

July 2024

OCCASIONAL PAPER

Volume 4, Number 7

The 75th Anniversary of NATO's Founding: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

**The 75th Anniversary of NATO's
Founding: Lessons Learned and
Challenges Ahead**

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National Institute Press®

Published by
National Institute Press®
9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750
Fairfax, Virginia 22031

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National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Occasional Paper* possible.

Cover design by Stephanie Koeshall.

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Preface

This year, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commemorates 75 years since its founding. The Alliance has proven to be one of the most successful multilateral partnerships in the history of modern states. Yet, challenges are on the horizon and its members cannot take peace, security, and the prosperity stemming from NATO membership for granted.

The contributors to this *Occasional Paper* have dedicated their professional careers to fostering a strong transatlantic partnership and together bring an uncommon depth of expertise. They offer a sobering appraisal of lessons learned and challenges NATO faces going forward.

Todd Clawson takes stock of NATO's capabilities and makes recommendations to strengthen NATO's force posture. Ann-Sofie Dahl argues that, along with Finland and Sweden, the two most recent additions to NATO, the Alliance is stronger than ever. Michaela Dodge highlights increasing challenges to NATO's cohesion as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues to shape Europe's security environment. Gary Geipel examines, and capably dispels, an adversarial counternarrative, that NATO is a charity and that its policies are responsible for Russia's expansionism. "NATO is cool," Geipel writes, and makes valuable recommendations to fashion the discourse in a more positive light. Artur Kacprzyk comments on NATO's nuclear deterrent, a timely contribution given debates about changing nuclear burden-sharing in Europe. Kacprzyk points out that China's nuclear expansion could draw U.S. attention away from Europe and create risks for nuclear deterrence in Europe, and that the current program of record may not be sufficient to address the challenge. Susan Koch discusses the evolution of allies' relationships since NATO's founding, as well as the link between their defense spending and Russia's threat. She cautions that it remains

to be seen whether NATO's showcasing of its successes to date will meet a responsive audience, particularly in the United States. David Lonsdale examines how the Alliance's *Strategic Concepts* reflects changing geopolitics. He observes that, while the geography has largely remained the same, the geopolitical landscape has changed quite dramatically. Franklin Miller notes three fundamental challenges to NATO's continued success: a debate over defense spending, a controversy regarding the role of the United States, and a potentially highly dangerous method of decision making which could paralyze NATO in a time of crisis. Keith Payne writes about structural pressures facing the U.S. alliance system—particularly Russia and China's détente and their belligerent revisionist policies. Washington's inaction in the face of rising threats has worsened the situation, and it is necessary now to act as the seriousness of the situation requires. Michael Rühle provides insight into NATO's current challenges that could undermine its strength if left unattended to, including the weakening of transatlantic relations and threats to the Alliance's political dimension. Petr Suchý brings to the reader's attention a few instances of NATO's past successes and failures so that it may apply the right lessons learned to future challenges. Bruno Tertrais analyzes the sources of NATO's cohesion, the foundation of its success. And last, but certainly not least, Kenton White discusses the importance of a strong industrial base for a successful functioning of an alliance, a lesson that NATO leaders appear to have forgotten after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

We are grateful for the authors' excellent commentaries and trust you will find them highly stimulating. We are also grateful for the support of the Scaife Foundation and the Smith Richardson Foundation for making this research project possible.

Michaela Dodge
Editor

NATO's Year of Deterrence

Todd Clawson

2024 is a pivotal year for the NATO Alliance. With the Ukraine War continuing into its third year, Russia likely does not see a need to end the conflict until it achieves its political objectives. Hamas' attack last October signifies that the Middle East remains unstable. China's rise and threat of war in the Western Pacific, along with North Korea's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and threatening the United States with war, shows that the Alliance needs a robust deterrent in an increasingly dangerous and unstable world. As NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary, NATO Heads of State and Government need to take stock of the Alliance's ability to deter aggression and maintain peace along its borders.

In 2014, my friend and former teaching partner at the Naval War College penned an article on deterrence. In his article, Jim Holmes discusses the late Henry Kissinger's formula for deterrence. For deterrence to succeed, friendly forces must have the capability and political resolve to use force against an aggressor, and the adversary must believe in that capability and resolve.¹ Dr. Holmes also clarified that deterrence would fail if any aspects of the equation were

This article is drawn from Todd Clawson, "NATO's Year of Deterrence," *Information Series*, No. 584 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 18, 2024).

¹ James Holmes, "Deterring China = Capability x Resolve x Belief," *The Diplomat*, June 19, 2014, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/deterring-china-capability-x-resolve-x-belief/#:~:text=For%20my%20money%20Henry%20Kissinger%20supplies%20the%20best,last%20element%20is%20the%20hub%20of%20the%20problem.>

absent. Here, one can examine NATO's means to deter Russia or any other aggressor from harming the Alliance.

First, NATO states that its deterrence posture relies on combining conventional and nuclear forces.² If one compares NATO's overall conventional force structure to Russia, NATO is vastly superior. In 2023, NATO had an overall three-to-one advantage in conventional forces.³ Furthermore, NATO has a five-to-one advantage in air forces and a three-to-one advantage in naval forces. To reinvigorate NATO's ability to respond to threats quickly, Allies agreed at the 2022 Madrid Summit to create a new force model that could deliver more than 100,000 troops within ten days and up to 500,000 in 30 days.⁴ Allies continue to demonstrate resolve through NATO Air Policing along its Eastern Flank, maritime patrols, and deterrence exercises scattered throughout Allied territory. While European Allies are doing more to demonstrate their capabilities, the United States is adding means to the deterrence equation. Russia offsets its inferior conventional force structure through its vast arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW), with reports of up to 2,000, if not

² See NATO's deterrence policy statement here:
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm.

³ "Comparison of the military capabilities of NATO and Russia as of 2023," Statista, available at
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293174/nato-russia-military-comparison/>. (These numbers are from March 2023, thus do not account for Russian losses to date).

⁴ Sven Biscop, "The New Force Model: NATO's European Army?," *Egmont Policy Brief 285*, September 2022, available at
https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2022/09/Sven-Biscop_PolicyBrief285_vFinal.pdf?type=pdf; Also see "New NATO Force Model," North Atlantic Treaty Organization Information Graphic, available at
https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf.

more, warheads at Putin's disposal.⁵ Moreover, Putin's nuclear modernization of his NSNW forces will provide Russia with the ability to deliver a variety of these weapons if Putin believes that his regime's survival is in jeopardy or if battlefield conditions in Ukraine warrant their use.⁶

According to the Department of Defense, the United States will spend another \$3.6 billion as part of its European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) that aims to increase U.S. presence, promote exercise and training, enhance U.S. prepositional stocks, improve U.S. and Allied infrastructure, and build Allied capacity.⁷ Since EDI's inception in 2014, responding to Russia's invasion of Crimea, the United States has spent over \$37 billion⁸ to deter Russian aggression and assure NATO allies. On paper, NATO possesses a highly capable conventional deterrence force, yet this is only half of NATO's deterrence strategy.

⁵ Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, p. 4, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

⁶ Amy F. Woolf, *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons*, Congressional Research Service, Report RL32572, Washington D.C., updated March 16, 2021, p. 29, available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32572/42>; U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review, Report*, Washington, DC., February 2018, p.9, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINALREPORT.PD>; Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, and Eliana Reynolds, "Russia Nuclear Weapons: 2023," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2023, Vol. 79, No. 3, p.178, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2023.2202542>.

⁷ "European Deterrence Initiative," Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year 2024, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March 2023, p. 3, available at https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2024/FY2024_EDLJBook.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.* Also see "European Deterrence Initiative: A Budgetary Overview," *Congressional Research Service*, updated July 1, 2021, p. 1, available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10946>.

The Alliance also maintains a robust strategic and non-strategic nuclear force to complement NATO's conventional deterrent. NATO's strategic deterrent relies on the combination of U.S. and UK nuclear forces, with the independent French nuclear arsenal contributing to Alliance security.⁹ This adds further complexity to any Russian decision towards conflict. The United States is undergoing a modernization of its nuclear triad that supports its extended deterrence strategy.¹⁰ Moreover, the U.S. B61 modernization effort supports NATO's nuclear strategy and the Alliance nuclear sharing agreement as Allies begin to transition to newer dual-capable aircraft platforms.¹¹ The British are also undergoing a nuclear modernization program that will see its Dreadnaught submarine program become the backbone of the United Kingdom's nuclear strategy by 2030.¹² Allies, minus France, participate in NATO's nuclear sharing agreement, the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), and partake in numerous deterrence drills, such as Steadfast Noon, which in 2023 saw 60 Allied aircraft participate to demonstrate NATO's

⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Nuclear Sharing Arrangements," *Fact Sheet*, February 2022, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220204-factsheet-nuclear-sharing-arrange.pdf.

¹⁰ Joseph Clark, "Pentagon Tackling Nuclear Modernization With Proactive, Integrated Approach," *DoD News*, August 25, 2023, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3505989/pentagon-tackling-nuclear-modernization-with-proactive-integrated-approach/>.

¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Nuclear Sharing Arrangements," *op. cit.*

¹² "The United Kingdom's future nuclear deterrent: the 2022 update to Parliament," Ministry of Defence Corporate Report, March 8, 2023, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-united-kingdoms-future-nuclear-deterrent-the-2022-update-to-parliament/the-united-kingdoms-future-nuclear-deterrent-the-2022-update-to-parliament>.

credible nuclear capabilities.¹³ While NATO possesses tremendous conventional and nuclear capabilities, Allies must demonstrate the political will to employ these forces.

Statements from Secretary General Stoltenberg and President Biden claim that the Alliance will defend every inch of NATO territory, indicating NATO's resolve.¹⁴ Moreover, the Allies continue to showcase Article 5 that an attack on one ally is an attack on all. This is a powerful political statement that bolsters NATO's deterrence. The combined statements from NATO leaders emphasizing that any attack on any NATO ally would generate a response should give President Putin and the rest of the Russian leadership pause. Indeed, one would argue that deterrence should hold with the NATO force structure and Russia's depleted weapons stockpile due to its aggression against Ukraine. However, there is one final aspect of the question to consider, and that is whether or not Putin believes in NATO's capability and resolve.

One of Putin's likely goals for invading Ukraine was to fracture the NATO Alliance's unity.¹⁵ Indeed, ever since

¹³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO holds long-planned annual nuclear exercise," October 13, 2023, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_219443.htm.

¹⁴ David Vergun, "Allies Will Protect, Defend Every Inch of NATO Territory, Says Secretary-General," *DoD News*, March 3, 2022, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2953765/allies-will-protect-defend-every-inch-of-nato-territory-says-secretary-general/>. Also see The White House, "Remarks by President Biden Urging Congress to Pass His National Security Supplemental Request, Including Funding to Support Ukraine," December 6, 2023, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/12/06/remarks-by-president-biden-urging-congress-to-pass-his-national-security-supplemental-request-including-funding-to-support-ukraine/>.

¹⁵ Aleksandra Krzysztozek, "Press report: Putin hoped to break NATO after Ukraine invasion," *Euractiv.com*, March 6, 2023, available at

NATO's voluntary membership grew eastward, including invitations to Ukraine and Georgia, Putin sought to reshape the world order that would eliminate NATO and the European Union (EU) as perceived threats and reestablish a sphere of influence subservient to Moscow's demands. Even though the invasion has not gone to plan, Putin can look west to see that there are cracks in the Alliance that he could exploit.

First, not all allies have the same view of Russia as others. Interestingly, citizens in Hungary view the United States unfavorably and lean toward favoring Russia.¹⁶ Like in Hungary, Slovakia appears to align more with Russia and desires to maintain friendly relations with Moscow.¹⁷ Türkiye's balancing strategy aims to place Erdogan at the center of his version of "triangle diplomacy" between the United States, the European Union, and Russia, which often appears to be at odds with projecting NATO unity.¹⁸ Of course, there is France's pursuit of strategic autonomy, though Macron's more aggressive and bellicose support for Ukraine places France at odds with NATO's conservative approach. France's refusal to participate in the NPG and maintain its independent deterrent outside of the Alliance emanates from its historical distrust of the United States and

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/press-report-putin-hoped-to-break-nato-after-ukraine-invasion/>.

¹⁶ Moira Fagan, Laura Clancy, Sneha Gubbala, and Sarah Austin, "Poles and Hungarians Differ Over Views of Russia and the U.S.," Pew Research Center, October 2, 2023, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/10/02/poles-and-hungarians-differ-over-views-of-russia-and-the-us/>.

¹⁷ Lucas Leiroz, "Slovakia doesn't see Russia as enemy," *Blitz.com*, December 17, 2023, available at <https://www.weeklyblitz.net/views/slovakia-doesnt-see-russia-as-enemy/>.

¹⁸ D.B. Grafov, "A balancing strategy in Türkiye's foreign policy," *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta*, 2022; 15(3):115-142, available at <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-3-84-115-142>.

freedom to ensure its security outside of NATO.¹⁹ Indeed, looking at France's passionate independent streak, one can conclude that its nuclear deterrent is only for France rather than supporting its treaty allies.

