

Alliance of alliances

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What are alliances made for? History has shown that at any time especially in the « old Europe », States have experienced the necessity to ally with other States, either to face together to new threats (an alliance against) or to build and/or conquer new achievements (positive alliance). Up to 1949, alliances had always been temporary and were not supposed to last after their task had been achieved. Whatever were their objectives, positive or negative, States could integrate two kinds of alliances: equal ones, i.e. together with States of the same level of power; unequal ones when the weak allied with the stronger, abandoning in counterpart a part of its sovereignty.

This issue is obviously not new, but even if responses that can be given have hardly changed for centuries, it deserves to be restated. For the last ten, or even twenty years, countries members of what happens to be the most important of the existing alliances – NATO - seem to have some difficulty in defining the purpose of their organization, since they less and less clearly perceive its function. In the past, alliances were generally alliances with essentially regional vocation. However with the phenomenon of globalisation, be it real or artificial, is it realistic to wonder whether a single power has sufficient legitimacy to ensure the entire world security? Or, on the contrary, to ensure this new form of enlarged and globalized security wouldn't be more efficient to think of an alliance - temporary or not – of some of the pre-existing regional alliances, in order to avoid any risk of monopolisation of security by a single global power? Short, could today's realities lead to a dialectical relation of the regional and the global. True the Atlantic Alliance has its place at the very heart of the device. But, for obvious reasons, NATO cannot efficiently act in crisis zones, without a support and an assistance of other alliances or regional groupings, whatever be their relations to NATO.

The Afghan crisis is one of those privileged situations, where different institutional structures may develop cooperations – be it a competitive or cooperative. After the fall of the Berlin

Wall and the reunification of the old continent arose the question of the relevance in maintaining the two opposed military alliances. If the future of the Warsaw Pact was quickly set by the successive withdrawal of nearly all of its members, arose also the question of NATO's future. The reasons why the Atlantic alliance has survived, is not the matter here. But it is necessary to recall that NATO still exists because it is the only element legitimating the presence of the United States in Europe and because the former east-european countries have expressed such a strong demand for NATO - i.e. for the USA - that they can be considered as the "savers" of NATO. But what of kind of an alliance and what for?

While preparing the adoption of the second "strategic concept" (April 1999), took place a very sharp discussion between NATO members: should NATO limit its zone and its capabilities of intervention in the framework of the sole article 6 of the treaty? Or is it entitled to intervene anywhere in the world? Could the Alliance legitimate itself its own interventions? Or should it be considered that UN is the only institution able to allow the use of force? Those questions are still the same ten years later. But during the decade between the adoption of the two strategic concepts (1999 and 2010), attempts to answer those questions became more and more discreet, since the world is now perceived as being at war. 1999 was marked by the conflict in the Balkans (Kosovo). After 2001 the non-arabic Muslim East is at the heart of a threat which is indifferently qualified of extremist, Islamist, fundamentalist, terrorist... In 1999 a mythical Slavic and Orthodox fraternity - rather instrumentalized than real - was one of the main concerns for NATO. After September of 2001 appeared a new and completely different playing field. True that Russia had been much earlier concerned with the rise of the Taliban at the borders of the CIS, as a direct consequence of its experience of ten years of war in Afghanistan, but for NATO the experience was quite new. After the Balkans, the world is now concerned with what Brzezinski had called in 1997 "The Eurasian Balkans" announcing the beginning of a new "great game"¹ in which competition is no longer the one of Empires but the one of alliances.

If it became quickly obvious that, in the conflict that started in Afghanistan, the US, and behind them, NATO, would take a prominent place, it became as well evident that Russia could not be completely kept away. True, Russia had been weakened by years of uncertainty during the eltsinian era but Moscow also sees an opportunity to come back as a major actor of

¹ Z. BRZEZINSKI, *The Grand Chessboard*, 1997.

the international scene. In the same time, and even if there is no direct connection between cause and effect, Russia had consolidated its own system of alliances in its close environment in institutionalizing the Collective Security Treaty and the Shanghai Group.

