strategic partnership, political consultation and priority areas for cooperation with the European Union.²

The NATO-Ukraine partnership was also high on the agenda of the Madrid Summit. Long-term financial and military assistance to Ukraine was reinforced through the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (CAP), as part of which NATO provided immediate assistance to war-torn Ukraine. Other objectives include the modernization of Ukraine's defence sector, the modernization of the armed forces, the establishment of interoperability, the further strengthening of defence and security institutions, and support for the country's post-war reconstruction (NATO, 2022g). The Madrid Strategic Concept reaffirmed the earlier declaration of the Bucharest Summit in 2008 on the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. It was stated that, after the second aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Federation is the most significant and immediate threat to the peace and stability of the Alliance and the Euro-Atlantic area (NATO, 2022h, p. 4). Since independence, Ukraine's vision for the future has been the Euro-Atlantic integration and the opening up to the West, building close ties with the Russian Federation and neutrality. It has balanced Russian influence with maintaining an optimal and most beneficial relationship with NATO. Since 2014, however, Ukraine's clear priority has been Euro-Atlantic integration and, through a differentiated partnership, full NATO membership (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022a, 59; Siposné Kecskeméthy,

¹ The priority areas of cooperation are: cyber defence; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; civil preparedness; women, peace and security.

² These include: military mobility, resilience, the impact of climate change on security, disruptive new technologies, human security, the women, peace and security agenda, cyber and hybrid threats, and the challenge of an emerging China.

2022b, 90). Following the annexation of Crimea, NATO has strengthened Ukraine's capacity to build a modern democratic state, strengthen its defence capabilities and undertake comprehensive security and defence sector reform by launching capability development programmes and providing financial assistance (NATO, 2023d).

2 KEY DECISIONS OF THE VILNIUS SUMMIT

Vilnius was a symbolic choice of venue, a clear message to Russia. The protection of the countries of the Eastern flank and the security of the region is a top priority for the Alliance, leaving no room for Russian military aggression against Ukraine. In the post-bipolar era, summits have been held in the capitals of four countries formerly belonging to the Soviet sphere of interests and in one of the former republics of the Soviet Union. Prague in 2002, Riga in 2006, Bucharest in 2008 and Warsaw in 2016 hosted the NATO Summit. As early as 2008, during the South Ossetia crisis, the Baltic countries expressed their concerns and called for the strengthening of the Alliance's eastern flank, taking into account the actions of the Russian Federation.

The Baltic States have been steadily increasing their defence budgets since the 2014 Defence Pledge in Wales, with Lithuania reaching 2% of GDP in 2019 (NATO, 2023a). The country, which is in a vulnerable geostrategic position, together with Estonia and Latvia, provides significant support to Ukraine. Similar to the Madrid Summit, the Alliance wanted to demonstrate the solid political unity of its member states in Vilnius. A key step in this direction was the extension for the fourth time of the mandate of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the second longest-serving NATO Secretary General.

The longest-serving NATO Secretary General in the Alliance's history was Joseph Luns, who held this responsible position for thirteen years between 1971 and May 1984. NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, served five years from 4 April 1952 to May 1957, and Manfred Wörner served six years (1988–1994). Jens Stoltenberg, former Prime Minister of Norway, has been at the helm of the Transatlantic Security Alliance since October 2014 (NATO, 2023b). He served his first term as Secretary General from 2014–2017. In 2017, the Allies extended his mandate until the end of September 2020. His term was extended in 2019 to September 2022. On 24 March 2022, one month after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Stoltenberg's mandate was extended until 1 September 2023. This was the third term of the Secretary-General from 24 March 2022 to 30 September 2023 (NATO, 2022f). Another important decision was taken on 4 July 2023 by the North Atlantic Council, to avoid a debate among member states over the next NATO Secretary General,³ extending the mandate of the Secretary General for a further year from 1 September 2023 to 1 October 2024. Russia's invasion of Ukraine played a big role in the decision, as several member states preferred to keep the experienced Stoltenberg, known for his cautious rhetoric, at a politically sensitive time for NATO (Bayer, 2023).