Another potential divide Putin could benefit from is that some allies may lack the will to defend other NATO members in case of attack. Indeed, a poll by NATO indicates that the general population of eight allies lean more towards not supporting other allies rather than upholding their Article 5 commitments.²⁰ Some European states do not trust in the United States' willingness to defend its Allies in case of Russian aggression. Many Europeans fear the outcome of the 2024 election would see the United States retrench. While Congress has made efforts to restrict future presidents' ability to withdraw from NATO, that does not mean the next President cannot deemphasize or deprioritize NATO in the future. Besides, since the return to Great Power Competition, some in the United States views Europe as a secondary theater, with China as the primary threat. To prevent Putin from exploiting any of these perceived divisions within the Alliance, NATO leaders must work hard this year to patch up internal relationships.

Another area of concern is NATO's readiness. There appears to be a significant disconnect between the ambition to create the new force model and Europe's ability to fulfill this ambition. Indeed, the United States has the preponderance of NATO forces, with over 1.1 million

¹⁹ Bruno Tertrais, *French Nuclear Deterrence Policy, Forces, And Future: A Handbook* (Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Updated February 2020), pp. 7, 12-14, available at <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/recherches-et-documents/2020/202004.pdf>.

²⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Public Diplomacy Division, "NATO Audience Research: pre-Summit polling results 2023," available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-pre-summit-research-2023.pdf.

active-duty personnel. Depending on the United States to rapidly respond to a crisis along NATO's borders is unrealistic. Moreover, NATO's Eastern Flank remains vulnerable due to numerous bureaucratic and infrastructure problems.²¹ Allies should no longer worry about the NATO-Russia Founding Act or the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement; considering Russia's actions in Ukraine and withdrawal from CFE and other arms control agreements, NATO must do more regarding its force posture to protect its vulnerable regions by denying Russia the opportunity to attack NATO vice relying on a deterrence through punishment strategy.²² One approach might be to place more NATO forces east, increasing their numbers and visibility and conducting more readiness exercises along the Eastern Flank.

There are solutions for NATO leaders to pursue that will shore up the deterrence equation. By the July Summit in Washington D.C., Allies must agree to demonstrate their ability to assemble NATO's new force model. As part of the Summit Communique, Allies should announce that the Alliance will assemble its New Force Structure in 2025, with the 500,000-man force within 30 days as stated in its construct.²³ Allies should agree to demonstrate NATO's

²¹ "Defending every inch of NATO territory: Force posture options for strengthening deterrence in Europe," *Issue Brief*, The Atlantic Council Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, March 2022, pp. 2-3, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Force-Posture-Options-Issue-Brief.pdf>.

²² Ben Barry, Henry Boyd, Bastian Giegerich, Michael Gjerstad, James Hackett, Yohann Michel, Ben Schreer and Michael Tong, "The Future of NATO's European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects," The International Institute for Strategic Studies (Washington D.C., June 2023), p 33, available at <https://www.iiss.org/en/research-paper/2023/06/the-future-of-natos-european-land-forces/>.

²³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "New NATO Force Model," available at

ability to reinforce its Eastern Flank through Exercise Defender with the majority of the troops from the European Allies so that there is little doubt in NATO's ability to quickly muster a response force capable of defeating any threats.

Next, NATO must continue to support Ukraine. Demonstrating the Alliance's resolve with a potential future ally will show Putin he cannot bully NATO or revise the international system to favor authoritarianism. Moreover, continuing to support Ukraine demonstrates the Allies can adjust to the realities of today's geopolitical environment to remain resilient in the face of aggression.

Third, NATO must work hard to resolve political rifts that divide the Alliance. Allies must figure out how to woo Hungary, Slovakia, and Türkiye away from Moscow. Also, the Alliance must quell any hint that the United States lacks commitment to NATO through more messaging of NATO successes. Indeed, NATO can showcase how all Allies are meeting their 20 percent major equipment purchases and how the Alliance had record defense spending, with the vast majority of allies surpassing their 2014 defense spending levels, coupled with how the United States continues its deterrence activities through the Alliance and via domestic interests.²⁴ There will always be differences within the Alliance. For deterrence to succeed, however, requires that NATO leadership find ways to resolve or minimize those differences when faced with more pressing problems. There can be no avenue that Putin can perceive as exploitable to his advantage.

https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf.

²⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)," *Press Release*, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, July 7, 2023, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf.

Finally, NATO must rethink its nuclear posture and strategy. Fortunately, the United States and Great Britain are modernizing their nuclear forces. However, NATO's nuclear deterrence messaging has not changed since Russia's 2022 invasion, nor has NATO's nuclear strategy. While nuclear weapons are unique and aim to preserve the peace, Russia's openly threatening NATO with nuclear weapons indicates that Putin may be willing to employ nuclear weapons in the future. Thus, NATO needs to reintroduce a piece of Cold War deterrence that would see additional nuclear capabilities on land, sea, and air beyond the current reliance on strategic systems and a few tactical weapons employed by aircraft. Moreover, NATO should disperse its tactical nuclear forces throughout Europe to complicate Putin's strategic thinking and encourage additional burden sharing.²⁵ Finally, it is time to encourage France to join the NPG. No one is suggesting that France would give up its independent nuclear deterrent or lose its strategic autonomy. But having Paris actively involved in the NPG and committed to NATO's nuclear deterrent will show Alliance unity and total commitment to deterrence.²⁶ These additional measures may provide the substance that would make NATO's deterrent more credible in the minds of the Russians.

²⁵ Robert Peters, "Time to Update NATO's Nuclear Posture," The Heritage Foundation, September 11, 2023, available at <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/time-update-natos-nuclear-posture>.

²⁶ Liviu Horovitz and Lydia Wachs, "France's Nuclear Weapons and Europe: Options for a better coordinated deterrence policy," *SWP Comment*, No. 15, March 2023, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (accessed January 9, 2024), pp. 6-7, available at https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2023C15_Frances_NuclearWeapons.pdf.

Deterrence in 2024 remains NATO's primary mission. The Alliance does not want war with Russia. But Allies must be ready to confront Putin in unison if he decides to engage NATO in a conflict. To convince Putin that any attack on NATO would lead to a severe response, NATO must fill the gaps in its capabilities and unify politically to demonstrate Alliance resolve.

There is a fine line between deterrence success and failure. NATO's military strength and political cohesion are crucial elements of the deterrence equation. With 2024 seeing increasing global insecurity, NATO requires an approach to deterrence that makes the Alliance's military capability and political resolve clear in Putin's mind, and there are no gaps he can exploit. In other words, NATO can leave nothing to chance.

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NATO at 32: Stronger Than Ever

Ann-Sofie Dahl

NATO Turns 75

When the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) gathers for its 75th Anniversary Summit in the U.S. capital this July, the circumstances will be dramatically different than when the Alliance hosted its last big birthday celebration there five years ago.

Much has happened in that relatively short period of time, all of which will be reflected on the agenda for the Summit. First and foremost, NATO now faces a full-scale war waged by Russia against the Alliance's close partner country, Ukraine. Though the first round of Russian military aggression against Ukraine dates back 10 years, when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the invasion on February 24, 2022 was a steep escalation, with subsequent involvement by NATO and its allies at a previously unprecedented level.

The last few years have also brought some good news for NATO. Today's Alliance is more united and more determined than ever to stop Russia from winning the war or advancing further towards NATO territory. Support for the Ukrainian struggle for independence and sovereignty has been strong since day one of the war, with one "red line" after the other passed as new packages of weapons and armament deliveries have been agreed on.

In addition, the accession of Sweden and Finland—which prior to the 2022 invasion in Ukraine had no ambitions whatsoever to trade their traditional nonaligned status for NATO membership—has resulted in a substantial strengthening of the northeastern flank next door to Russia.

The picture that emerges as we compare the Alliance today with that of only five years ago is a mixed one. On the one hand, there is a steadily deteriorating security

environment, with challenges emanating from Russia as well as in the Indo-Pacific theater where China has emerged as a serious threat to transatlantic security. On the other, new strength, unity, and determination characterize the Alliance as it enters into its 76th year. This is particularly evident in NATO's North.

NATO Allies 31 and 32

March 7, 2024 was a truly historic day for Sweden. When Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson handed over the Swedish accession protocols to the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, at the State Department, more than 200 years of nonalignment—which is still at times erroneously referred to as “neutrality”—came to an end. Just a few days later, the yellow and blue Swedish flag was raised outside NATO Headquarters (HQ) and at NATO commands across the transatlantic area, in its alphabetical spot between the Spanish and Turkish flags in the traditional flag ceremony that marks the welcoming of every new ally.

For Swedish supporters of NATO membership—a community which saw a huge expansion in numbers in the last few years, from originally counting just a handful of true believers—it was an emotional week, and frustrating two years since the application forms were handed in jointly with the Finnish ones in mid-May 2022.

At the start of the accession process, Finland and Sweden pledged to join NATO as members “hand in hand.” In the end, however, that promise could not be kept as it quickly became clear that Finland had a much smoother path to membership than its neighbor across the Gulf of Bothnia. Finland took its permanent seat in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on NATO's birthday, April 4, 2023, less than a year after the two countries had presented their applications to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. For

Finland to be the first of the two to join, and to thereby become ally 31, was indeed a much-deserved honor.

The Finnish president, Mr. Sauli Niinistö, right from the start took the lead in bringing both his own country and neighboring Sweden to NATO's doorstep. President Niinistö was instrumental in persuading the more reluctant Swedish government at the time to accompany his country in this historic move. When Finland was admitted to NATO in the spring of 2023, President Niinistö emphasized that, in his view, Finland's membership in NATO would not be complete until Sweden too was an ally.¹

Meanwhile, the Swedish path to NATO proved much less straightforward. It quickly stalled as primarily Turkey, but also Hungary, blocked the accession process.

Though the similarities between the Nordics are obviously great, Finland's and Sweden's differences quickly became apparent as they approached NATO membership. One such significant difference was the Finnish vs. Swedish attitude to the now-abandoned doctrine of nonalignment. While Finland has always considered its military a top priority, and saw nonalignment as a direct consequence of its long—1,300 kilometer—border with Russia, nonalignment was always more of a political tool in Sweden.

Unlike Sweden, Finland never pursued an activist foreign policy nor accepted a huge immigrant population; these two elements were at the core of the problems that Stockholm encountered in its bid to join NATO. The large Kurdish community, and the generous aid provided to Kurdish movements over the years from various Swedish governments and parties, proved a particularly complicating factor for Sweden.

With this in mind, a number of steps should therefore had been taken—or avoided—when the enlargement process

¹ Statement by President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö on Finland's NATO membership. Press release, April 4, 2023, available at www.presidentti.fi/niinisto/en/press-release/statement-by-president-of-the-republic-of-finland-sauli-niinisto-on-finlands-nato-membership/.

was first set in motion in May 2022. Regrettably, though, this latest accession round instead became characterized by a series of unfortunate events and mistakes, most of which could—and should—quite easily had been avoided by NATO HQ and the major allies.

First, the trilateral agreement with Turkey was an obvious and major mistake. It immediately put Sweden and Finland at a disadvantage and gave Turkey a heavy upper hand vis-à-vis the two candidate countries. Preferably, NATO should from the start had been in charge of, and the Secretary General himself taken control of, the negotiations with Turkey. Any objections that Ankara had with regard to the Nordic membership applications should also have been dealt with centrally at NATO HQ.²

As a result of the trilateral agreement, the negotiations were outsourced to the candidate countries with no experience—or even knowledge—of the long tradition of Turkish obstructionism within NATO. As it turned out, the trilateral arrangement basically amounted to an invitation to Ankara to do what it does best: obstruct.

NATO has been confronted by such Turkish obstructionism over the years. Perhaps the most prominent example could be seen at the NATO Summit in 2009, when Turkey at the very last minute—and without prior warning—opposed the formal appointment of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO's new Secretary General. Ankara's objections concerned the way Fogh Rasmussen, then Prime Minister of Denmark, had handled the Danish "cartoon crisis" in 2005 and 2006. One of then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's demands for Turkey to accept the appointment was the closing of a Kurdish radio station in Denmark.³

² It is not clear why this did not happen, though Turkish pressure for a trilateral agreement likely played a role.

³ "Turkish PM Against Rasmussen As NATO Chief," *RFE/RL*, April 03, 2009, available at

In yet another example of its obstructionism, Turkey attempted to block NATO's defense planning for the three Baltic countries, unless NATO made Kurdish terrorism a top priority. The Kurdish dimension is, in other words, a recurring theme as Ankara looks for opportunities to impede NATO's work and to extract various advantages in return.

These predictable, well-known Turkish tendencies for intra-NATO obstructionism should have been foreseen by the allies, the United States in particular. Appropriate steps should therefore have been taken at an early stage to prevent Turkey from paralyzing the enlargement process.

