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THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE AUSTERITY SUMMIT

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THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE AUSTERITY SUMMIT

Abstract:

Economic austerity has stressed the challenges of the NATO summit. The U.S. spends less money on defense and is tired of its longest war. In Chicago it has set deadlines for the withdrawal from Afghanistan in an orderly and safe manner, despite the announcement from France. However, the Taliban are jeopardizing social gains and the political viability of the country as is an unstable nuclear Pakistan. Despite the restrictive budgets the EU countries and the Pentagon are facing, the U.S. has managed to enter several allies to the concept of Smart Defense with drones and a missile defense system with U.S. technology in an initial phase, despite Russia's reluctance, which allows a nuclear withdrawal in Europe. Meanwhile, NATO has extended its vision and has become the hub of global security with 13 new partners allowing military, political and financial cooperation in different parts of the world.

Keywords:

U.S, NATO, Chicago Summit, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taliban, Smart Defense, capabilities, austerity, hub for security partnerships, missile defense, deterrence, ISR, drones.

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INTRODUCTION

Has the NATO summit answered the challenges that the US posed?

The Obama administration has achieved some of the objectives that they had set, but some others will clearly have to wait until long after Chicago. The withdrawal from Afghanistan results from the Pentagon's increasingly austere and restrictive budgets, but we still have to wait to see if the country will be stable and politically viable. Achieving more with less money has been imposed on the Alliance and the example of the *Smart Defense* works with the aerial drones and it is in the initial phase of the antimissile system with American technology. This United States would like to look more toward China and the Pacific than to the Transatlantic relationship, especially if they saw that their bonds with the EU are very strong. The future of the Alliance depends on how the Western's economic and political vitality is restored.

A SECURE WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

The first goal that the US set in the Alliance Summit was to achieve an ordered and secure transition in Afghanistan without leaving the Afghans to their fate and the disappearance of Al Qaeda and their refuges in the Asian country.

In Chicago a guideline has been established by the allies and their partners to achieve a secure withdrawal from the longest war that the US has ever faced. This is a *road map* that was fixed in the Lisbon Summit in 2010 and that NATO has been carrying it out since 2011 and planning on finishing by 2014.

From 2012 onwards, the NATO troops in Afghanistan will still carry out combat operations but not as their main work; the initiatives of the attacks will be taken by the Afghan army. This is what General John Allen, the chief of the international troops in Afghanistan, calls a transition from a combat mission to a support mission, which will occur during 2013.

The Afghan security forces have multiplied from 276,000 to 330,000 in the last year, and they control the territory in which the 50-75% of the population lives. Their objective is to reach the 352,000 members in October 2012. Around 23,000 soldiers will leave Afghanistan at the end of the summer and the troops will continue to be reduced until 2014. However, the Afghans will count with the US security forces who will cooperate until 2024.

When the United States started the Afghanistan war in 2001 they had 2 objectives: catch Bin Laden and bring down the Taliban regime. Ten years later the first objective has been achieved, and the second one shall not even be mentioned because there are negotiations with them and after the withdrawal they might try to rise to power once more.

We do not talk about a victory in Afghanistan, but about a “good enough”¹ which means that it is politically acceptable to the Americans while they slowly come out of the economic crisis. “When Obama talks about the North American troops, his speech sounds positive and even optimistic, but when he acts he seems to be in a rush to reach the exit door of Afghanistan”, says Kalb². In the middle of the electoral campaign, the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, pressures and wants to finish the Taliban, which seems even less likely to happen. Since Vietnam, no other president has wanted to sit in the Oval Office while their country loses a war.

It is probable that after 2014, the attacks from the Taliban rebels will continue in this country and in the south, in the border with Pakistan where the Haqqani network operates. To top them they would need 600,000 people in the Afghan security forces, in a country with 30 million people and a 200,000km² more territory than Iraq in which 670,000 members of the security forces operate.