Transformations have started in June of 2001, with the Shanghai group (“Shanghai 5”) which became a permanent organization (Shanghai Cooperation Organization). The same day, the new organization adopts a "convention on the fight against"terrorism, separatism and extremism"², a document which is also regularly used as an argument by Russia and China to accuse the West to discriminate between "good and bad" terrorists and use a double speech policy. An old practice, which could be considered as outdated but which obviously still works. The following year, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) as well became a permanent Organization (CSTO) which is from time to time and by some of its members considered as a possible counterpart to NATO. Actually this presentation of the CSTO as an alliance succesively partner, complementary or counterweight to NATO is instrulmentalized by all parts according to the circumstances. When relations with NATO are not satisfactory, the CSTO becomes a new Warsaw Pact: thus, during the CSTO Summit in Dushanbe (28 April 2003) president Lukashenko referenced the Organization as a successor of a Warsaw Pact whose main function would be to contain NATO's progression³. On another hand, when relations between the two organizations are good, CSTO becomes a natural partener of NATO: “If we speak about NATO, it is essential for it to continue contacts with Russia and in general to ensure an alignment of contacts with the CSTO in absolute compliance with international law and the Charter of the UN”⁴.

Such links between NATO and CSTO may also be considered as the potential founding element of a new organization of the Eurasian area. Even if the Charter of the CSTO does not mention any specific area where the treaty is supposed to apply, the tasks mentionned in this text are clear enough to make understand where the privileged zone of action of the organization is.

² www.sectesco.org/EN/show.asp?id=68. This convention is adpoted some three month before september 2001.

³ *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*, April 29th, 2003. It should be remembered that at this very time, the US war in Iraq was criticized by Russia together with France, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg ...

⁴ D. MEDVEDEV, Speech at meeting with Russian ambassadors, July 12, 2010
<http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/610>.

True, in saying that Kant in Kirghizistan will be the main military base of the Organisation, a base which is settled a few kilometers away from US and NATO's one in Manas, indicates that the past is still present in some minds. This will change according to the evolution of the relations between Washington and Moscow: from calls for the establishment of a privileged partnership related to the complementarity of the two alliances to recalling the time of the bipolar confrontation. If the Russian positions fluctuate, NATO's ones are more often uncertain, asserting that cooperation could be possible... if necessary⁵. In other words and concerning such possible complementarities, Washington mainly gives the impression of a real disregard for any other alliance, NATO considering itself as being accountable to no one. Such a reaction is not a surprise coming from an organization whose trusteeship country considers itself as the only one able to preserve its conception of global security.

Yet, what offers Russia is not so much as an all-out cooperation which would place CSTO and NATO at the same level - even if some dream of it, they remain realistic! – but only a technical cooperation including the fight against terrorism or organized transnational crime and drugs trafficking. Of course, Moscow⁶ could then instrumentalize its relationship with NATO and use it for a better observation and/or control of the Alliance's activities in an area which has been first considered as its near abroad and which is now its "area of privileged interests"⁷.

Actually, the CSTO - Russia – has already started cooperation with organizations like OSCE and SCO, which are probably easier to manage, since they are different from CSTO, being only in charge of security issues.

The first one of those two organizations is the heir of the CSCE⁸ and the Helsinki Conference and is by essence the paneuropean institution. It had been criticized in the 70's and the 80's, but it is now considered as one of main factor having allowed the peaceful collapse of the communist system in Europe. Being entitled to deal with security issues - but it does not have

⁵ See for instance press conferences by Jap de Hoop Scheffer, December 8th, 2005 or June 25th, 2009.

⁶ Moscow because Russia is for CSTO what Washington is for NATO.

⁷ The formula has been proposed by Dmitri Medvedev in his interview to the Russian television a few days after the "5 days war" (August 31th, 2008).

⁸ CSCE became OSCE in 1994.

any military means - the CSCE has nevertheless lost its fight which opposed it to NATO in 1990-92, at a time when was set the question of the relevance of cold war military alliances. Links between CSTO and OSCE are certainly not very impressive but they are real in sectors such as peacekeeping. There are therefore coordinated actions between CSTO and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. This of course does not exclude – especially since 1999 – different positions on topics and areas such as Moldova or Georgia where cooperation is often competitive! But the OSCE paneuropean conception of security can also be considered as a one of the basis of Dmitri Medvedev's initiative (Berlin, June 5th, 2008) concerning the negotiation on a new treaty on collective security.