In addition, as a Social Democrat himself with close ties to his Swedish colleagues, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg should have identified the difficulties that the many years of international activism in support of radical and revolutionary parties, governments, and movements – including Kurdish, at the center of the Turkish objections – could create during the accession process for Sweden.

All of this is also relevant for another aspect of the Swedish – and Finnish – applications: the “fast track” process that was again and again mentioned in the late spring and early summer of 2022.⁴ What Jens Stoltenberg most likely was referring to was a fast Membership Action Plan (MAP) process – that is the mechanism for NATO, jointly with the aspirant countries, to make a thorough assessment of their military, political and legal readiness to join the Alliance.

For Sweden and Finland – close partner countries since the introduction of Partnership for Peace in 1994, and from 2014 in NATO's top-level partnership category known as

www.rferl.org/a/Turkish_PM_Against_Rasmussen_As_NATO_Chief/1601413.html.

⁴ For example, “Stoltenberg: Finland and Sweden's applications to join NATO will be fast-tracked,” *Forces.net*, May 16, 2022, available at www.forces.net/nato/stoltenberg-finland-and-swedens-applications-join-nato-will-be-fast-tracked.

Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP)—the MAP amounted to more or less a formality, quickly finished in a day or two during the summer of 2022.⁵

Though said with the best of intentions, the repeated reference to a “fast track” to many Swedes signaled the promise of an exceedingly quick membership process such that Sweden and Finland could apply one day and be full-fledged members of the Alliance the next.

There is, however, no such thing as a “fast track” to NATO membership. It is the allies who decide which candidates to invite, and it is the allies who ratify each application in their respective parliaments, a process which can take a while.

This misunderstanding, and miscommunication, explains some of the widespread public frustration when the two countries were stuck in the waiting room.

As a matter of fact, in spite of the frustrations that characterized much of the process, this round of accessions actually turned out to be exceptionally fast, much faster than any previous NATO enlargement in the post-Cold War era which all have stretched out over several years, and, in one case, even a decade.⁶

In the end, “fighter jets” turned out to be a solution to the stalemate that Sweden found itself in. The Turkish Parliament ratified the Swedish accession protocols and President Erdogan put his signature on the documents in less than a week once the U.S. Congress agreed to the F16 sale. After months of Ankara citing security concerns and the Kurdish issue as the main obstacles to Sweden’s

⁵ For more on partnerships, see Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Sweden and Finland: Partnership in Lieu of Membership,” in Ann-Sofie Dahl (ed.), *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region. Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018).

⁶ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “New in NATO. Lessons from Previous Enlargements,” in Katarina Tracz (ed.), *Stronger Together. Sweden and Finland on the Road Toward NATO* (Stockholm: Stockholm Free World Forum and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2022).

membership application, a little superpower pressure and an F16 deal was apparently all it took in the end to speed up – and finalize – the accession process.

In a similar fashion, Hungary, which contrary to its stated intentions quite unexpectedly ended up as the last remaining ally to endorse the Swedish accession, quickly finalized the ratification process after a face-saving deal to buy four Swedish JAS Gripens (which it of course could have done in any case). At that point, NATO's patience with the two obstructive allies had long run out, after several rounds of negotiations and deadlines had passed one after the other.

A Win-Win Situation

For NATO to add two new and highly-capable allies in the North – particularly two that up until the Russian invasion of Ukraine had never contemplated abandoning their traditional non-alignment – is a major setback for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the demands that he made at the end of 2021 for a halt to all future NATO enlargements.⁷

Though Sweden and Finland had been exposed to Russian military aggression for years, with innumerable provocations and various forms of trespassing,⁸ the news on

⁷ For an analysis of Putin's December 2021 speech, see Andrew Roth, "Russia issues list of demands it says must be met to lower tensions in Europe," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/17/russia-issues-list-demands-tensions-europe-ukraine-nato>.

⁸ The perhaps most (in)famous of these instances was the simulated nuclear-bombing attack on Good Friday, 2013, on targets in Southern Sweden (presumably a military base) and close to both the home of the Swedish royal family and the headquarters of the National Defense Radio Establishment. On such Russian aggression prior to the 2014 Ukraine aggression, see Dahl 2018, p. 130, op. cit. These activities continue in Baltic Sea region. During the spring of 2024, there were for example several instances of Russian hybrid warfare when allies in the Sea and other parts of Northern Europe were targeted. See, "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on recent Russian hybrid activities," *NATO: Press Release*, May 2, 2024.

February 24, 2022, that Russia had mounted a full-scale invasion on Ukraine, was an abrupt wake-up call and game changer for the two nonaligned Nordics.

Thus, the outcome that President Putin got was the very opposite to what he had demanded: NATO's border with Russia was doubled overnight when Finland entered the Alliance as a new ally, and Sweden, the country that dominates the map of the Baltic Sea region with its large territory and vast coastline – including the vulnerable island of Gotland in the midst of the Baltic Sea – was now protected by Article 5.

The strategic impact of this latest round of NATO enlargements is indeed profound. As has been repeatedly stated by NATO's Secretary General and President Biden alike, the addition of allies 31 and 32 makes NATO "stronger than ever," and "the whole Alliance more secure."⁹

In other words, this enlargement is a win-win situation for NATO and the two Nordics, as well as for their entire neighborhood. Finland and Sweden may be the latest allies to take their seats in the NAC, but they are certainly no strangers to the Alliance. As former partners in the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership (EOP) – an innovation which followed upon Russia's first incursion into Ukraine territory in 2014 – and with a grand total of 30 years of partnership with NATO as the very first two countries to sign up for the Partnership for Peace program in the summer of 1994, they are both well-known and well-respected in the allied community.

Since the end of the Cold War, these two nations have participated in countless NATO exercises – the latest of which was Steadfast Defender 24 – as well as in numerous operations, such as the International Security Assistance Force. Sweden also participated in the Libya operation in

⁹ For instance: "Sweden officially joins NATO," *NATO*, March 7, 2024; and "Biden signs measures giving U.S. approval to Sweden and Finland's bid to join NATO," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2022.

2011, which resulted in its nickname “partner number one.”¹⁰ During the Cold War, the extensive, top-secret cooperation that officially neutral Sweden engaged in with a number of allies resulted in Sweden being jokingly referred to inside NATO HQ as “member 17,” at a time when the Alliance’s membership counted 16.¹¹

The two newcomers bring along sophisticated, high-tech capabilities, especially in the maritime area and air defense, but also, in the Finnish case, an impressively strong army. With their arrival, NATO has gained a new fleet of Sweden submarines—otherwise a rare commodity these days in the Baltic Sea—as well as a substantial addition of fighter jets, Finnish F35s as well as Swedish JAS-Gripens. Important, too, is the strong Nordic defense industry, especially at a time when the allies are faced with two competing sets of demands: to reach the defense spending goals of a minimum of two percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) while also supporting Ukraine with military equipment. The Nordic (and Baltic) countries are actually among the top per capita providers of military support to Ukraine.¹²

The enlargement brought the number of allies that now reach the “floor” of two percent of the GDP for defense to 18 out of 32. While Finland never joined the European trend of defense cuts in previous decades and has always easily met the two percent requirement, Sweden is in the midst of an intense buildup of its military forces to catch up after years of severe cuts. After an additional 52.8 billion kronor (around 4,87 billion USD) proposed this spring—adding more air defense, two more brigades, many more conscripts

¹⁰ For an analysis of Sweden’s contribution to Operation Unified Protector, see Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Partner number one or NATO ally twenty-nine? Sweden and NATO post-Libya,” *NATO Research Paper*, 2012, available at <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=434>.

¹¹ For more on “member 17,” see Ann-Sofie Dahl, *Svenskarna och NATO* (Stockholm: Timbro, 1999), p. 40 ff.

¹² *Ukraine support tracker*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, available at www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/.

and more – the Swedish defense budget is expected to reach 2.6 percent (as defined by NATO) by 2030.¹³

With the previously nonaligned two Nordics, the balance within NATO has seen a heavy shift in a Northern direction, militarily as well as politically, as two old and solid democracies are added to the roster. With the exception of Russia, all countries surrounding the Baltic Sea are now members of NATO, thus turning it into a de facto “NATO lake”; some consider this term controversial, but it illustrates the control and access that NATO now enjoys in the Baltic Sea and the enhanced security and increased level of deterrence that follows as a result.¹⁴

Of course, Kaliningrad is still a Russian enclave, and a heavily weaponized one, nuclear capabilities included. That is also the case on the Kola Peninsula in the northernmost part of the region, where strategic tensions are likely to further increase in the forthcoming years as Russia continues to expand its military presence. Therefore, rather than primarily concentrating on the Baltic Sea, as is often done, the strategic focus should include the entire Nordic-Baltic region, from the Arctic to the southern shores of the Öresund Strait.

Participants in this year’s Anniversary Summit will have a lot on their plates. The threat to the Alliance that Russia continues to pose will again be at the top of the agenda, while 32 NATO members struggle to balance the differences in threat perceptions in Europe’s South vs. the North and East.

With two strong and capable Nordic allies now permanently seated in the NAC, NATO’s capacity for

¹³ *Stärkt försvarsförmåga, Sverige som allierad*, DS 2024:6, available at www.regeringen.se/contentassets/79646ada8654492993fe7108d95ac6d5/starkt-forsvarsformaga-sverige-som-allierad-ds-20246.pdf.

¹⁴ Ann-Sofie Dahl, “Finland and Sweden’s NATO entries are a mixed blessing for the old Nordic allies,” *New Atlanticist*, June 27, 2023, available at www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/finland-and-swedens-nato-entries-are-a-mixed-blessing-for-the-old-nordic-allies/.

countering that Russian threat has received a significant boost. As a result, today's NATO is indeed "stronger than ever."

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NATO at 75: Déjà Vu?

Michaela Dodge

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is looking well on paper at 75. Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine has provided a new *raison d'être* for an Alliance that let most of its military capability atrophy during the optimistic post-Cold War years. That era was marked by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO's principal adversary, a belief that Russia can reform and peacefully integrate with the West,¹ and later, an integration of some of the Warsaw Pact's former members into the Alliance. But now the menacing form of a militaristic belligerent Russia has returned and Europe is too slow to respond to negative trends in the security environment. In fact, some NATO member states appear to dismiss the urgency of Russia's threat, thus creating an opportunity for adversaries to undermine the most established U.S. alliance either through disinformation operations and propaganda, or perhaps even by attacking it.

Differing Perceptions and Differing Levels of Defense Spending

After Russia invaded Ukraine's Crimea in 2014, NATO members recommitted to a 2006 agreement to spend two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. Few did so in the years that followed, despite the continued deterioration in Europe's security. Since Russia's 2014 and 2022 invasions of Ukraine, NATO members have again

¹ On some of the first warning signs that it may not be so, see Lennart Meri, "The speech that sent Vladimir Putin flying from the room," *ERR.ee*, February 21, 1994, available at <https://news.err.ee/1609296789/the-speech-that-sent-vladimir-putin-flying-from-the-room>.

taken up the matter of rearmament with an increased urgency. Eighteen of them are expected to hit the two percent benchmark in 2024,² up from 11 that met the threshold in 2023.³ But the European states cannot go it alone, even together. The United States is an integral part of transatlantic security, and this security has fostered the most integrated commercial partnership in the world.⁴ According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, “Eighty percent of NATO’s defense expenditures come from non-EU NATO allies.”⁵ Due to years of under-investments, it is going to take some time for the defense budget increases to translate into more capability.

Insofar as the two percent metric can be considered a useful proximate for assessing how a state sees its security environment and obligations, it is clear that NATO has a challenge on its hands. While many members with relatively smaller economies, including countries that used to be a part of the Warsaw Pact, lead on defense spending, some of the Alliance’s most prosperous members continue to lag behind.

² James Frater and Joshua Berlinger, “Record 18 NATO states expected to meet 2% defense spending threshold this year,” *CNN*, February 14, 2024, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/14/europe/nato-defense-spending-target-intl/index.html>.

³ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023),” July 7, 2023, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf.

⁴ Daniel Hamilton and Joseph Quinlan, *Transatlantic Economy 2023* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS/Transatlantic Leadership Network, 2023), p. v, available at <https://transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Transatlantic-Economy-Report-2023.pdf>.

⁵ Sabine Siebold and John Irish, “NATO chief says Europe meeting spending targets after Trump comments,” *Reuters*, February 14, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-chief-says-18-countries-meet-2-military-spending-target-2024-02-14/>.

Poland is now NATO's leader in percentage of defense spending with 3.9 percent of its GDP being invested in defense, over a half of it on new equipment procurement.⁶ Much richer Germany is at 1.57 percent, despite Chancellor Olaf Scholtz's February 2022 *Zeitenwende*⁷ speech and German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius's warning that Russia could attack NATO within five-eight years.⁸ So far, the Chancellor's rhetoric is divorced from the government's defense policy, including denying *Taurus* missiles to Ukraine, even if Germany has started to slowly move in the right direction.⁹ Germany is expected to meet the two percent benchmark for the first time since 1992 in 2024, but German leadership in concrete actions and policies is still largely lacking.¹⁰

⁶ NATO Public Diplomacy Division, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)," *Press Release*, July 7, 2023, p. 3, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf.

