

DOMINIQUE FAUET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A new world disorder

BY STEFANO STEFANINI

The upcoming NATO Summit must deal with a growing constellation of global disarray, from Ukraine on its eastern edge to Syria and Iraq on the southern border. Otherwise NATO will fade into irrelevance.

The parallel tragedies of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 in eastern Ukraine and of Israel's ground campaign in the Gaza Strip signal an international security environment spinning out of control. The Atlantic community is at the center of it. Crises, both to its east and to its south, have morphed into wars. Russia, once part of the solution, has chosen to be part of the problem. As a result, the West is confronted with a scenario of European and global insecurity. In Wales, on September 4-5, NATO leaders will have the chance to tackle it together. Should they fail to do so, the 65-year old alliance will have outlived its core mission.

Between 1989 and 1992 the Cold War was won by the West "without firing a single shot." The prevailing narrative (in the West) conveniently overlooks the internal dynamics of the Soviet implosion and demise of communism; it ignores the fact that too many shots were fired in the periphery, especially in the appalling wake of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Yet, it is fundamentally correct with regard to the 40-year standoff between the US and USSR (and by extension between NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and to the overhanging nuclear shadow that came with it. It all vanished. No blood was shed.

Have we spoken too early? Those missing shots are being fired now in eastern Ukraine, between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian rebels, in a late aftershock of the Soviet Union's collapse. There is a war going on in the midst of the European plains. So far it has been a relatively low intensity conflict, yet casualties now number in the hundreds, and mounting, and weaponry has been getting heavier and more sophisticated. Then on July 17 it took a turn for the worse when Flight MH 17 was downed by a surface-to-air Russian-made SA-

11 (Buk) missile. Suddenly the local turned global. The horrific images of debris, bodies, personal effects scattered throughout the Ukrainian fields rippled across the world, leaving a long trail of mourning and human suffering, that stretched from the Netherlands to Malaysia and Australia, while the scientific community grieved the loss of several brilliant AIDS researchers – a loss that could significantly set back cure and treatment.

All evidence points to the rebels mistakenly shooting at the Malaysian Airlines Boeing 777, because they thought it to be a Ukrainian military transport plane; two days earlier they had proudly downed an Antonov 26, at a lower altitude. Irrespective of further details, which will have to wait for the international investigation – if ever allowed to take place in such incredible conditions – the MH 17 tragedy raises two wider political and security issues. First, a separatist war in the middle Europe cannot be isolated and managed as a side-show; either it is "peacefully and diplomatically settled," as Angela Merkel put it, or it will not only destabilize Ukraine, but also spill over and affect European security and Russia's relations with the West. This has already happened. Further deterioration would be a gigantic step backward for Europe and in the Atlantic community. Second, Russia's responsibilities for supporting and arming the rebels in eastern Ukraine take center stage. Diplomacy and politics

A piece of wreckage from Malaysia Airlines flight MH 17 on July 18, 2014 in Shkhtarsk, Ukraine, the day after it crashed. US officials believe Boeing 777 flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was hit by a surface-to-air missile fired by pro-Russian separatists, killing all 298 people on board.



Israeli firefighters extinguish a fire that broke out after a rocket hit a petrol station in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod July 11, 2014.

might finesse it – and I hope they will – but Russia's policy in Ukraine cannot escape the jury of common sense. With flaming rhetoric and wily deeds, President Putin has stoked up Russian ethnic nationalism. He has let the rebels of the Donetsk People's Republic be trained and equipped, with tanks, man-pads and now with anti-aircraft missile batteries. Like an apprentice sorcerer he does not fully control the forces he has unleashed. The fire he has ignited has now come to burn him.

Let me be clear. Russia does have legitimate interests in Ukraine. Moscow should be entitled to be at the table with Kiev and Brussels in a trilateral discussion on Ukraine-EU-Russia relations. Energy matters: Russia is a main supplier, Ukraine is a main transit route; there are no alternatives in the medium term. After the 1999 NATO enlargement, which was accompanied by a strong and consistent diplomatic outreach to Moscow, Russia has often been taken for granted on matters of European security. More generally, Moscow has a real grudge toward the West for having long being treated with complacency and disdain. Though Russia contributed in distancing itself from Europe, especially in the last eight to ten years, there is quite some truth to a Russian perception of “not being wanted” by the West. The Western narrative about the “declining power” cannot have gone down very well in the Kremlin.