France’s precipitated departure

Another problem that could be solved in Chicago, in spite of Obama’s bilateral reunion before the G8 with François Hollande, is France’s violation of the Alliance’s motto “we entered together, we leave together” when he ordered the withdrawal of the French troops in 2012. The French President noted this violation by not attending either president Obama’s nor Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s speech at the NATO plenary meeting. Hollande entered the room after their interventions³.

Hollande had promised the American president to contribute with “other means”. This new direction of the newest French president is a political setback for the NATO mission in Afghanistan. It opens the breach by which other countries could also withdraw, especially those who are going through a serious economic crisis, in spite of the great irresponsibility that the abandonment would suppose to the Alliance’s compromise with the Afghan people. During the summit they have tried to maintain NATO united to prevent a sudden withdrawal from the Asian country.

Hollande’s confirmation with the withdrawal of the 3,200 soldiers by the end of this year could hardly be precipitated and, it’s more than probable that one third of the French soldiers stay to instruct the Afghan security forces, as he announced during his surprise visit to the troops in Afghanistan 2 days after the summit.

Sarkozy’s getting France in the NATO’s integrated command during a period of austere budgets, makes it complicated for Paris to renounce the Intelligent Defense and Connected Initiatives, which are necessary to some missions such as Libya’s⁴. Even though Hollande

¹Kalb, Marvin. A “good enough” exit from Afganistan. Brookings Institution. May 17th, 2012. <http://www.brookings.edu/up-front/posts/2012/05/17-afghanistan-exit-kalb>

²Kalb, Marvin. op.cit.

³Caño, Antonio. Francia se aleja de la OTAN en Afganistán. El País. May 21st, 2012

⁴Valcárcel, Darío. La OTAN busca una salida honorable. ABC. May 24th, 2012

voted against the reintegration of France in the allied military structure in 2008, it's very unlikely that he would do something against it because, as he himself stated, he'll be "transparent and predictable with his allies"⁵.

The Taliban power

The Taliban have not missed their chance and after Hollande's announcement they have asked the rest of the countries with troops in Afghanistan to do the same. However, Chicago seems to have stopped the stampede of the allied troops out of a country where there must be collaboration with Hamid Karzai's regime. 97% of the Afghan GDP comes from international aid and the military. Afghanistan is the first producer of heroin and cannabis in the world. The opium crops, 74% of the world production, are very important for the war lords, the corrupt officials, the Taliban and many poor Afghans.⁶ The leaders of the OTAN met Karzai to certify his compromise and pressure him to make greater political progress. The American administration is currently speaking with the Taliban to try to find an end to this war, but there will be no agreement if the Afghan regimen doesn't allow representation to all the rest.⁷

The slow recovery of the North American economy and their enormous deficit has made the Pentagon cut their expenses and rethink the Afghanistan mission. The objectives that the OTAN fixed in 2001 were clear: take the initiative against insurgency, help the afghan government to govern and start to give responsibility to the Afghans. In Chicago everything has come to prepare the troops to be relieved. According to the ISAF, police corp. and an army that depend on the coalition support where only one unit was able to work independently a year ago.

Even though Rasmussen said that half of the Afghan population is living in areas that are under the exclusive responsibility of the Afghan army. Their combat performance is usually low and there is proof of infiltration of rebel elements.

In spite of the deadlines stipulated by Chicago, it's hard to predict when the security forces will be formed without the need for external support. An army made out of members from different ethnicities, not Psthuns, have to operate in the south and east of the country. In Psthun areas (the main ethnic group comprising 35% of the Afghans) the Taliban command the insurgency.⁸

⁵Vaïsse, Justin. Franco-American Relations after the election of François Hollande. Fondation Robert Schuman. http://www.robert-schuman.eu/question_europe.php?num=qe-241

⁶Benedicto Solsona, Miguel Angel. Afganistán: ¿Misión cumplida? Atenea Digital. 14.07.11. http://www.revistatenea.es/RevistaAtenea/REVISTA/articulos/GestionNoticias_5175_ESP.asp

⁷ Caño, Antonio. La OTAN diseña el final en Afganistán. May 20th, 2012. El País.