⁷ The word can be approximately translated as a "new turning point," marking a departure from years of subjugating economic interests to security with respect to German-Russia relations.

⁸ Nicolas Camut, "Putin could attack NATO in '5 to 8 years,' German defense minister warns," *Politico*, January 19, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-germany-boris-pistorius-nato/>.

⁹ Matthew Karnitschnig, "The truth about Germany's defense policy shift," *Politico*, February 27, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-zeitenwende-defense-spending-nato-gdp-target-scholz-ukraine-war-russia/>; and Jana Puglierin, "Turning point or turning back: German defence policy after *Zeitenwende*," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 19, 2024, available at https://ecfr.eu/article/turning-point-or-turning-back-german-defence-policy-after-zeitenwende/?amp&mc_cid=32aaa6b04a&mc_eid=6a56106a20.

¹⁰ Aaron Gasch Burnett, "Germany's *Zeitenwende*: An underfunded military rearmament absent political strategy," Open Canada, April 1, 2024, available at <https://opencanada.org/germanys-zeitenwende-an-underfunded-military-rearmament-absent-political-strategy/>.

While the two percent of GDP on defense metric is not perfect, NATO members agreed to it voluntarily and under much more benign security conditions than those present today. The situation has grown worse since the time of the agreement. In other words, maintaining security in the transatlantic region might require larger defense expenditures. The peacetime standard does not make sense for wartime. Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen recently stated that “Russia’s capacity to produce military equipment has increased tremendously,” and that it “cannot be ruled out that within a three- to five-year period, Russia will test Article 5 and NATO’s solidarity. That was not NATO’s assessment in 2023. This is new knowledge that is coming to the fore now.”¹¹ He is by no means alone. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said the Lithuanians understood that if Russia was not stopped in Ukraine, it could continue and “then it’s the Baltic states who would be next.”¹² General Christopher Cavoli, Commander of the U.S. European Command, stated during recent testimony that “Russia is reconstituting that force far faster than our initial estimates suggested. The army is actually now larger – by 15 percent – than it was when it invaded Ukraine.”¹³ The prospect of Ukraine losing undoubtedly increases NATO states’ collective perception of danger, even if unequally. How long it will take for the

¹¹ Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, “Danish defence minister warns Russia could attack NATO in 3-5 years -media,” *Reuters*, February 9, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/danish-defence-minister-warns-russia-could-attack-nato-3-5-years-media-2024-02-09/>.

¹² Sergey Goryashko, “Will Putin attack NATO? No chance, says Lithuanian general,” *Politico*, January 25, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/lithuania-nato-putin-ukraine-russia-war/>.

¹³ Christopher Cavoli, “Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives, Armed Services Committee,” April 10, 2024, p. 3, available at <https://www.eucom.mil/document/42803/useucom-gen-cavoli-cpshasc2024pdf>.

threat perceptions to impact the defense budget in the laggard countries remains to be seen.

The sense of threat does not appear to be shared by the public enough for the people to elect representatives who favor prioritizing defense budgets over social programs. The challenge for the United States is clear. An agreement “on paper” that NATO is under an increasing threat appears to be simply rhetoric for some of the richest members of the Alliance, particularly those that are farther from Russia’s border. This intra-European division creates an additional potential source of cleavage that Russia could exploit through influence operations to undermine NATO’s unity. Moscow’s message could be, “why do poor Polish farmers pay for rich Belgians’ security?” or, “Russia is not a threat to NATO and therefore increases in defense spending are wasteful.” Indeed, that Russia is not an aggressor in Ukraine is the Kremlin’s top disinformation message.¹⁴

Challenges for U.S. Alliance Management

One of the best strategists in modern times, Colin Gray presciently said in 1977 that,

over the medium to long term it is unreasonable for Western Europeans to expect the US [United States] to pick up the kind of security check it is picking up at this time. [...] In other words, the American security commitment is a temporary one; most Europeans, if they really think it through, would probably agree with that. The years since 1945 have been an extraordinary period. The kind of risks that the US [United

¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Disinformation Roulette: The Kremlin’s Year of Lies to Justify an Unjustifiable War,” *Global Engagement Center Press Release*, February 23, 2023, available at <https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/disinformation-roulette-the-kremlins-year-of-lies-to-justify-an-unjustifiable-war/>.

States] runs on behalf of foreigners abroad, even though the American interest obviously is very substantial in Western Europe, may at some time in the future be felt to be incompatible with American well-being. This would be a very grave miscalculation on the part of the US [United States] but it is unreasonable to believe there will always be American governments prepared to take the kind of risks that they appear to be taking today.¹⁵

We might be facing this time now.

The relative size of the European members' contributions to NATO has been a source of U.S. frustration for perhaps as long as NATO has been around. This frustration usually plays out as the Americans pleading with the Europeans to contribute more to their defense. In 2011, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned that "The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress—and in the American body politic writ large—to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense. Nations apparently willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defense budgets."¹⁶ In 2017, then Secretary of Defense James Mattis stated in Belgium

¹⁵ B. A. Wellnitz, "Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory panel on tactical nuclear warfare. Report of the fifth meeting (short title: TAC-5)," April 5-6, 1977, pp. 73-78, available at <https://www.osti.gov/servlets/purl/7091279>.

¹⁶ Robert Gates, "Reflections on the Status and Future of the Transatlantic Alliance," Speech delivered in Brussels, Belgium, June 10, 2011, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/text-of-speech-by-robert-gates-on-the-future-of-nato/>.

that “Americans cannot care more for your children’s security than you do. Disregard for military readiness demonstrates a lack of respect for ourselves, for the alliance and for the freedoms we inherited, which are now clearly threatened.”¹⁷

President Donald Trump was perhaps the most outspoken U.S. president in his criticism of countries that do not contribute their equitable share to defense, and his rhetoric continues to cause concerns regarding the strength of the U.S. commitment to NATO among allies. “You need to understand that if Europe is under attack we will never come to help you and to support you,” he reportedly told European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in 2020.¹⁸ As a 2024 presidential candidate, he reportedly said he wouldn’t come to defense to “delinquent” countries and that he “would encourage them [the Russians] to do whatever the hell they want.”¹⁹ But he also more recently stated that the United States would come to NATO’s defense under his leadership, although he added “But you know, the United States should pay its fair share, not everybody else’s fair share.”²⁰ The transactional approach to

¹⁷ Dan Lamothe and Michael Birnbaum, “Defense Secretary Mattis Issues New Ultimatum to NATO Allies on Defense Spending,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2017, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/02/15/mattis-trumps-defense-secretary-issues-ultimatum-to-nato-allies-on-defense-spending/>.

¹⁸ Eddy Wax, “Trump vowed he’d ‘never’ help Europe if it’s attacked, top EU official says,” *Politico*, January 10, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-vow-never-help-europe-attack-thierry-breton/>.

¹⁹ Jones Hayden, Myah Ward and Jan Cienski, “Trump says he would ‘encourage’ Russia to attack NATO allies who don’t pay up,” *Politico*, February 11, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-says-he-would-encourage-russia-to-attack-nato-members-that-dont-pay-enough/>.

²⁰ Andrew McDonald, “Donald Trump says he won’t quit NATO – if Europe pays its way,” *Politico*, March 19, 2024, available at

alliance management weighed heavily on allies' mind during his administration, including for reasons of their own unwillingness to bear consequences of their own failure to meet their voluntary commitment to defense spending. As the likely Republican presidential nominee Trump is reportedly considering lobbying the Alliance for a commitment to spend three percent of GDP on defense.²¹

The dynamic between the United States and other NATO members is an illustration of an alliance paradox. The more secure countries are in the U.S. commitment to their defense, the less urgency they feel to fund their own defense establishments, especially if their publics do not feel the sting of an outside threat. The less they contribute, the harder it is to make the case in the United States that U.S. resources spent on upholding the commitment are important and worthwhile. The less allies rely on the United States, the harder it is for the United States to influence their policy to align with U.S. interests where it potentially diverges, for example regarding sanctions on China.

For most NATO allies, there is no realistic alternative to U.S. leadership when it comes to NATO's collective defense. European NATO members do not have the capability or the defense industrial base to support a prolonged conflict, despite slow movements to strengthen their industrial base.²² A majority of Central and Eastern

<https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-says-he-wont-quit-nato-if-europe-pays-its-way/>.

²¹ Tony Diver and Rozina Sabur, "Trump considering new 3 per cent Nato defence spending target," *The Telegraph*, May 3, 2024, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/news/2024/05/03/donald-trump-three-per-cent-nato-defence-spending/>.

²² Max Bergmann, Colin Wall, Sean Monaghan, and Pierre Morcos, "Transforming European Defense," Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 18, 2022, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transforming-european-defense>; and Jason C. Moyer and Masa Ocvirk, "'Turbocharging' European Defense Production in Support of Ukraine," The Wilson Center, March 6, 2024,

European countries do not consider Germany and France credible guarantors of their security, partly because their military capabilities would not be sufficient and partly because of historical experience that saw Germany attack them during World War II while France stood by. U.S. leadership in European security is indispensable.

An additional option is open to countries that make the calculus that their interests are not sufficiently met in the West. They can try to strike a separate deal with the Russians (and the Chinese, who have come to bankroll Russia's aggression against Ukraine). Russia is a natural ally to Europe's wannabe autocrats due to its permissiveness of authoritarian practices. Countries pursuing a more cooperative policy with Russia are also interested in Russia's oil and gas supplies. Such is the path that the Hungarian and Slovak governments are choosing at the moment. Perhaps they are even hedging their bets should Russia attack NATO.

Hungary and Slovakia have worked to undermine the European Union's support for Ukraine and their government representatives continue to meet with their Russian counterparts.²³ Neither government is interested in countering Russia's disinformation and propaganda and, in fact, amplify them.²⁴ But Russia's operations go beyond

available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/turbocharging-european-defense-production-support-ukraine>.

²³ Nicholas Vinocur, Jacopo Barigazzi, Ketrin Jochecová and Giorgio Leali, "EU shrugs as pro-Russia pals Orbán and Fico troll the West after Putin handshake," *Politico*, October 25, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-union-pro-russia-viktor-orban-robert-fico-troll-western-allies-vladimir-putin-handshake/>; and, "Putin and Orbán reaffirm Russian-Hungarian ties amid international strains," *Reuters*, October 17, 2023, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-holds-talks-with-hungarys-orban-china-2023-10-17/>.

²⁴ Konrad Bleyer-Simon and Péter Krekó, "Disinformation Landscape in Hungary," EU Disinfo Lab, June 2023, p. 3, available at <https://www.disinfo.eu/wp->

these two countries. Russia paid other European politicians to influence the upcoming elections to the European Parliament indicating that its hybrid warfare against NATO continues despite Moscow's focus on Ukraine.²⁵ More directly, Russia is reportedly planning acts of sabotage across Europe.²⁶ These activities damage U.S. interests by making it more difficult to achieve an agreement on important policy issues, such as sanctions policy against Russia or providing aid to Ukraine. Moreover, Russia's intelligence operatives attack and kill on NATO member states' territory.²⁷ NATO members are only slowly waking up to the fight.

Conclusion

Alliances are one of the main U.S. advantages over its adversaries, both in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific region, and that is why Russia and China work so hard to undermine them. NATO stands out as the most successful multilateral U.S. alliance, but the continuation of its success

content/uploads/2023/06/20230521_HU_DisinfoFS.pdf; and, Peter Dubóczy, Michaela Ružičková, and Stanislav Matejka, "Disinformation Landscape in Slovakia," EU Disinfo Lab, September 2023, p. 3, available at https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/20230919_SK_DisinfoFS.pdf.

²⁵ Nicholas Vinocur, Pieter Haeck and Eddy Wax, "Russian influence scandal rocks EU," *Politico*, March 29, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/voice-of-europe-russia-influence-scandal-election/>.

²⁶ Sam Jones, John Paul Rathbone, and Richard Milne, "Russia plotting sabotage across Europe, intelligence agencies warn," *The Financial Times*, May 4, 2024, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/c88509f9-c9bd-46f4-8a5c-9b2bdd3c3dd3>.

²⁷ Roman Dobrokhotov, Christo Grozev, and Michael Weiss, "Unraveling Havana Syndrome: New evidence links the GRU's assassination Unit 29155 to mysterious attacks on Americans, at home and abroad," *The Insider*, March 31, 2024, available at <https://theins.press/en/politics/270425>.

cannot be taken for granted and, in fact, it is coming under increasing peril. NATO must get back to the business of collective territorial defense, which requires increasing defense spending and breaking economic dependencies on Russia and China. Only by strengthening the Alliance's capability and unity can we look forward to more decades of peace.