Afghanistan through Central Asia. The relationship progressively frayed and deteriorated, with tense situation like Georgia and Libya, during the Medvedev presidency. In the last 12 months, the Syrian and Ukrainian crises have completed the u-turn in Russian foreign policy, from cooperation to opposition with respect to Washington and Brussels.

Such change does not mean that the EU and NATO should not talk to the Russians. On the contrary, it makes dialogue the more necessary, albeit difficult. Nor does it mean that the West cannot do business with Russia. What it means is that Moscow, or rather President Putin, *perceives* Russia's national interests as competitive or contrary to those of the United States and European Union. Witness Ukraine. Negotiations and compromise remain possible, desirable, and even likely, but they will require Western and European awareness that engagement, in the current prevailing Russian mindset, is a zero-sum game. Such awareness has often been lacking in some European quarters. MH 17 might change that.

This is the state of play today with regard to Russia. In the meantime the “world order” has turned into global insecurity, and risen well outside Europe, irrespective of Moscow's policy. As I write, the other headline news is the Israeli ground attack against Hamas in Gaza and the pain it is inflicting on the Palestinian population of the Strip. Without analyzing this new

That said, Russian behavior, namely the annexation of Crimea and covert activity in eastern Ukraine, is internationally unacceptable. What is happening in the Donbas, including the unwanted MH 17 tragedy, is a direct consequence of that behavior. Not to recognize this is to be in denial – and to encourage more of such behavior.

The key to George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft's “new world order” was Moscow's cooperative posture, namely in the UN Security Council. It lasted through the 1990s, in spite of the significant difference over Kosovo. (Although that did not prevent Moscow from initially participating in KFOR, as it had participated in IFOR in Bosnia Herzegovina.) When al-Qaeda struck in 2001, President Putin put Russia squarely on the American side, granting unprecedented access to



A Palestinian woman cries inside her damaged house, which was targeted in an Israeli air strike, in Gaza City, July 17, 2014.

destructive turn in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Gaza crisis proves first that, contrary to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim, the Palestinian issue cannot be simply “managed.” It has to be solved diplomatically with the two-state solution, or it will continue to be fought unendingly. Second, the Palestinian crisis is certainly not the only conflict in the Middle East, but it is not one that will go away if the rest subside – which is not going to happen anyway. In other words, the road to peace and stability in the Middle East does not go through Jerusalem *only*, but it certainly goes *also* through Jerusalem. Just as simplistic is the narrative that sees all existing conflicts *only* through the prism of the Sunni-Shiite secular divide and of the Iran-Gulf rivalry for hegemony. The clash exists and runs deep, but other forces and issues conflate the overall Middle East powder keg.

The list of crises, threats and flashpoints in the region stretching from Afghanistan to Northern Africa would be unending. At least two, at the moment, should be constructed as threats to international peace and stability, i.e. as posing challenges beyond the regional dimension – where it has already been devastating: the Syrian civil war; and the Islamic State of Iraq and of the Levant's (ISIS) barbaric consolidation in the Sunni triangle in Iraq, while successfully fighting against a weak and fractured Baghdad government.

The two, combined, could de facto break up Syria and Iraq, redraw the Sikes and Picot map, disrupt oil supplies, threaten Jordan and Lebanon, and last but not least, send Europe and the US a steady flow of well trained would-be terrorists with Western passports. Needles to say, the accumulation of crises and wars from Northern Africa and the Levant has its natural outlet on the long Mediterranean arc, which is Europe and NATO's southern and southeastern border. Illegal immigration toward the EU is the immediate effect of Mediterranean instability. It will not be the only one if strife and lawlessness continue unabated.

Therefore, today, Europe finds itself at the unhappy crossroads of two main sources of international insecurity. It may be argued that the main geopolitical hazards remain centered in Asia and in the Pacific, because of China's claims in the South China Sea, of the simmering rivalries with India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and other ASEAN countries, of the Korean peninsula, of the Taiwan issue. Unlike Europe, Asia does not have a collective security organization, and relies on US military presence to keep stability. A case could also be made for the existence of an across-the-board terrorist threat that does not spare anyone and has actually targeted the US, India and Russia (Chechen inspired) more than Europe. However, the fact remains that in the first half of 2014 the most pressing security challenges have



People look at the flowers left in remembrance for the victims of the MH17 plane crash at Schiphol Airport, near Amsterdam, July 21, 2014.

come from the Ukrainian crisis and from the Mediterranean/Middle East instability and wars. Moreover these deteriorating developments have occurred against the backdrop of an often distracted EU, of an engagement-averse America and of a fairly indifferent rest of the world. Like it or not, Europe is not the center of the world it once was during the Cold War. While the US has too much at stake in the Atlantic community and the Middle East, and will not walk away from European security, the rest of the world will not be moved by Europe's travails nor will be dragged into them. It will watch and thrive. Europeans, Americans and Russians have to solve their issues by themselves.

