

# ILLYRIUS



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## **NATO in a Post-Covid new crisis Era...**

**Abstract.**

*COVID has been a great systemic shock, but in this context NATO has been adapted well. COVID-19 confirmed and affirmed the NATO's value and NATO's tools, the solidarity between Allies in collective defence as the Allies have helped each other and partners, including the Balkan. The post-COVID-19 crisis era offers a good moment for lessons to be identified and learned, and for these issues to be actively considered and acted upon, for the next biological attack may be even more deadly and destabilizing.*

**Irida Xheneti Ph.D. (Cand.) (1)**

COVID has been a great systemic shock, but in this context NATO has been adapted well. COVID-19 confirmed and affirmed the NATO's value and NATO's tools, the solidarity between Allies in collective defence as the Allies have helped each other and partners, including the Balkan. Secondly, the pandemic has showed the value of armed forces. The Armed forces have not stood idle, but they have been used in logistics transporting equipment for hospitals and in many different ways by many different nations.

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In addition, information space has become a key battleground as we have seen a lot of disinformation, manipulation and propaganda about the origin of the virus and fake news about our battle groups<sup>2</sup>.

But, the former rivalries have not gone away. There is always a risk of the potential adversaries to take advantage of the distractions that the COVID-19 has imposed. Both state and non-state actors should try to take advantage of this, but we have to remain vigilant. We have to focus on NATO's core tasks – focusing on deterrence and defence. Maybe NATO has to continue its operations in Kosovo, in Afghanistan and Iraq and continue to reach the partners and think more globally with partners such as Australia, New Zealand, Australia, South-Korea and many others across the world.

In the context of the Post-Covid world it turns out that resilience is key. The alliance is as strong as its weakest link. It is important to have civil preparedness to all hazards and support the military. The next crisis will not be the same, so NATO needs to be prepared.

It is important to have a forward looking view, although we are not in a post-COVID situation yet as it is also arriving in certain regions.

Without doubt, Security is the most important task. The goal was to make sure that this health economic crisis, civilian crisis does not become a security crisis. That there are no changes to the NATO's mission nor in operation, activities have been going on despite the pandemic.

NATO was playing a supportive role providing logistics support, transport, but also providing very vital medical supplies. The pandemic hit allies in different times and on different levels. All allies that could help, did help, there was a strengthening of feeling of solidarity<sup>3</sup>.

NATO has been adapting to different threats from different directions. Disinformation is one key area. Throughout the pandemic we have seen some stark examples how disinformation, propaganda, false narratives are being used how some of our adversaries have tried to split us in the alliance. An other important fact that should be emphasized is that NATO needs to make sure that economic crises should not become a security crisis. Defence investment is crucial.

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<sup>2</sup> Webinar NATO in the Post Covid World , 11.06.2020 – Webinar “NATO in a Post-COVID World”.

<sup>3</sup> Webinar NATO in the Post Covid World , 11.06.2020 – Webinar “NATO in a Post-COVID World”.

It is worth underlining the words of the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, according to whom, NATO must “stay strong militarily, be more united politically, and take a broader approach globally.

The coronavirus crisis had shown that many new challenges, including non-military threats, can only be addressed through multilateral institutions, of which “NATO is one of the biggest and most important”.

He added that, despite the ever-changing global security environment, NATO’s Strategic Concept will not be revised anytime soon. “We have undertaken huge changes of NATO with the same Strategic Concept. The most important thing is not whether we have a new Strategic Concept or not, but that we are able to change NATO as the world is changing<sup>4</sup>.

The crisis of this magnitude cannot but have a major impact on international affairs as well as on transatlantic security.

Whether or not the COVID-19 pandemic ushers a paradigm shift in global history remains to be seen, but there will certainly be important lessons and conclusions to be drawn in the fields of life sciences, economics, sociology, psychology, and also international relations and security.