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NATO as a U.S. Strategic Asset: Restoring the Alliance's Founding Narrative

Gary L. Geipel

Introduction

In the most dangerous international environment that the United States has faced since the 1930s, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) may be the nation's only undiminished strategic asset. At 75 years, NATO is America's oldest and most resilient multilateral alliance. It is getting stronger through the addition of new members and an increase in defense investments by older members. And it remains fit for purpose, meeting critical U.S. needs abroad. In contrast, the U.S. armed forces today struggle for adequate funding,¹ miss their recruitment targets,² and report ever-growing delays in the modernization of key systems.³ American society is more divided than at any time in recent memory, seemingly unable to agree on basic national goals or views of the world. Federal deficits and inflation have soared in recent years—diminishing the vaunted performance of the American economy. And the

¹ Mike Stone, "Biden's meager 1% US defense budget increase buys fewer ships, jets," *Reuters.com*, March 11, 2024, available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/bidens-meager-1-us-defense-budget-increase-buys-fewer-ships-jets-2024-03-11/>.

² David Vergun, "DOD Addresses Recruiting Shortfall Challenges," U.S. Department of Defense, *DOD News*, December 13, 2023, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3616786/dod-addresses-recruiting-shortfall-challenges/>.

³ Joseph Rodgers and Rebecca Hersman, "Nuclear Modernization under Competing Pressures," Center for Strategic and International Studies, *csis.org*, February 12, 2021, available at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nuclear-modernization-under-competing-pressures>.

U.S. Congress as the supposed embodiment of liberal democracy appears largely dysfunctional in the face of these and many other challenges.

Yet far from being perceived as a ray of light in the strategic gloom, NATO faces a significant perception problem in the United States. The problem is not yet acute: about 62 percent of American adults still tell pollsters that they have a favorable opinion of NATO.⁴ But that number is trending down and already has fallen below 50 percent among Americans who are Republicans or “lean Republican.”⁵ Prevailing narratives about NATO likely have much to do with this trend. In place of those narratives, it is time to reassert that NATO membership and leadership remain squarely in the U.S. interest.

NATO Narratives

One highly visible narrative today holds that NATO has been largely responsible for Russia’s growing belligerence in Eastern Europe—culminating in the Vladimir Putin regime’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and its full-scale 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In this view, NATO’s eastward expansion beginning in the 1990s—and the possibility that Ukraine eventually might join the Alliance—created legitimate anxiety and heightened revanchist sentiments in Russia.

The University of Chicago political scientist John Mearsheimer⁶ is best known among the mostly realist

⁴ Jacob Poushter, Moira Fagan, Sneha Gubbala, and Jordan Lippert, “Americans Hold Positive Feelings Toward NATO and Ukraine, See Russia as Enemy,” *Pew Research Center Report*, May 10, 2023, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/05/10/americans-hold-positive-feelings-toward-nato-and-ukraine-see-russia-as-an-enemy/>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Isaac Chotiner, “Why John Mearsheimer Blames the U.S. for the Crisis in Ukraine,” *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2022, available at

thinkers associated in academic and policy circles with this narrative, which can be called “NATO is the Problem.”⁷ However, more extreme variations have taken hold in the online ecosystems and activist communities of the far-right⁸ and far-left⁹ in the United States. Adherents advocate rejection of U.S. support for Ukraine, if not outright sympathy for Moscow’s actions—and describe solidarity with NATO and financial support for Ukraine as detracting from America’s ability to address domestic problems. Though it remains a small-minority viewpoint, this narrative greatly delayed and nearly derailed the U.S. Congress’ April 2024 passage of a bill approving U.S. military assistance to Ukraine.

A more pervasive narrative also clouds U.S. perceptions of NATO. At least 23 percent of American adults and more than a third of Republicans tell pollsters that the Alliance “mostly benefits our allies.”¹⁰ Call this the “NATO is a Charity” narrative, with adherents divided as to whether or

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-john-mearsheimer-blames-the-us-for-the-crisis-in-ukraine>.

⁷ “Ukraine war follows decades of warnings that NATO expansion into Eastern Europe could provoke Russia,” *TheConversation.com*, February 28, 2022, available at <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-follows-decades-of-warnings-that-nato-expansion-into-eastern-europe-could-provoke-russia-177999>.

⁸ Sheera Frenkel and Stuart A. Thompson, “How Russia and Right-Wing Americans Converged on War in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2022, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/technology/russia-american-far-right-ukraine.html>.

⁹ Jan Dutkiewicz and Dominik Stecula, “Why America’s Far Right and Far Left Have Aligned Against Helping Ukraine,” *Foreign Policy*, July 4, 2022, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/04/us-politics-ukraine-russia-far-right-left-progressive-horseshoe-theory/>.

¹⁰ Dina Smeltz, “Americans Continue to See Benefits from US Alliances,” *Chicago Council on Foreign Relations Public Opinion Survey*, October 4, 2023, available at <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-continue-see-benefits-us-alliances>.

not it is a worthy charity. For these Americans, concerns center on whether and how much the United States should, in effect, subsidize the defense of its European allies. Former (and potential future) President Donald Trump appeals effectively to the skeptical side of this narrative when he scolds European NATO members for resting on a U.S. security guarantee while failing to spend the Alliance's targeted two percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on their defense budgets. On the "worthy charity" side, adherents invoke moralistic arguments about supporting the heroism of European friends who stand against the despotic Putin. As accurate as such images may be, they tend not to overcome American beliefs that European countries can and should mount this resistance on their own.

Recalling NATO's Founding Narrative

Lost in "NATO is the Problem" and "NATO is a Charity" is the largely unspoken argument that—whatever its missteps and despite its internal imbalances—NATO is first and foremost an American strategic asset. To revive that understanding of the Alliance, it may help to reconsider what amounts to NATO's founding narrative. Though largely forgotten, U.S. President Harry Truman's remarks at the April 4, 1949, signing of the Washington Treaty outline a U.S.-centered rationale for NATO that is even more powerful today than 75 years ago.¹¹

President Truman linked shared prosperity to the sharing of military burdens: "We are determined to work together to provide better lives for our people ... [b]ut we cannot succeed if our people are haunted by the constant

¹¹ Harry S. Truman, "Address on the Occasion of the Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty," National Archives (speech delivered April 4, 1949), available at <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/68/address-occasion-signing-north-atlantic-treaty>.

fear of aggression, and burdened by the cost of preparing their nations individually against attack.”

Truman highlighted the shared value system of NATO members: “The nations represented here are bound together by ties of long standing. We are joined by a common heritage of democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law. These are the ties of a peaceful way of life. In this pact we are merely giving them formal recognition.”

He made the economic motivations for NATO clear: “[W]e must have a world in which we can exchange the products of our labor not only among ourselves, but with other nations. We have come together in a great cooperative economic effort to establish this kind of world.” Truman rejected the compromise of American interests: “We shall, no doubt, go about this business in different ways. There are different kinds of governmental and economic systems, just as there are different languages and different cultures. But these differences present no real obstacle to the voluntary association of free nations devoted to the common cause of peace.” Finally, he linked the entire enterprise to America’s enduring self-image: “Our faith in this kind of unity is borne out by our experience here in the United States in creating one nation out of the variety of our continental resources and the peoples of many lands.”

At a subliminal level, NATO’s founding narrative may still hold some sway. About 57 percent of Americans remain willing to concede that NATO benefits both the United States and its European allies, and seven percent even say that NATO “mostly” benefits the United States itself.¹² But there is a large generational divide, with American senior citizens viewing NATO favorably at a rate 10 percentage points higher than their under-50 children and grandchildren.¹³ And in the swirl of competing narratives,

¹² Smeltz, op. cit.

¹³ Poushter et al., op. cit.

it is unlikely that more than a tiny percentage of Americans ever have heard a full-throated description of NATO as a U.S. strategic asset.

In 2024, that is not a difficult case to make. Consider the big-picture strategic outlook of the United States and what NATO represents in response.

America's Strategic Outlook

- Today, with China having joined post-Soviet Russia as a major competitor, the United States faces two adversaries with global reach, large nuclear arsenals, and demonstrated capacities to develop next-generation military technology.
- Both are authoritarian states under strongman rule—utterly opposed to the liberal-democratic values of the United States and its allies—attempting to disregard, if not dismantle, the post-World War II international order based on those values.
- China and Russia seek influence across the globe, generally in the form of economic support (in China's case) and military assistance (in both cases) conditioned on recipients adopting an adversarial or at best neutral posture towards the United States.
- China has signaled (regarding Taiwan) and Russia has embarked upon (regarding Ukraine) efforts to overrun liberal-democratic societies wholly opposed to such annexation. The precedents set by success in either case almost certainly would embolden them to further military adventurism and create massive instability.
- Already, the deterioration of U.S. relationships with China and Russia has added friction to the

global trade that enriched the United States (and most of the world) to an unprecedented degree since the end of World War II. A great-power military conflict would stall or wreck much of this progress and therefore must be deterred.

- Meanwhile, conflict in the Middle East has intensified rather than gone away in the wake of large-scale U.S. military withdrawal from the region—driven primarily by a near-nuclear Iran and its proxy forces. Israel fights for its security against these forces, and the flow of critical energy supplies and trade from and through the Middle East is at serious risk.
- In Northeast Asia, North Korea continues its development and deployment of nuclear weapons that threaten not only U.S. allies Japan and South Korea but also the U.S. homeland itself.
- Thus far the United States has shown neither the ability nor the propensity to expand and modernize its military forces or rapidly develop the technologies necessary to deter two global adversaries and two more regional adversaries. The U.S. defense posture across all domains appears weaker relative to its security environment than at any time since the end of the Cold War.
- Worsened by the constant influence operations of our adversaries—whose capacities for digital attacks and manipulation appear to exceed U.S. defenses—American society reels under distractions, divisions, and widespread concerns about its future.

NATO as a U.S. Strategic Asset

One U.S. advantage is missing from the bleak outlook just described. It is a certain political and military alliance with 31 other countries.

These 31 countries are among the wealthiest and most technologically advanced on the planet, with whom the United States conducts annual bilateral trade exceeding \$700 billion and from whom it receives more than \$2.5 trillion in direct investment.¹⁴ These countries have a combined GDP equal to China's which, when further combined with the United States gives the Alliance a 2:1 advantage in economic clout over China. The 1.8 million combined active military personnel of these allies significantly exceed the size of the United States's active military.¹⁵ Including their substantial increases in military spending after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, these countries now spend nearly as much on defense as Russia does—giving NATO as a whole a 3:1 military-budget advantage over Moscow.¹⁶

These countries share borders or proximity with Russia, and so mostly (and increasingly since 2022) understand the geopolitical risks it poses. These countries stood alongside U.S. efforts to improve stability in the Middle East for 20 years—and generally share America's outlook on Iran's influence in the region and Israel's necessary survival. These countries' systems of government and societal values closely resemble, and in several cases were inspired by,

¹⁴ Hans Binnendijk and Magnus Nordenman, "NATO's value to the United States: By the numbers," *Atlantic Council Issue Brief*, April 19, 2018, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/nato-s-value-to-the-united-states-by-the-numbers/>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2023" (March 14, 2024), available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_223291.htm.

those of the United States; ultimately, most will resist putting those legacies at risk to obtain the favors of China.

These countries, of course, are NATO.

From the U.S. perspective, imagine facing the current global environment without NATO. Imagine the economic isolation, the absence of allied military forces and burden sharing, and the lack of support for liberal-democratic values or the rule of law.

If NATO did not exist, then the United States would need to invent it—with great difficulty and arising almost entirely from self-interest rather than charity.

Conclusion

Where public persuasion is concerned, inventing NATO anew may be exactly what U.S. political and military leaders should do—all the better as the Alliance passes its 75th anniversary. In 2024, NATO is America's rare, undiminished strategic asset. Without concerted attention, however, U.S. support for NATO could decline rapidly in today's volatile information silos. An American reinvention of NATO likely will require three components: a fresh narrative, leadership commitment, and communications savvy.

NATO's "founding narrative"—captured in President Truman's April 1949 address—is obscure enough today to appear fresh in its own right. Its essence as an explanation of NATO arising from American self-interest is the key, however. "NATO is the Problem" and "NATO is a Charity" must be challenged by "NATO is America's Answer." This paper offers a high-level outline of the U.S.-centered case for NATO, but the evidence is much more diverse and plentiful than can be contained here. A fresh narrative may credit the wisdom of Truman and his cohorts but must update the economic, military, and societal stakes for the United States in maintaining close transatlantic relations. Viewed from

abroad, U.S. recognition of NATO as a strategic asset could serve the healthy purpose of reminding our allies themselves of the civilizational benefits and stakes—strengthening the spines of European governments against China and Russia.

The American president, military and political leaders, and even cultural influencers need to step up. The power of an Oval Office “Address to the Nation” has diminished in our digital cacophony—but it remains a place to start. President Ronald Reagan (perhaps not coincidentally known as “the Great Communicator”) gave 35 such addresses; Presidents Trump and Biden each have given two.¹⁷ While neither man is a natural candidate to “reinvent NATO,” that disinclination could give their words particular power if they can be persuaded—and strategic necessity may marry political advantage quite suddenly in the years ahead. NATO is long overdue for presidential attention, with the substance of a U.S.-centered case then echoed, embellished, and even challenged by others with substantial microphones and digital platforms. Discussion and debate are as important—and perhaps more important—than slavish repetition as new narratives take hold.