⁸ Tankel, Stephen. Afgan war is not over yet. CNN. May 23rd, 2012.

The problem is Pakistan

In the 90s, India supported the Northern Alliance, integrated my non-Pasthun ethnicities, against the Taliban which financed Pakistan. Islamabad saw the Afghan army as the remains of the Northern Alliance because it was mainly formed by non Pasthuns. It is a force that could reach the 300,000 members equipped by the Unites States and Kabul's government near their archenemy, India.

If the Afghan army divides due to their heterogeneous ethnic components, the Pasthuns would represent the majority of the population, but a small minority in the Army, which could result in a inter ethnic violence that could break the nation. An Afghan civil war would have terrible consequences for the region, especially for their neighbor, Pakistan.

Islamabad's fear has resulted in the political⁹ support to the Taliban and the Haqqani network to position as the referee in the future conflict resolution. This has led Pakistan to isolation. The support of the Pakistani government to the reconciliation of Afghanistan with the Taliban and their intent to control this process is unacceptable for Kabul, Washington and even to the Taliban. They all want to diminish Pakistan involvement.

The reopening of the supply route

All these issues are very knotty, but it does not seem that Chicago has made a progress or set a path to solve them. For Barak Obama an unstable nuclear Pakistan is more of a threat than an Afghanistan without a strong democratic government. That is the reason for inviting president Zardari at the last minute in spite of the problems in Afghanistan —since 6 months ago— when during an air bombing 24 Pakistani soldiers died accidentally. The reopening of this rout is the pending subject of the Chicago summit. Even though it is not necessary for the logistics and troop withdrawal, it is important for the large-scale project.

The relationship between the US and Pakistan clashed once more in Chicago. President Zardari was invited at the last minute and there were possibilities to reach an agreement with Washington to reopen the borders, which would benefit both countries. The Islamabad government charged a 250\$ passing rights per truck before the killing, now they're asking for 5,000\$. The disagreement about the pricing is evident and Islamabad is asking the US to apologize for the bombing that caused the death of the soldiers. To bring 130,000 NATO soldiers and the huge logistic that it implies requires such ways.¹⁰ It is the cheapest and most direct one because most of the war material enters through the port of Karachi. Half a year ago, the Pentagon was forced to open an alternative way through Russia and Central Asia, which raised the costs.

Furthermore, there are increasingly powerful forces in Pakistan that require the border to be closed. Several jihadist groups have united into a lobby that calls itself "Defense of Pakistan", and it's directed by Hafez Saeed, the leader of the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which

⁹ Tankel, Stephen. Op. Cit.

¹⁰Bassets, Lluís. Sin Hoja ni ruta. El País. May 24th, 2012.

perpetrated the Bombay attack in 2008 and promoted manifestations all over the countries demanding the closing of the borders. The lobby also asks to stop Zardari's agreements with the US, the NATO and to end the attacks perpetrated by the aerial drones to terrorist objectives.¹¹

Although Washington set a price for Saeed's head after the Bombay attack, the leader of the terrorist group bragged about those threats in the Pakistani television. Saeed has strong supporters in the Army and the Intelligence Services (ISI) and knows perfectly how unpopular the Americans are in Pakistan, especially after the aerial drones' attacks that caused so many collateral victims and Bin Laden's death in Abbottabad by the hand of the Navy Seals.

President Zardari is not so popular in his country and since his wife passed away, former President Bhutto has been in the focus of Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Taliban. After Bin Laden's death, she has survived an army coup attempt.

Zardari has tried to change its relations with India, where he visited President Singh and, despite the jihad extremists and ISI's opposition, he understands that Pakistan must put an end to its rivalry with its neighbour and open up its borders to trade in order to prosper. Further, he has to stop investing a large amount of its resources in its nuclear arsenal while the main cities of the country have power cuts that last more than 20 hours.