In this context, the lack of a EU foreign policy and the lackluster performance of many European capitals in confronting the fallout of Russian behavior in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, are striking – and worrisome. As *Corriere della Sera's* Luigi Offeddu commented, "Europe stands still, while diplomacy is on leave." The appointment of the new EU High Representative has been postponed to the end of August, after a inconclusive European Council that argued about names rather than policy. 2014 might not be 1914, but the habit of sleepwalking through crises dies hard on the Old Continent. In the immediate aftermath of the Gaza ground war and of the Malaysian Airlines crash, nothing could highlight it more cruelly than the contrast be-

tween the flurry of activism in Washington and the long weekend lethargy in Brussels.

Foreign policy aside, the security crossfire should have the Europeans sticking together to cope with a gathering of threats that by any stretch of the imagination no nation can confront alone. Instead, Europe seems to be falling prey to the sirens of fragmentation and break-up: euroskeptic populism in France and Denmark, separatism in Scotland and Catalonia, EU rejection in Britain – to name a few. Politically, these trendy attitudes cannot be dismissed and will influence the EU institutions, starting with the newly elected European Parliament. In purely security terms they go against common sense.

While the combination of wars, rivalries, fundamentalism, nuclear proliferation and population displacements makes the Greater Middle East the

biggest threat to international peace and security in the medium to long term, today it is mainly Russia that divides Europeans. Left only to themselves, they are unlikely to reconcile their views. To be sure, differences run deep also between Americans and some Europeans – as the European External Action Service Secretary General, Pierre Vimont, put it recently, "we are in different geographical situations" – but such a gap can still fit into the traditional transatlantic pattern: US and Europe have a long tack record of bridging disagreements into allies' unity. NATO, of course, is the venue where to manage such differences. Hence the importance of the September Wales Summit.

Policy divisions at NATO are rooted in different security perceptions: Eastern Allies want the Alliance's return to be a bulwark against Russian expansionism; Southern Europeans want it to remain focused on the Mediterranean; free from any specific threat on their borders, other Western Europeans look at NATO as a rain check; North Americans believe that they have done enough for European security and that it is time for European Allies to take more of the burden and more responsibilities, within and outside NATO. These differences are sharpened both by defense budgetary constraints and the need to credibly respond to the Ukrainian crisis. Meanwhile the Middle East burns. And the Mediterranean is no buffer, witness the boat people coming to European shores, and a crucial ally,



Turkey, shares border with Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Yet the very fact that European and Atlantic security is challenged on both sides, East and South, makes NATO the only forum where the West can still unite. A credible political response has to be backed by credible and convincing security deterrence and supported by consistent diplomatic outreach. Only NATO, as a political-military alliance, can do it. Only NATO can keep "the Americans in" as a shared policy.

Will NATO do it? Only if, in September's Wales Summit, NATO leaders rise to this new challenge. New, because it is not a Cold War redux. In spite of the Ukrainian crisis, the relationship with Moscow remains more complex than purely adversarial. NATO needs to talk to Russians as much as to deter them from further expansionism and destabilization in Central and Eastern Europe. Russia has a powerful military (not to mention its nuclear arsenal) but it also has legitimate security concerns that should be dealt with at a negotiating table rather than in the fields of eastern Ukraine and on the Crimean coast.

NATO is entering a new phase. The Russian problem exists and demands reassuring the eastern Allies. But NATO cannot fail to recognize the much wider context of global insecurity, and the other looming

threats at its very doors. The summit should not be a sterile debate between opposite, static and flexible, visions of the alliance and of common defense. Either NATO leaders are able to assess and acknowledge the dual security challenge, in the Central European plains *and* on the Mediterranean shores, or, for the first time in its 65-year history, it will have given up on its core mission of providing long lasting security to all its members.

STEFANO STEFANINI is Vice President of Oto Melara, a Finmeccanica company and Nonresident Senior Fellow of the Brent Scowcroft Center for International Security, Atlantic Council. He was the Italian Permanent Representative at NATO from April 2007 to December 2010.

Soldiers of NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo (KFOR) on July 4, 2014 at the US Camp Bondsteel near the village of Sojeva, Kosovo.