Finally, reinventing the case for NATO will require savvy engagement through all of today’s information channels and across all of America’s diverse constituencies. Observers may lament that a single social-media post by a celebrity will result in more commentary and shape more people’s outlooks than a thoughtful speech, but the point should be obvious: the old ways aren’t enough. Debates exist as to whether the platform created or merely augmented the attitudes of American young people about Israel’s war with Hamas, for example, but the role of TikTok

¹⁷ “United States Oval Office Address,” Wikipedia.com (accessed May 2, 2024), available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Oval_Office_Address.

in spurring large-scale emotional responses on security issues is beyond dispute.¹⁸ TikTok and the rest of social media may not make a think tank seminar on NATO “go viral” but neither can they be ignored in 2024. (Perhaps Taylor Swift can be encouraged to comment on the seminar.)

NATO is cool. Best friends share values, and NATO connects America to diverse friends who believe in freedom and self-determination. NATO stands up to bullies; it’s about deterring war and maintaining peace. Most of all—and against a lot of existing narratives—NATO serves America’s highest and best interests. NATO arises from what’s great in our history—and helps to keep it alive. The time to spread these lessons is now.

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¹⁸ Rebecca Jennings, “TikTok isn’t creating false support for Palestine. It’s just reflecting what’s already there.” Vox.com (December 13, 2023).

Revival of NATO Nuclear Deterrence: Time to Shift Gears

Artur Kacprzyk

Introduction

Nuclear deterrence has served the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) well since the creation of the Alliance 75 years ago, but is facing growing challenges.¹ During the Cold War it was the central element of securing NATO against a potential invasion by numerically superior armies of the Communist Bloc. After the Cold War, nuclear deterrence was sidelined in NATO, as most of its member states long did not see Russia as a threat. It was only Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2014, backed by nuclear saber-rattling towards NATO, that eventually made the Alliance begin to reinvigorate its nuclear mission. Since then, NATO has made progress in a nuclear adaptation, albeit it also substantially restrained itself in this process. There are reasons for concern as to whether NATO's current approach will be enough to keep nuclear deterrence effective in the future. They include adverse trends in Russia's behavior, which is increasingly aggressive and reliant on nuclear intimidation, and continuing efforts to improve and diversify its nuclear forces. At the same time, China has been rapidly expanding its nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities and a breakout of a war in Indo-Pacific seems increasingly possible. By drawing away U.S. attention and forces, it would create risks for NATO nuclear deterrence in Europe given the fact that the United States is its main contributor.

¹ This essay draws upon: Artur Kacprzyk, "NATO Nuclear Adaptation: Rationales for Expanding the Force Posture in Europe," *PISM Report*, November 23, 2023, available at <https://www.pism.pl/publications/nato-nuclear-adaptation-rationales-for-expanding-the-force-posture-in-europe>.

A Cautious Post-2014 Adaptation

Responding to the Russian threat, NATO has focused on improving its nuclear forces without expanding them. After deep cuts following the Cold War, the posture jointly managed by NATO allies is estimated to include around 100 U.S. B61 nuclear bombs. They are widely believed to be deployed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.² In wartime, they are to be delivered by dual-capable aircraft (DCA), which can also carry conventional weapons. Some DCA are provided by the United States, while others, under nuclear-sharing arrangements, by nations reportedly hosting the bombs, which could be allowed to employ these nuclear weapons if given U.S. permission. Various aspects of this nuclear mission are being consulted in NATO among the allies.³ Fourth-generation DCA are now being replaced by stealthy F-35A multirole fighters. The United States started production of an upgraded nuclear bomb, the B61-12. NATO has also declared to have been taking other steps to increase the effectiveness of the DCA mission, such as strengthening conventional forces assigned by various allies to support it (e.g., by providing fighter escort), and enhancing exercises. In addition, the United States is upgrading storage sites and related infrastructure in one of the bases in the United Kingdom, which previously hosted nuclear weapons and continues to host U.S. DCA. However, it appears to be a preparation for a possible contingency deployment in a crisis rather than a prelude to permanent stationing, as

² Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda et al., "Nuclear weapons sharing, 2023," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol., 79, No. 6, pp. 395-396.

³ Only France does not participate in such consultations, by its own choice.

NATO officials stress there are “no plans to deploy any more nuclear weapons in any additional NATO countries.”⁴

While these steps are aimed at enhancing deterrence, NATO’s recent nuclear posture adaptation efforts are modest compared to the Cold War era. That is not to say that NATO needs to increase its theatre-range nuclear forces in Europe to a few thousand warheads it deployed during the Cold War or an estimated 1,000-2,000 possessed now by Russia.⁵ The Alliance is not relying on battlefield nuclear use anymore, as it plans for non-nuclear defense against a conventional invasion. Unlike the Cold War, its members clearly have the capacity to do so, provided they properly invest in their forces. The main military challenge for NATO in the nuclear domain is to be able to respond relatively proportionally to limited nuclear attacks. They are discussed by Russian strategists first and foremost as means of avoiding a conventional defeat by compelling the enemy to stop fighting out of fear of further escalation.⁶ Limited response to such an attack would aim at dissuading the adversary from further nuclear strikes. Introduction of stealthy F-35A will improve this ability, by substantially increasing the odds of DCA penetrating Russian air defenses

⁴ “Joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Rishi Sunak, NATO,” April 23, 2024, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_224943.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁵ “Report to the Senate on the Status of Tactical (Nonstrategic) Nuclear Weapons Negotiations Pursuant to Subparagraph (a)(12)(B) of the Senate Resolution of Advice and Consent to Ratification of the New START Treaty,” U.S. Department of State, April 16, 2024, available at <https://www.state.gov/report-on-the-status-of-tactical-nonstrategic-nuclear-weapons-negotiations/>.

⁶ See William Alberque, “Russian Military Thought and Doctrine Related to Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons: Change and Continuity,” International Institute for Strategic Studies, January 2024, available at <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2024/01/russian-military-thought-and-doctrine-related-to-nonstrategic-nuclear-weapons/>.

and dropping the B61-12 bombs (which have variable explosive yields and are more precise than their predecessors). But the F-35A will not be totally undetectable in all circumstances and will have other limitations, from being based in just a few airbases that could be attacked to its range. In comparison, during the Cold War, the Alliance took further reaching steps to demonstrate that it has the ability and collective resolve to respond to aggression by striking Soviet territory, despite U.S.-Soviet parity in strategic nuclear forces (those with intercontinental ranges and usually higher yield). It decided not to rely only on vulnerable DCA and less politically visible U.S. sea-launched cruise missiles, but also to deploy ground-launched intermediate-range missiles in several NATO countries in the 1980s.

At the same time, it needs to be noted that even a more modest enhancement of nuclear deterrence in recent years was not an easy step for some allies and modernization of contributions to NATO's nuclear posture was uncertain. Just in 2010, Germany sought a withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from its territory, with some other countries open to such reductions. Germany finally ordered a follow-on DCA only in 2022. Moreover, after 2014, the Alliance also had to improve other aspects of its nuclear deterrence, including some very basic elements. Summit communiqués reinstated passages on the role of nuclear deterrence and importance of allied DCA and U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe, which disappeared in strategic documents from 2010-2012. Joint NATO declarations also increasingly called out Russia on its aggressive behavior, and warned against any nuclear use. NATO has been gradually becoming more open about some of its nuclear efforts. For example, in 2020 it started to publicly inform about its nuclear exercise, which it has been holding annually for many years. It also returned to joint nuclear operations planning and made efforts to improve the knowledge about nuclear matters ("nuclear IQ") among its member states. Still, there remains ample

room for improvement. For example, NATO used to communicate on nuclear matters more frequently and extensively by issuing communiqués after the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) meetings. More importantly, many allies still speak up on nuclear deterrence too rarely and superficially, especially at the highest levels of government. At times, they also make statements that, instead of reinforcing NATO's nuclear message to Russia and their own publics, weaken it. This was the case with some leaders overemphasizing and overestimating risks of nuclear escalation during Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

No Time for Complacency

It would be risky for NATO to assume that its current adaptation framework will suffice for nuclear deterrence to hold in the coming years. Although NATO's nuclear posture appears to be fulfilling its role in the middle of the highest tensions with Russia since the end of the Cold War, nuclear risks to the Alliance are increasing and more may yet materialize. This argues for NATO taking additional steps, since deterrence depends on an adversary's constant evaluation of the deterrer's resolve and capabilities.

First and foremost, NATO allies should take the 2022 invasion of Ukraine as a major warning sign about the propensity of the Russian leadership to risky miscalculations. Russia has miscalculated about both Ukraine's will and ability to resist, and the West's resolve to support the attacked nation. In addition, if Russia wins, or at least does not lose the war, it may very well still conclude it was partially due to its nuclear intimidation. Along with Russia's reorientation of its economy for an industrial war, it would significantly increase the danger of Russia conducting aggression under a nuclear umbrella against a NATO member. While Russia's threats have not prevented

the West from delivering huge military assistance to Ukraine, concerns regarding Russia's nuclear escalation had some effect on limiting it. This includes delays in decisions to provide certain types of equipment (especially long-range missiles and fighter aircraft) and at least some countries putting limits on the Ukrainian use of these weapons against targets on Russian territory.⁷ Some leaders also explicitly linked the lack of direct military intervention in support of Ukraine to escalation fears.⁸ Moreover, after relying mostly on rhetoric through the first year of the war, Russia began to step up nuclear intimidation towards NATO with more tangible steps, including an announced deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus, suspension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, "de-ratification" of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and additional exercises of theater nuclear forces. While Russia apparently does not approach nuclear use lightly, it might yet entertain it, especially against non-NATO member Ukraine, if faced with a major defeat in the war.

Even if Russia loses the ongoing conflict, a potential for another Russian miscalculation regarding NATO's nuclear resolve would rise greatly in the case of a war between the United States and China. Russia might then assume that the United States would not be willing to risk a nuclear war with two adversaries at the same time and that doubts about the

⁷ Šejla Ahmatović, Jürgen Klöckner, "Germany allows Ukraine to strike targets inside Russia with German weapons," *Politico*, May 31, 2024, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-ukraine-government-russia-strike-war-weapons-territory-announcement-washington/>.

⁸ See, e.g., Brett Samuels, "Biden: Direct conflict between NATO and Russia would be 'World War III,'" *The Hill*, March 11, 2022, available at <https://thehill.com/policy/international/597842-biden-direct-conflict-between-nato-and-russia-would-be-world-war-iii/>; and, Joe Barnes et al., "Scholz shoots down Macron suggestion that Nato soldiers could join Ukraine war," *The Telegraph*, February 27, 2024, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/02/27/macron-scholz-refusal-taurus-missiles-ukraine-war/>.

U.S. commitment and Russian threats would paralyze NATO.

In addition, in the future NATO may be less able to count a timely U.S. response to a limited nuclear attack in Europe with some of its low-yield strategic systems.⁹ One such option is deployment of bombers, but should a war in the Indo-Pacific region erupt, they would be most likely preoccupied with conventional and perhaps also nuclear operations in that region. Such conflict would also demand many of their supporting assets, such as aircraft for air-refueling. Credibility of another U.S. low-yield option, W-76/2 warheads carried by Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles, could decrease if Russia makes actual or perceived progress in its ongoing development of its strategic missile defenses.

Recent developments also weaken the arguments about alleged negative consequences of broadening NATO's nuclear adaptation. First, the notion that it would be provocative is at odds with the fact that Russia has not reciprocated NATO's self-restraint. Russia made a number of attempts at nuclear intimidation, announced nuclear weapons deployment to Belarus, and fielded ground-launched cruise missiles in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty,¹⁰ among other moves. NATO's nuclear self-restraint might have rather muddled its messaging and encouraged Russia to test its resolve and attempt nuclear intimidation. Second, concerns about a potential public backlash to expanded enhancement of

⁹ Some also argue that using strategic systems (even with low-yield warheads) for limited counterattacks would be more likely to be misinterpreted as escalation and prompt the adversary to respond with larger-scale nuclear strikes. See, e.g., Alan Cummings, "A Better Case for SLCM-N," *Proceedings*, Vol. 150/4/1,454, April 2024, available at <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2024/april/better-case-slcm-n>.

¹⁰ Russian violation was eventually followed by the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty and its collapse in 2019.