Pakistani representative also wishes to improve relations with the USA but his field of manoeuvre is limited by the army and the parliament, which demand apologies from Washington and the end of drone attacks. This does not seem viable as it is part of the new USA defence policy led by Obama and as it is giving such good results, despite the doubts of its legality. At the Chicago Summit, Zardari got snubbed by Obama, who did not receive him alone as the agreement to open up borders was not concluded, and had to content himself with a meeting with Hillary Clinton.

Obama's biggest problem with Afghanistan is that it can veto any attempt of negotiation between Karzai's Afghan government and the Taliban, which leadership remains in Karachi under control of the Pakistani secret services¹². US President himself acknowledged at the press conference in Chicago that the Taliban are still a strong enemy and that Pakistan has to be a part of the solution in Afghanistan.¹³

¹¹Riedel, Bruce. NATO Summit's big loser: behind Obama's snub of Pakistan. The Daily Beast. May 22nd, 2012. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/05/22/nato-summit-s-big-loser-behind-obama-s-snub-of-pakistan.html>

¹²Riedel, Bruce. Op. Cit.

¹³ White House. Remarks by the President at NATO Press Conference. Chicago, May 21st 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/21/remarks-president-nato-press-conference>

Social achievements in danger

An agreement with the Taliban or their accession to power once again would ruin the small achievements that have been reached. The schools, the roads and the hospitals that have been built or the increasing number of children attending school may have been pointless.

For example, in the province of Kandahar, schools have almost 80,000 pupils, twice as much as in 2007. Furthermore, already two thirds of the Afghan people have access to the basic health services, 8% more than under the power of the Taliban. There are 1,000 judges, 200 of them women, and elections are held on a regular basis.

Women's rights have been improved since 2001: 69 out of 249 members of the parliament are women (28% of the total). More than half of the young women attend school, which was forbidden under the Taliban regime. According to Human Rights Watch, if an agreement with Taliban is reached, the most affected will be the women. Tens of girl pupils got burned by the Taliban in 2010 and some teachers got threatened through intimidating letters to stop teaching girls, and in the previous weeks we have seen how these girls got poisoned.

The tiredness of 10 years being on the field makes the allies want a secure and stable Afghanistan that will not pose a threat for the region nor for the rest of the world, without emphasizing the social achievements. The war is not over. The Asian country is still a seedbed of international terrorists and instability and death are frequent every day.

Although there will be a strong reduction of troops until the end of 2014, the US will not leave alone the Afghan people and will cooperate with their security forces until 2024. In the roadmap it has also been established a considerable economic aid for at least 10 years with a cost of around 4 billion dollars, and the USA has engaged to pay half of the amount. The rest is being negotiated (Germany would bring 150 millions and Spain has been asked 30 millions) and in July the amounts to be paid by the 50 contributing countries will be established at the donors conference in Japan.

MAINTAINING THE PRIORITY MILITARY CAPACITIES

The economic crisis that strikes the West is also indirectly striking the Alliance. The USA sees the EU role as a relevant role for its Defence needs and is asking European countries to invest more in security.

The financial and government debt crisis that Europe is undergoing makes hard to increase its Defense expenses, which represents 1.6% of the GDP against the 4.8% in the USA. Currently the European countries bring 20% of the Alliance budget¹⁴. The EU limited defence budget makes it difficult for the USA to gaze at Asia. Not having a strong and stable transatlantic bond it is hard for Obama to focus on the Pacific.

¹⁴Dyer, Geoff. Washington can focus on Asia only with a robust NATO. FT, May 22nd 2012.

But in Europe each country goes its own way. France will withdraw the troops from Afghanistan this year and is likely to lower its Defense contribution. Germany aspires to lead the economic Europe but did not take part in an operation such as Libya's and pretends to reduce its defense expenses during the next 4 years.¹⁵ The United Kingdom will not build any aircraft carrier in a decade and will reduce its budget 7.5% until 2015, Denmark abandons its submarines and Holland will do the same with its tanks¹⁶ but will invest in radars for its frigates for the missile defense system of the Alliance¹⁷.