The Vilnius Summit was dominated by adequate alliance responses to Russian

³ The Allies have been mulling over the choice of a successor for months, and there has been talk in NATO circles of several candidates for Secretary General. It has been suggested that the choice of Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas would send a clear signal to Russia that the Alliance is backing the region with all its might. Some NATO observers have stressed the diplomatic advantage of geographical distance, with the name of Chrystia Freeland, Canadian Deputy Prime Minister, also mooted. Others argued that the Alliance's leader should come from a European Union country, of which 21 are NATO members. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyté and former Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović were among the candidates mentioned. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace were also mentioned.

aggression and its security policy consequences, most of the topics were related to the follow-up and monitoring of the implementation of the steps agreed in Madrid. In Madrid, three key commitments were formulated to strengthen the deterrence and defence of the Alliance. Member States committed to take forward the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) agreed at the Warsaw Summit in 2016. They decided to increase the number of allied exercises, preparing for high-intensity multi-domain operations in order to be able to reinforce any ally at short notice (Csiki Varga-Tálas, 2023). Many important issues were on the agenda of the Vilnius Summit, such as strengthening deterrence and defence, increasing the defence budget, research and adaptation of new advanced technologies, a new system of defence planning, and climate security, but the summit was dominated by Ukraine's possible NATO membership and Sweden's accession.

2.1 UKRAINE, STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

But the most important issue was the long-term support for Ukraine to resist and deter further Russian aggression. There was a serious debate among Member States on how to support Ukraine. Options included membership in NATO, upgrading relations and facilitating the membership process. Former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as Senior Adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, has repeatedly criticised the decision taken at the Bucharest Summit on Ukraine and Georgia to allow the two countries “on the terrace of our house, but not letting them inside”. In Vilnius, Ukraine was not formally invited and was disappointed by the decision. However, it was abundantly clear to both the Member States supporting full membership and Ukraine that as long as it was at war with Russia, an Article 5 defence commitment would lead to war between NATO and Russia. The decision could be postponed in Vilnius, but it will be inevitable that a decision has to be taken at the 2024 Washington Summit. The question of membership will be postponed until after the end of the Russia-Ukraine war, but NATO will not deviate from consensus decision-making, i.e. all member states must support an invitation to join. Future membership was confirmed in Vilnius, as was long-term financial and military assistance to Ukraine through the Comprehensive Assistance Package. The strategic partnership with the country has been taken to a higher level, with the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Council, which provides for broader and deeper cooperation and a more equal, privileged partnership status. In Vilnius, decisions were taken to bring Ukraine closer to NATO, and it was decided to ease the requirements of the Membership Action Plan for Ukraine, thus accelerating Ukraine's accession. It was a historic moment when the Council held its first meeting in Vilnius on 12 July. The Allies and Ukraine sat side by side as equals.

2.2 SWEDEN'S ACCESSION TO NATO

Another key issue at the summit was Sweden's accession to NATO. In Madrid, Finland and Sweden were invited to join the Alliance (NATO, 2022c). Turkey's veto was overridden by the trilateral Turkey-Finland-Sweden agreement, with the strong support of the NATO Secretary General (NATO, 2022j).

Accession negotiations with the two countries were concluded with the signing of the Accession Protocol (NATO, 2022b). This was followed by ratifications in accordance with national procedures. Finland was welcomed as the 31st member state of the Alliance in Vilnius. For Sweden, the ratification process in two member countries – Turkey and Hungary – was not completed until the Vilnius Summit. The summit began with talks between NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. The statement issued confirmed that since the NATO summit in

Madrid, Sweden and Turkey have been working closely together to address Turkey's legitimate security concerns (NATO, 2023f).

As part of this process, Sweden has amended its constitution, changed its laws, significantly expanded its counter-terrorism cooperation against the PKK and restarted arms exports to Turkey. They agreed to continue cooperation both through the Permanent Joint Mechanism of the Trilateral Memorandum of Understanding established at the Madrid Summit in 2022 and through the new Bilateral Security Pact, which will meet annually at the ministerial level and establish working groups as necessary. It has also been agreed that Sweden and Turkey will enhance economic cooperation through the Türkiye–Sweden Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO). Sweden will actively support efforts to revitalize Turkey's EU accession process, including EU–Turkey visa liberalization. The last point of the declaration states that the accession protocol for Sweden will be negotiated by the Grand National Assembly for ratification. The two northern European countries are of crucial importance for the Alliance. The territory of Finland provides strategic depth for NATO and facilitates the defence of the Baltic countries. Sweden's accession will stabilize the northern border and change and enhance the geostrategic value of the Arctic and the Arctic regions.

