NATO’s Next 70 Years
Adapting counterterrorism toolbox to the post-Caliphate context
Madrid, 3-4 June 2019

Executive Summary

The Elcano Royal Institute, together with NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division and the Policy Planning Unit of the Office of the Secretary General organised in collaboration with the Portuguese Institute for International Relations (IPRI) a two-day event to mark NATO’s 70th anniversary in 2019.

The event was divided into two parts. A workshop on Monday 3 June to debate in a restricted forum on the current and coming challenges for NATO and, in particular, those arising from the state fragility and counterterrorism in the NATO’s Southern Flank.

Leading security experts from NATO headquarters, senior officials from the Spanish and Portuguese Defence and Foreign Affairs Ministries, academia, think tanks and defence industry representatives gathered to discuss the regional approach to NATO’s next 70 years. The discussion revolved around the future of the Alliance and its internal cohesion in times of power transition and hybrid threats.

Experts concluded that, regardless the last rhetoric on disagreements, NATO continues adding value to the security of the allies in the core functions of collective defense and crisis management, but not so much in the cooperative security where the NATO’s instruments are limited. This makes it difficult to find a role for NATO in the South where the sources of fragility and instability are not military in nature. Thus, experts found that NATO must adopt a supportive role to third organizations and countries able to provide the non-military dimensions of the cooperative security.

On Tuesday 4 June a public conference took place with the participation of the Spanish Permanent Representative to NATO, the Portuguese Director General for National Defence Policy (Portuguese Ministry of Defence), the Spanish Director General for Defence Policy (Spanish Ministry of Defence) and NATO’s Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy. The discussions focused on different challenges affecting the Alliance nowadays: state fragility and counterterrorism, disinformation and how to ease tensions on the very sensitive topic of burden sharing. The audience was composed by approximately 200 participants with a very heterogeneous profile: civil servants from different ministries, ambassadors, foreign embassies’ representatives, defence industry companies, researchers from different think tank and university professors and students.

The exchanges between different stakeholders and the fruitful interaction with the public helped in the dissemination of NATO’s activities, which sometimes lack visibility. Especially applauded by the younger public was the role of NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division and its fight against disinformation through its different profiles in social media. In this regard, both sessions, the experts’ seminar and the public conference, concluded that a greater buy-in from the younger generations is essential for NATO’s next 70 years.