NATO's challenge is to maintain intact the priority military capacities and to do so it is talked about Smart Defense, that is to say, to spend better the resources and to share them among the allies that have mutual trust and similar security problems. In Chicago the initial operational capacity of the Missile Defense System has been boosted, as well as 20 multinational Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) projects.

Purchase of pilotless aircrafts

The weakness of the operational capacity of the Alliance was made clear in Libya. Only 9 countries brought planes and after 3 months some ran out of ammunition and made the USA send emergency supplies. 75% of the aerial refuelling tankers and between 70 and 80% of the ISR capacities were brought by the USA. That is why NATO has agreed to purchase a Ground Surveillance system with five pilotless planes to which will contribute fourteen of the allied. The spy aeroplanes will allow military commanders to control and oversee what the situation on the field is like in future missions in order to act with the finest accuracy and the least collateral damages. Furthermore, it was agreed to keep on with NATO's aerial patrols over the Baltic Sea to watch its airspace.

Anti-missile system with USA technology

Regarding the anti-missile system, the USA has agreed with Turkey, Poland, Romania, Spain and Germany to deploy its critical elements. There are also agreements with the Alliance to be incorporated to NATO's system and the ally country being able to defend itself against ballistic missiles can contribute to the project to defend itself from the increasing threat coming from Iran or North Korea. The Secretary General of the Alliance himself, Anders Fog Rasmussen, has carefully specified that it is a defensive shield and therefore Russia has nothing to fear. USA is the only country with the necessary technology to develop the system and for some European countries its acceptance will mean the future US nuclear withdrawal in Europe.

¹⁵ Larrabee Stephen; Wilson Peter. NATO's Shrinking resources. New York Times, 16.05.12.

¹⁶Continental Drift and Nato's future. FT Editorial, May 21st 2012.

¹⁷ Wolf, Joerg. NATO and the R-Words: 10 takes on the Chicago Summit. Atlantic-community.org.

Rasmussen stated at the Chicago Summit that NATO's missile shield is already partially operational. "It is a first step to reach our long term target of giving a total protection to the territory and to NATO's European countries population", said the Secretary General of the Alliance, whom also showed his desire to reach an agreement with Moscow.

The basic command-and-control system, which includes an advanced radar placed in Turkey, a communications satellite and an air defense specialised vessel (all of them from the US), work together and within the command system of the Alliance.

The capacities that are being planned to be developed until 2018 in NATO's missile defense shield in Europe are as follows:

-Spanish Government engaged to reach an agreement with the USA to house 1,200 soldiers and four destroyers with AEGIS combat system in Rota. To that end, the Spain-USA joint defense agreement (which will soon be signed) must be reformed, as confirmed Alan Solomont, the US ambassador in Spain.

-The Dutch navy will modify the Smart-L radar of the "De Zeven Provinciën" class frigates, which will allow to detect and follow ballistic missiles within a 2,000 km radius¹⁸.

-In the frame of the second stage of the program, Romania will place AEGIS interceptor rockets along the shore of the Black Sea.

Finally, the USA will deploy SM-3 missile radars in Poland between 2015 and 2018. Also, in Turkey, radars and missiles will be deployed in order to intercept ballistic threats.

One day after the Summit, Russia tested a new intercontinental missile able to deliver nuclear warheads in "response" to the anti-missile system project the USA wants to post in Europe.

Relations stagnation with Russia

For the USA, the shield involves a risk of a backward step and a stagnation in the relations with Russia that must be resolved after the elections, even if Obama states it is an area in which a cooperation with Russia is possible¹⁹. President Vladimir Putin sent a low level delegation to Chicago to show his discontent towards the project. Moscow has declared its intention to suspend the most important treaty of disarmament of the past 20 years and there is talk about deploying medium-range missiles in Kaliningrad and about preventive

¹⁸Villarejo, Esteban. NATO's missile shield is starting to become operational. ABC, May 21st 2012.