NATO's nuclear posture in Europe seem overstated. Surveys conducted after the 2022 invasion noted a substantial rise in public support for stationing of nuclear weapons in previously very skeptical societies.¹¹ While nuclear weapons remain a controversial topic in public debates, and non-governmental organizations are actively trying to undermine NATO nuclear deterrence in some countries, there does not seem to be a potential for massive anti-nuclear movements that the Alliance faced, and weathered, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Further Adaptation of NATO Nuclear Posture

To increase the likelihood of maintaining effective nuclear deterrence, NATO members should take additional actions to underscore their resolve to defend each other despite Russia's nuclear threats or attacks. They also need to further enhance NATO's ability to respond proportionally and in a timely manner to limited nuclear strikes. The most effective and tangible way to meet both goals would be to strengthen NATO nuclear posture in Europe beyond just modernizing existing capabilities. This would be a clear change in NATO's policy that would go beyond declarations and entail political decisions difficult for some allies, deployments of hardware, and financial investments.

NATO should increase the number of nuclear bombs storage sites in Europe and certify more F-35A to carry them (a number of NATO allies are buying this aircraft for conventional purposes). Such expansion would make it more difficult for Russia to destroy NATO's theater-range nuclear forces before it could counterattack. This expansion should include accepting additional countries into nuclear

¹¹ See, Michal Onderco et al., "Hawks in the making? European public views on nuclear weapons post-Ukraine," *Global Policy*, February 13, 2023, available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.13179>.

sharing, thus implementing a promise made long ago to ensure the broadest possible participation in these arrangements to demonstrate NATO's unity and resolve.¹² It would be especially important to extend nuclear sharing to at least one easternmost NATO member, such as Poland, that is at the biggest risk of Russian aggression. Apart from a high symbolic value, such a move would also provide the option of using DCA more easily, more quickly, and with greater ability to conduct a deep strike. When launched from locations closer to Russia, the DCA could reach Russian territory without the assistance of air-refueling tankers that could be destroyed or damaged during conflict. A more modest, but less controversial and costly option to extend nuclear sharing would be to certify DCA from additional countries, but without stationing U.S. nuclear bombs there. In a conflict, these additional DCA would be deployed to bases already hosting the bombs to take over the nuclear mission from aircraft that could be destroyed during conventional operations or on the ground. Alternatively, the bombs could be temporarily forward deployed to additional locations.

NATO also needs to start discussing what next-generation theater delivery systems should be developed for use by the United States and its allies participating in nuclear sharing. First, their acquisition will likely take a considerable amount of time. It took over a decade to develop and start the production of the B61-12 bomb. Second, even with the ongoing introduction of B61-12 and F-35A, dropping a bomb from the DCA is not the most credible way of delivering a nuclear strike and may face new challenges in case of evolution of Russian air defense systems in the coming years. The most straightforward solution would be to arm F-

¹² Most recently restated in: "Vilnius Summit Communiqué," NATO, July 11, 2023, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm, par. 45.

35s with nuclear-armed missiles, which could increase the chances for penetrating air defenses. A more survivable solution on the ground, but probably more controversial politically, would be to develop nuclear missiles launched from mobile land-based launchers. In any case, the need for an eventual upgrade of NATO theater nuclear forces will not be negated if the United States proceeds with development of nuclear-armed cruise missiles (SLCM-Ns) launched from survivable submarines with deployment expected in the 2030s. SLCM-Ns would strengthen NATO deterrence by enhancing U.S. capabilities and demonstrating U.S. resolve. Yet, it would not serve the goal of a joint NATO signaling, as its deployment would not require the involvement of other allies. Also, given high demand for U.S. attack submarines in a potential war with China, availability of such platforms to conduct counterstrikes against Russia could also be in question during a two-theater conflict.

Additionally, NATO deterrence could gain from an increased contribution of the French, and possibly British, nuclear forces. While they are much smaller, and less diverse and flexible than U.S. nuclear forces, they can still complicate Russian calculations on possible responses to a nuclear attack on NATO. It is worthwhile for European allies to take up the French offer of dialogue on the role of its nuclear forces in collective security. It must be conducted, however, with the clear goal of supplementing rather than replacing the U.S. extended deterrence. This message would be reinforced by at least some coordination with joint NATO efforts, such as simultaneous conduct of French and NATO nuclear exercises.

Last but not least, deterrence of nuclear attacks could be strengthened by further enhancement of allied non-nuclear capabilities, both offensive and defensive. They can support the nuclear mission by weakening the enemy's air defenses and protecting nuclear forces from attacks. Air and missile defense could also undermine Russian confidence in its ability to conduct a limited nuclear strike.

The Bottom Line

Maintaining NATO unity and achieving a consensus on recent nuclear adaptation efforts necessitated exercising restraint. But, as the Alliance achieved progress in this process, and nuclear risks to NATO increase, it should not only continue the current lines of effort, but also take additional steps to minimize the chance that Russia would miscalculate NATO members' resolve and capabilities. The time has come to expand NATO nuclear-sharing arrangements in Europe and to work on the next generation of theater-range delivery systems for U.S. nuclear weapons.

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NATO: The Unique Alliance

Susan Koch

Most commentary on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) focuses on its unique longevity. No other multilateral alliance in history has lasted as long. However, it is even more important – and rare – that NATO has grown steadily in number of members, scope and cohesion.

NATO was founded in 1949 primarily to deter the Soviet Union from expanding further westward in Europe and to reassure the 11 other founding members that the United States would protect them by all means necessary – including use of nuclear weapons – in the case of armed attack. Most European founding members also looked to NATO for protection in the event of a resurgent, aggressive Germany.

Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty, defining an attack on one member as an attack on all, encapsulated the basic founding principle of the Alliance, which has grown firmer with time: the members are each sovereign states, but part of a strong community.

Evolution of the Relationship Among NATO Allies

Although U.S. leadership has been fundamental to the NATO Alliance throughout its history, the relationship between the United States and the other members has changed significantly over time. In 1949, the United States far outstripped the other NATO members in virtually all major instruments of national power. The founding European members were still recovering from the devastation of the Second World War, and were completely dependent on U.S. military protection, economic assistance and political leadership.

While the United States remains the indisputable, and indispensable, leader of the Alliance, the other members now play a much more important role in it. The most striking expression of that evolution was the members' invocation of Article V, for the first and thus far only time, in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States. When the founding members adhered to the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, none could have foreseen that Article V would ever—let alone for the first time—be invoked in the case of an attack on the United States.

Sources of NATO Longevity

Even in the early days of the Alliance, the United States behaved as a first among equals rather than as a tyrant. There were times when the United States unilaterally asserted dominance over the Allies. One important instance was when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1953 warned of an “agonizing reappraisal” of U.S. relations with Western Europe if the proposed European Defense Community was defeated. Another, more serious example was the U.S. condemnation of British and French military action against Egypt in the Suez crisis of 1956. Still, those were gentle reactions compared to the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968. They were also unusual. Both the political and military arms of NATO were models of consultation from the beginning. Further, while the Supreme Allied Commander Europe has always been an American, the NATO Secretary General has always been European.

In 1964, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington published a prescient book, *Political Power: USA/USSR*, in which they argued that NATO would prove to be much stronger than the Warsaw Pact. Their reasoning was that U.S. democratic leadership made NATO a flexible, resilient alliance, while Soviet authoritarianism created a brittle

Warsaw Pact that would eventually crack.¹ Brzezinski and Huntington were proven right when the Warsaw Pact officially dissolved in 1991.

Another essential source of NATO's longevity has been the strength and consistency of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence commitment to, and reassurance of, allies. Except for France (which chose to pursue an independent deterrent beginning in the 1950s), and the United Kingdom (which had collaborated in the Manhattan Project), all NATO members have remained non-nuclear. It is clear that the strength of U.S. extended deterrence was central to the decision of some NATO members, especially West Germany and Italy, to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.² As of now, only France has acted on a lack of confidence in the U.S. extended deterrent by acquiring its own nuclear forces.

Finally, and importantly, NATO's cohesion and longevity owed—and continues to owe—much to the members' shared values. The Preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty makes those values clear: "The Parties to this Treaty...are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well being in the North Atlantic area."³ Those principles have been put into practice in the domestic politics of most (but not all) NATO members, as well as in the extensive consultative mechanisms within the Alliance.

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Political Power: USA/USSR*, New York: Viking Press, 1964.

² Susan Koch, "Extended Deterrence and the Future of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 39, No. 3, April 2020.

³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, DC—4 April 1949."

Changing Membership

Since NATO's founding, it has gone through nine rounds of enlargement. The first three reflected domestic changes: Greece and Turkey in 1952; West Germany in 1955 (changed to reunified Germany in 1990); and Spain in 1982. The next five incorporated most of Central and Eastern Europe: Czechia, Hungary and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania⁴, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; and Montenegro and North Macedonia in 2017 and 2020. The ninth round resulted directly from the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, with the admission of long-standing neutrals Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024).

The growth of NATO from 12 to 32 members testifies to the continued importance of the factors behind the Alliance's unprecedented longevity. It remains a beacon of security, democracy and rule of law – the embodiment, even if incomplete, of the 1990s vision of a “Europe, whole and free.”

The importance of NATO's expansion into Central and Eastern Europe was underscored during the 75th anniversary celebration at NATO Headquarters when a special event included brief speeches by the Foreign Ministers of the member governments who were celebrating the 25th, 20th and 15th anniversaries of their admission to the Alliance. Of particular note were the

⁴ NATO could readily admit the three Baltic states to membership because the United States and other founding members had never recognized the Soviet claim to their territories when it took them over in 1940. Thus, for NATO, there were only 12 former Soviet states, not 15. NATO has been more cautious about membership for any of the 12, to avoid complicating its relationship with Russia. However, now that the NATO-Russia relationship could hardly be worse, and Russia is at war against Ukraine and increasingly threatens other former Soviet states, NATO has become more willing to be positive about eventual admission of Ukraine and Georgia.

remarks of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski:

...when NATO was founded, my country, Poland, was trapped on the wrong side. Communist Soviet domination meant that if it came to war, Polish soldiers would have had to obey the orders of our enemies in order to fight our friends, a tragic situation. ... Unfortunately, Russia is on the march again. But happily, we are where we belong, in the company of democracies, among friends at home, resisting again, like a rock. Let's prevail again.⁵

Evolution of NATO Security Concerns

Minister Sikorski's remarks capture well the changes over the last several decades in one major NATO security concern. For NATO's first roughly 40 years, the focus of its security concerns, and the chief targets of U.S. extended deterrence, were the Soviet Union and the other members of the Warsaw Pact. When the Warsaw Pact disintegrated, quickly followed by the Soviet Union itself, NATO's focus changed. It sought to build new relationships with Russia and the other states of the former Soviet Union through programs like Partnership for Peace. U.S. cooperation with Russia led in the 1990s and early 2000s to landmark arms control agreements like START II and the Moscow Treaty, as well as the denuclearization of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and smooth implementation of the START I Treaty. Many other NATO members also contributed to the Cooperative Threat Reduction program and especially to the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (founded by the G-8 in 2002)

⁵ Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski, in North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Speeches by Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of NATO's 75th Anniversary Celebration, 04 April 2024."

which significantly increased NATO partners' and European Union threat reduction assistance.⁶

Alliance expectations of the time were well summed up in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997:

NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries. They share the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation. The present Act reaffirms the determination of NATO and Russia to give concrete substance to their shared commitment to build a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe, whole and free, to the benefit of all its peoples. Making this commitment at the highest level marks the beginning of a fundamentally new relationship between NATO and Russia.⁷

The expectation of a new, peaceful, productive relationship with Russia did not lead any existing or aspiring NATO members to conclude that the Alliance had outlived its usefulness. The large number of Central and Eastern European states who joined the Alliance beginning in 1999 testified to their unwillingness to take the "new Russia" for granted. Other members, including the United States, who were less skeptical about Russia's future, valued NATO cooperation in combatting new threats—including terrorism, Iranian and North Korean nuclear proliferation, and perceived threats from Libya and Iraq.

The *Strategic Concept* adopted at the NATO Madrid Summit in 2022 underscores the challenges presented to the Alliance by China, instability in the Middle East and Africa, and terrorism, which it characterizes as "the most direct

⁶ Russia was expelled from the G-8 after its 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France, 27 May 1997."

asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity.”⁸

Above all, the 2022 *Strategic Concept*, adopted just a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, made clear that the once-hoped-for partnership between NATO and Russia had been completely destroyed.

The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. ...NATO...will continue to respond to Russian threats and hostile actions in a united and responsible way. We will significantly strengthen deterrence and defense for all Allies, enhance our resilience against Russian coercion and support our partners to counter malign interference and aggression.⁹

The NATO Allies—and not least the United States—were very slow to recognize the reality of Vladimir Putin’s newly authoritarian and aggressive Russia. That was partly because Putin moved very slowly; cases in point were his calm reaction to the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in June 2002, as well as his near-simultaneous insistence on the Moscow Treaty with its significant reductions in deployed strategic warheads.

However, the United States and the NATO Allies were still slow to react even after Putin began really to show his true self. Allies condemned the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia and annexation of a large part of its territory, but NATO-Russian relations continued largely unchanged. The

⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept: Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid,” para. 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 8-9.