But of course relations of CSTO are most obviously developed with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As well as OSCE, SCO is not entitled to deal with defence issues but it is definitely one of those institutions whose political functions particularly clearly reflect geopolitical objectives. Informally created in 1996 to deal with border issues between China and the former Soviet republics, SCO became a standing structure in June 2001. It includes China and Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kirgizistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which means that all the CIS countries of the SCO are also members of the CSTO. But it should be also mentionned that SCO includes four countries with an observer status: India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan. This means that the area of action of the Organization can be clearly identified as being Central Asia -Middle East and that China, which hosts the headquarters of the organization, can be considered as the centre of the organization.

Using their participation to both CSTO and SCO as a counterweight between both alliances this situation happens to be of some necessity for smaller countries of Central Asia. With two neighbours such as Russia and Chine with their respective landmas and demographic weight, several countries - such as Kirghizstan at least up to the 2010 crisis – have managed balancing the mutual influence of their mihgty neighbours. This particuliar situation might at least partly explain why Russia and CSTO, China and SCO have been so discrete with regards to the Kirghiz crisis.

Yet, concerning Central Asia, the main difference between CSTO and NATO on the one hand and SCO on another lies in the fact that SCO is not a military alliance, and if it deals with security issues, as well as OSCE, it has no military means to implement them. But the countries members of the Shanghai organisation are, at varying degrees, particularly aware of

the importance of problems of terrorism. This explains why they have given a relatively clear definition of it in their 2001 Convention⁹. The point here is the one of the compatibility between definitions proposed by the different organizations, since a terrorist is not necessarily the same for a country and for another. Beijing and Moscow – as well as all Central Asian States - have similar conceptions because they also have similar strategic interests. This is not always the case with NATO. The point lies here with the compatibility of designs and objectives of the Atlantic Alliance, and especially of the United States, in an area which had been incautiously considered as an area of vital interest for the United States by former President Bush Jr. Either Washington demonstrates that its presence in the region is only linked to its fight (war?) against terrorism in "Afpak" and, in that case, cooperation between the different regional security alliances could prove to be helpful and efficiently work. Or Washington intends to impose and perpetuate its presence in this region so that it becomes a zone of influence which would mean that rivalries between Empires in this area will resume¹⁰. But it should also be considered that considering today's world economic situation, none of the players participating to such a game has any interest to a worsening of the tensions especially in this area, unless a political leader intends to embark his own country into an external adventure in order to make his people forget difficulties at home. But history has shown that this kind of calculation has allways ended with a disaster¹¹.

If NATO condescends to cooperate, especially with SCO, it will be interesting to follow the way which will be used to develop such a cooperation: a direct way from the USA to China through the Pacific would mean that Washington is looking for Beijing as its privileged contact in Eurasia ignoring the Atlantic Alliance. On the contrary, if through NATO, Washington uses the European way, including Russia - which could be considered as being obvious for an Alliance supposed to be "Atlantic" - the main partner in Eurasia should be Russia, admitting de facto its vocation to be the main contributor of security in the Central-Asia¹².

⁹ Article 1 of the Shanghai convention, June 5th, 2001.

¹⁰ *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, August 20ht, 2010.

¹¹ The only exception might be the Falkland War in 1982.

¹² In this three players game, should also be mentionned the role of BRIC which is one of the axis of the sino-russian dialogue but should not be considered as the bebeginning of an alliance.

Of course, at least in appearance and for the time being the common objective remains the fight against terrorism. But even on this issue it is not obvious that the three poles of power – Washington, Moscow and Beijing - have adopted the same conception of security in the area and that they have the same conception of fighting against terrorism. In a paper published in a Russian review a Chinese researcher considered that a triangular formation is nothing but a set of three bilateral formations, and in this case: China-Russia, China-USA and Russia-USA¹³.

¹³ YAN Zemjan, “Dialog na troih” (Trilateral dialog), *Rossia v global'nom politike*, n° 3, 2010.