¹⁹ White House. Remarks by the President at NATO Press Conference. Chicago, May 21st 2012.

bombings against the future anti-missile shield²⁰.

The Alliance considers this anti-missile defense as a complement to the inalienable nuclear deterrence, against other States with nuclear facilities and against terrorist groups. While nuclear weapons will continue existing, the USA will have a nuclear arsenal large enough to ensure the safety of the allies. Rasmussen highlighted the need of credible nuclear deterrence despite the fact that we must work to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. In Chicago was agreed an adequate mix of the nuclear, conventional and anti-missile defense capacities NATO needs. The USA should announce an immediate 50% reduction of nuclear tactic weapons in Europe²¹ and build new bridges to maintain a good relation with Russia.

GLOBAL SECURITY NETWORK

The Arab Spring and NATO's operation in Libya have given rise to not only an operational Alliance but one that also seeks to build a global security network by means of cooperation with other thirteen strategic actors at a military, politic and financial level. Working with a larger number of partners allows the Alliance to increase its legitimacy, to share financial charges and to benefit from other's capacities, as happened in Afghanistan with 22 partners. In Europe, Africa, Asia and especially in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East arise new forms of cooperation that help the Alliance to expand its area of strategic influence. Mechanisms such as the Mediterranean Dialogue or the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative have forged alliances that may help to control two of the current hottest spotlights: Syria and Iran. However, both matters have gone unnoticed during the Summit.

The military intervention in Libya has strengthened this cooperation. That way, the Alliance and its partners at the Gulf Cooperation Council are reverting the relation between both organizations in order to attract 350 million people from the Arab world to the orbit of NATO's regional and global agenda. An Alliance that must remain faithful to its foundational values (democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law) in order to maintain its credibility and to be a pole of attraction at a global scale.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the economic crisis striking the West, the USA had to face many challenges in the Chicago Summit for which a roadmap has been established:

-To achieve a smooth and secure transition in Afghanistan without simply leaving the Afghan people and with the disappearance of Al-Qaeda.

²⁰Ischinger, Wolfgang. Yes to missile defense, with Russia. New York Times, May 17th 2012.

²¹Browne, Des and Ruhe Volcker, The Challenge for NATO in Chicago. New York Times, May 17th 2012.

The USA has avoided, for the moment and despite France leaving, a massive withdrawal of the troops. At the Donors Conference in Japan, the US will need the allies and the partners to finance a complex "postwar", and Pakistan to open its border for the military and logistic withdrawal to be less complicated.

Zardari might cede in exchange of a big amount of money, but internal pressure of the Taliban against the opening increases every day. If to this we add the collateral victims of the pilotless planes, the situation in Afghanistan can be aggravated at a political level and may delay the troops withdrawal. The war is not won and the Asian country's stability is still on the air.

-To maintain the operability and the priority military capacities in times of crisis and reductions in a productive and intelligent way and to improve relations with Russia despite the anti-missile shield.

Despite the Defense limited budgets the EU countries and the Pentagon are facing, in Chicago has begun the Smart Defense and an agreement has been reached to invest in surveillance systems by means of pilotless planes. Washington needs Europe to rise economically in order to focus on Asia.

Regarding the anti-missile shield, it is in an embryonic phase but with very clear deadlines. It is the use of American technology that bothers Russia, with whom the USA is willing to cooperate in order to defuse tensions, although we will have to wait until November's presidential elections.

-To widen the partners network at a global level.

The NATO leaving Chicago is willing to be a world security hub. Countries moving towards democracy need the Alliance, and the latter needs new partners in different areas of the world in order to cooperate military, politically and financially.

The USA comes out well of a summit in which economic austerity was the real protagonist. Despite the budget limitation, Chicago's challenges are on the way to being achieved, some more than others, even if not at short term.

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