Like every crisis, it presents an opportunity, and in this case to revisit the global order and rectify some of its deficiencies. In particular, an urgent debate is needed on how to adapt the international system to the realities of the 21st century, including a fairer distribution of the benefits of globalisation, striking the right balance between security and privacy in the cyber era as well as between security and the movement of people and goods, and addressing existential challenges such as climate change. Leaders of the Euro-Atlantic community must take an active and leading part in this process<sup>5</sup>.

The post-COVID global security environment is likely to be more adversarial and characterised by increased geopolitical competition. It is of vital importance to retain adequate levels of funding for defence and security, in line with Allied commitments to the Defence Investment Pledge agreed at the 2014 Wales Summit. Parliamentarians of NATO countries have an essential role to play in this regard.

For more details on countering disinformation and propaganda during the COVID-19 pandemic, see

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<sup>4</sup> Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching NATO 2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world, 08.06.2020

<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 ET SÉCURITÉ TRANSATLANTIQUE, Rapport spécial, 20.11.2020

the draft report of the Assembly's Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security as well as its earlier reports, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the Civil Dimension of Security*.

Based on the lessons learned from this outbreak, NATO should conduct a review of its mechanisms and assets to establish what can be used in emergencies of this kind and to reduce the response time in the future. The Allies should also consider providing additional resources to the EADRCC, which once again proved its effectiveness. Allied nations should also revisit their national security strategies to give greater priority to the capacity to engage in public health and pandemic response. But, in preparation for any such future scenarios, NATO must not be distracted from its core mission of deterring and protecting its members from more conventional security threats.

The Euro-Atlantic Allies must improve the coordination of their policy towards China.

In particular, the Allies must redouble their efforts to limit third party investments in strategic infrastructure and to encourage diversification of supply chains in strategic areas, including medicines and medical equipment. Allied leaders should consider endowing NATO with the mandate and resources to provide advice to Members regarding security implications of third-party investments in critical industries and infrastructure in a broader and more strategic way than NATO currently does. Coordination with the EU is also crucial in this regard.

NATO's efforts to promote resilience through civil preparedness should be supported, in particular, the updating of baseline requirements in seven strategic sectors – continuity of government, energy, population movement, food and water resources, mass casualties, civil communications, and transport systems. The pandemic showed the importance of NATO-EU cooperation on logistics and military mobility for both organisations<sup>6</sup>. It is to be hoped that the EU will continue to fund its Military Mobility project adequately. Ensuring resilience of cyber structures will be particularly important in the wake of the pandemic, when societies, governments, and militaries are likely to increase dependence on online communications. NATO's significant efforts in protecting Allied networks

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<sup>6</sup> COVID-19: NATO in the Age of Pandemics, NATO Defense College, 09.05.2020



and enhancing cyber resilience will need to be expanded, including in cooperation with the EU.

NATO's recent responses during terrorist attacks, chemical incidents, epidemics and the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the role of the Alliance in ensuring collective biodefence and deterrence. In these end states, the Allies will continue to play the most central role<sup>7</sup>.

However, NATO's own mandate for biodefence and deterrence means that the Alliance should be prepared (if called upon) to assist members and partner nations during growing threats in the biosphere or in the germs domain, recently described by the Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command in Naples as the "7th domain of warfare".<sup>20</sup> While NATO's responses during the COVID-19 crisis attest to the fact that Allies and partner nations are probably better off with NATO's support to deter and defend from future bioterrorist attacks than without it – more must be done to ensure that the Alliance is fully prepared to respond to biological attacks across the whole spectrum of operations.

Enhancing NATO's complementary situational awareness, capabilities and engagements, as agreed upon during the 2012 Chicago Summit, is critical in at least four lines of effort identified in this chapter: first, to prevent the increase in intent and capabilities of terrorist entities; second to pursue indicators and warnings of bioterrorism activities; third to protect civilians and critical infrastructure of NATO members (and partner nations); and fourth to prepare for future bioterrorism attacks. The post-COVID-19 crisis era offers a good moment for lessons to be identified and learned, and for these issues to be actively considered and acted upon, for the next biological attack may be even more deadly and destabilizing.

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