2.3 PARTNER COUNTRIES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

The Alliance's relations with global partners in the Asia-Pacific region are the result of a long process. While their relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is of paramount importance, these countries do not participate in any of the institutionalized partnership fora, nor is there a permanent body or institution that provides a space for structured dialogue between the parties. The strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific region is unquestionable in many respects. At the Madrid Summit, the Alliance invited for the first time the four main Pacific partners (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea) to the Summit. At the Vilnius Summit, the NATO Secretary General welcomed representatives from all four countries (NATO, 2023g; NATO, 2023h; NATO, 2023i). Regarding Australia, he highlighted support for Ukraine and joint action against cyber, new technologies and hybrid threats. With South Korea, the Alliance finalized the Tailored Partnership Programme to expand the partnership, which includes cooperation on climate change, cyber defence and new technologies. Sweden and the EU were invited to the extended North Atlantic Council meeting on 12 July 2023, along with the Asia-Pacific countries (NATO, 2023e).

Among the Global Partners, Japan, the oldest partner of the Alliance in the region, has a prominent role and importance (Szenes-Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2019, p. 125). Stoltenberg also described Japan as the Alliance's closest partner (NATO, 2023c). Over the past decades, the partnership has seen a steady evolution. Already in 2007, the Japan Tailored Cooperation Package was signed, followed by the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme. The further deepening of relations has led to the appointment of the Embassy of Japan in Belgium as the NATO Permanent Representation.

Since 2014, Japan has been participating in the Interoperability Platform (IP), which brings together NATO members and partner countries, through the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) announced in Wales (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022b, p. 182). The new NATO–Japan Partnership Programme will further strengthen cooperation in areas such as arms control, new technologies, space, supply chains, resilience and innovation. Japan supports the opening of a NATO Liaison Office (NLO) in the Asia-Pacific region to help deepen cooperation and facilitate dialogue with Asia-Pacific partners and serve as a centre for information sharing and practical cooperation. It was planned to open an office in Tokyo in 2024 as NATO's first office in Asia. It was expected that progress would be made on this at the Vilnius Summit, but the

Alliance scrapped the plan. China also strongly opposed NATO's presence in the region. Even before the summit, Emmanuel Macron, referring to Article 6 of the Washington Treaty, which defines its geographical boundaries, stated that France did not support NATO's presence in the Pacific region, because it is an organisation created to guarantee the security of the North Atlantic area (Lau-Kayali, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The Vilnius Summit is an important milestone for NATO. The choice of venue was symbolic; it was a clear message to the Russian Federation. The Madrid Summit was a strategic shaping meeting, the new strategic concept was adopted and the Russian Federation was named as the most significant and direct threat. The Alliance's deterrence and forward defence capabilities were strengthened. The actions of the Russian Federation in contravention of international law (2008 action in Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea, 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine) have radically changed the strategic and security environment. The Vilnius NATO Summit was of a political nature, it focused on the challenges, risks and threats on the eastern flank of the Alliance, in line with the previous Madrid strategic concept. Military reinforcement and the strengthening and development of response capabilities were given priority. Finland participated in the Vilnius Summit as a full member state.

Important decisions were taken regarding Ukraine. Long-term support for Ukraine was confirmed in the framework of the Comprehensive Assistance Programme to resist and deter further Russian aggression. Though Ukraine was formally not invited to join the Alliance, a clear path to membership was outlined. Although the Baltic States, Poland and Great Britain would have supported inviting Ukraine, the reality was that as long as Ukraine was at war with Russia, an Article 5 commitment would lead to an open war between NATO and Russia. The 2024 Washington Summit will certainly have to address this issue, it cannot be postponed/put off. In addition, member countries have also agreed to ease the requirements of the Membership Action Plan for Ukraine. The NATO-Ukraine Council was established and held its first meeting at the Summit.

Sweden's accession to NATO was also discussed in Vilnius. Due to the consensus decision-making rule, Sweden could not become a full member as two NATO-member countries had not ratified the accession document by Vilnius. Similar to the Madrid summit, in Vilnius, the NATO Secretary General mentored the Turkish and Swedish sides, bringing the actual decision closer. The agreement touched on Turkey's legitimate security concerns, the Swedish arms embargo and Turkish visa liberalization. The Asia-Pacific countries (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) are key partners of the Alliance. The strategic importance of the region is unquestionable and the relations of these partner countries with the Alliance are important. Japan, one of the most active partner countries in the region, would have hosted a NATO Liaison Office in the Asia-Pacific region. However, Emmanuel Macron did not support the idea and blocked the initiative regarding NATO outposts in Japan citing Article 6, which clearly defines NATO's geographical borders.

In Vilnius, NATO wanted to show unity, which is why the mandate of Jens Stoltenberg was extended for the fourth time, ahead of the debate between countries on the future NATO Secretary General. NATO's forthcoming annual summit will be held in Washington to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance, marking the high profile of the event.

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