United States and its Allies reacted more strongly to the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, annexation of Crimea and occupation of much of Eastern Ukraine; they levied sanctions and expelled Russia from the G-8 group of leading industrialized nations.¹⁰ But the sanctions were not severe. Further, and crucially, the United States provided only “non-lethal” military equipment to Ukraine—a restriction which the Obama Administration defined very broadly, to include critical items like air defense. The NATO reaction, led by the United States, has been very different since the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

There is a direct link between the resurgent Russian threat and the agreement by NATO Allies to adopt the guideline that they should devote annually two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to defense spending. Initially, this guideline—note that it is not a firm requirement—was issued in response to budgetary needs rather than a severe threat to Alliance security. The NATO Defense Ministers first agreed on the two percent target in 2006. It was largely ignored until the NATO Heads of State and Government reiterated, and put their full authority behind, it at the Wales Summit following Russia’s first invasion of Ukraine in 2014. At the time, only three NATO members had met the guideline.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine gave a new urgency to the two percent guideline. In 2023, 11 NATO members, led by Poland, surpassed that target, and the Alliance announced in April 2024 that two-thirds of its members were expected to meet it in 2024.¹¹ The growth rate of defense spending by NATO Europe and Canada grew

¹⁰ The G-7 (United States, United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada) was formed in 1975. Russia was invited to join in 1994, forming the G-8. Its indefinite suspension in 2014 was essentially an expulsion.

¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Defence expenditures and NATO’s 2% guideline,” April 5, 2024.

from 2.0 percent to an historically-high estimated 8.3 percent between 2022 and 2023.¹²

The direct link between NATO defense spending and the Russian threat becomes even clearer when one notes which allies met the two-percent guideline in 2023. In order of percentage of GDP devoted to defense, they are: Poland, United States, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, United Kingdom and Slovakia.¹³ Thus, eight of the 11 are near neighbors of Russia.

The Alliance has not identified the nine additional Allies who are expected to meet or surpass the guideline during 2024. However, the German government reported in February 2024 that it had already met the target.¹⁴ The Swedish government in September 2023 announced that it would meet the guideline in 2024, with defense spending that would be almost double that of 2020.¹⁵ Other candidates, all of which in 2023 devoted a greater percentage of GDP to defense than did Germany, are: France, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Albania, Netherlands, Norway and Denmark.¹⁶

NATO's Future

NATO's decisive response to the Russian threat, including its unprecedented support for Ukraine and for greater

¹² North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2023)," July 7, 2023, p. 2.

¹³ Derek Hawkins, "See which NATO countries spend less than 2% of their GDP on defense," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2024.

¹⁴ Alexander Ratz, "Germany hits NATO spending target for first time since end of Cold war," *Reuters*, February 14, 2024.

¹⁵ "Sweden adds another 700 million crowns to its 2024 defence spending," *Reuters*, September 11, 2023.

¹⁶ Hawkins, op. cit.

defense spending, suggests that the Alliance is as strong as ever. But there are conflicting signals that cannot be ignored. The emergence of authoritarian, or semi-authoritarian, governments in Hungary, Turkey and Slovakia casts real doubt on whether the community of shared values that has made NATO so cohesive over the decades can long survive. Already the divergence of those three governments from the generally-accepted NATO values is echoed in differing perceptions of the threats Vladimir Putin poses to the Alliance.

The United States and the Soviet Union were the leading forces behind the creation of NATO in 1949: the one as the leader of the Alliance, and the other as the greatest threat to its members. Seventy-five years later, the actions of the United States and Russia will once again be the greatest determinants of the Alliance's future. There is little question about the future direction of Russia for the foreseeable future; as long as Putin and his ilk are in power, it will remain authoritarian and aggressively expansionist, a direct threat to many NATO members. The more difficult question may be what the United States will do in response: continue to lead a strong Alliance determined to safeguard freedom, national sovereignty, and the rule of law; or decide that our alliance relationships no longer serve our national interest. The April 20, 2024 vote of the House of Representatives does not indicate a clear direction regarding U.S. policy, but instead shows that both of the two opposite choices may be feasible. On the one hand, a strong majority of the House members favored a continuation of U.S. support to Ukraine's democracy and independence and opposition to Russia's lawless aggression. On the other hand, the vote was delayed by several months, potentially jeopardizing Ukraine's ability to continue to defend itself, and more than half of the members of the majority party voted against it.

The events of the July NATO Summit in Washington – and the domestic political reaction to those – may tell us

much about the future direction of U.S. policy toward this unique Alliance. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Alliance, its members, and those (like Ukraine) who rely on it: to make clear how much NATO has done—and continues to do—for the security and prosperity of the world, and not least, of the United States. Whether the NATO Allies will seize that opportunity, and whether they will meet a receptive audience, remain unknown.

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75 Years of Geopolitics: How Has NATO Responded to a Changing World?

David J. Lonsdale

We shall again have to deal with a closed political system ... Every explosion of social forces ... will be sharply re-echoed from the far side of the globe.¹

Halford J. Mackinder, 1904

Introduction

As is evident in its title, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a geopolitical alliance. Its very purpose is to defend a geopolitical space. Clearly, however, geopolitically the world has changed since NATO's founding, and continues to change. The question that this paper addresses is whether NATO has adapted effectively to the changing geopolitical environment. To that end, the paper will begin by briefly defining and discussing geopolitics as both a theory and a reality in international relations. From here, the paper will assess the geopolitical record of NATO, and more specifically will analyse the alliance's strategic concepts as official expressions of how NATO views and responds to the international security environment. NATO describes that a strategic concept: "outlines NATO's enduring purpose and nature, its fundamental security tasks, and the challenges and opportunities it faces in a changing security environment. It also specifies the elements of the Alliance's approach to security and provides guidelines for its political and

¹ Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now," in Geoffrey Sloan and Colin S. Gray (eds.), *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 15-38, 20.

military adaptation.”² The assessment will cover a range of issues, including a broadening security agenda, dealings with Russia, the rise of China, out-of-area operations, and the emergence of cyberspace and space as new domains for strategic activity.

Geopolitics Defined

Geography plays a significant role in human affairs, that much is obvious. But how exactly are we to understand its role vis-à-vis politics? Geoffrey Sloan, Associate Professor at the University of Reading, suggests that geography can be viewed through three lenses: as an objective or prize, to be gained or defended; as the perpetual environment (both natural and historical) within which politics is played out; and as a theatre for military action.³ More succinctly, Colin Gray defines geography as the “context for human thought and behaviour.”⁴ Developing this idea, Gray notes that geography is simultaneously objective and imagined.⁵ The former refers to the physical reality of the spaces we inhabit, whereas the latter represents the values and importance we attach to geography. A geographical space, then, can be a tract of land, but also the soil of our fathers with historical, cultural, even religious resonance. In this way, physical geography can be regarded as an essentially stable arena that becomes dynamic when overlaid with politics.⁶

It should be noted that the stability of geography, and its political utility, can be affected by technological

² NATO, *Strategic Concepts*, July 18, 2022, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

³ Sloan, p. 16.

⁴ Colin S. Gray, *Perspectives on Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 123.

⁵ Colin S. Gray, “Inescapable Geography,” in Geoffrey Sloan and Colin S. Gray (eds.), pp. 161-177.

⁶ Gray, *Perspectives*, p. 121.

developments.⁷ This was at the heart of Halford Mackinder's seminal 1919 work on geopolitics, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Specifically, Mackinder theorised about the end of the Columbian period, which had been dominated by maritime powers. In their place would rise the land powers of Central Europe and Asia. The catalyst for enhanced land power was development in railways and motorised vehicles.⁸ We will return to the subject of technology later, especially in relation to developments in space and cyberspace.

As a word of analytic caution, discussions of geography should not devolve into geographical determinism.⁹ Put simply, we should not ignore the politics in geopolitics. In this way, geography presents both challenges and opportunities, but does not dictate. Political leaders have choices; decision making matters.¹⁰ Geopolitics, then, speaks to the importance of spatial relationships amongst political actors. It can be defined as "the spatial study and practice of international relations," and conceptually as "the theory of spatial relationships and historical causation."¹¹ Ultimately, we can think of geopolitics as a form of bounded rationality, but one that has "profoundly shaped the modern age."¹²

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁸ Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Suffolk: Penguin Books, 1944).

⁹ Gray, *Perspectives*, pp. 120-122.

¹⁰ Sloan and Gray, p. 2.

¹¹ Gray, "Inescapable Geography," p. 164, and Sloan and Gray (eds.), p. 2. For the origins of geopolitics, see also John Hillen and Michael P. Noonan, "The Geopolitics of NATO Enlargement," *Parameters*, Autumn 1998, pp. 21-34.

¹² Hal Brands, "The Field of Geopolitics Offers Both Promise and Peril," *Foreign Policy*, December 28, 2023, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/28/geopolitics-strategy-eurasia-autocracies-democracies-china-russia-us-putin-xi/>.

NATO & Geopolitics

Although the physical geography of the Euro-Atlantic region has remained constant, politically and technologically we have witnessed much change since the founding of NATO. The paper will now assess how NATO has responded to said changes and how the Alliance has reconsidered the geopolitical landscape in which it operates. Since its founding in 1949, NATO has produced eight *Strategic Concepts*. Four were produced during the Cold War, the latest being 1968. The first of the post-Cold War strategic concepts appeared in 1991. Since then, strategic concepts have been published at fairly regular intervals, with the latest appearing in 2022 in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Cold War

NATO's first strategic concept, *Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area (DC 6/1)*, established the ends, ways, and means at the heart of Alliance strategy. The objectives sought were, and remain, peace, security, stability, and well-being amongst the nations of the North Atlantic area. In relation to means, *DC 6/1* established the notion that parties to the North Atlantic Treaty should contribute appropriate military forces, relative to their respective geographical location and economic situation. *DC 6/1* also identified the main ways by which the objectives would be achieved: deterrence and collective defence in the event of an attack.¹³

Geopolitically, this initial strategic concept was focused exclusively on the North Atlantic Treaty area, and understood that operations in all three existing domains

¹³ NATO, *Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area, DC 6/1*, 1949, available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a491201a.pdf>.

(land, sea, and air) played a part in securing the territory in question. That being said, *DC 6/1* contains an interesting reference to psychological operations.¹⁴ We should not make too much of this, certainly not claiming, for example, that in 1950 NATO had notions of hybrid warfare. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even in its first iteration, NATO's conception of strategy included operations beyond the more traditional physical domains (on this occasion the cognitive domain). We will return to the issue of domains later in the paper.

The second strategic concept, *MC 3/5*, followed quite quickly in 1952. In the Alliance's own words, this was in response to the outbreak of the Korean War, alongside the accession of Greece and Turkey to NATO. Communist aggression on the Korean peninsula actualised the communist threat in a visceral manner. In its wording, *MC 3/5* differed very little from its predecessor, but it did initiate and/or accelerate reforms to NATO military structures. It also began a discussion regarding what would become NATO's "forward strategy," deploying forces as far forward as possible to the Iron Curtain.¹⁵ Interestingly, from a geopolitical perspective, the Korean War did not expand the geographical area of the Alliance. At this stage in its history, NATO was not prepared to operationally link different areas of the globe vulnerable to communist aggression. The war did, however, lead to the founding of the less robust, and relatively short-lived South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO).

MC 14/2, NATO's third strategic concept, published in 1957, was far more significant in geopolitical terms. This third iteration of NATO strategy embraced Massive Retaliation as the basis for deterrence. Moreover, it formally

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ NATO, *Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Area, DC 6/1*, 1952, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

acknowledged that Soviet activities outside of the NATO area, especially those of a subversive nature, could prove detrimental to the security of the Alliance. As a consequence,

planning ... must take account of the possible need for certain NATO countries to use some of their NATO forces to meet defense commitments elsewhere, such as may arise because of the various and changing forms of the Soviet-inspired Communist threat on a world front. This need, however, should, in conformity with their NATO commitments, be harmonized with the primary importance of protecting the NATO area.¹⁶

Although this statement does not shift the focus of NATO's geopolitical mission, it does represent an acknowledgement of the important security linkage between the North Atlantic Treaty area and other geopolitical locations. The developing nature of the closed political system identified by Mackinder in the opening quotation of this paper, was becoming apparent to the Alliance.

The final strategic concept of the Cold War, *MC 14/3*, released in 1968, followed the withdrawal of France from NATO's Integrated Military Structure in 1966. Strategically, it encompassed Flexible Response as the core of NATO's deterrence strategy. Geopolitically, *MC 14/3* expanded on the notion of out-of-area threats, in particular identifying Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and the High Seas as especially vulnerable to communist activities.¹⁷

¹⁶ NATO, *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Area*, p. 12, available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a570523a.pdf>, 1957.

¹⁷ NATO, *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Area*, 1968, p. 6, available at <https://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a680116a.pdf>.

Additionally, MC 14/3 doubled down on the threat from communist subversion, both within and outside the North Atlantic Treaty area.

Alongside the 1968 strategic concept, NATO also released the *Report of the Council on the Future Tasks of the Alliance*, or *Harmel Report*, to which it is more commonly referred. The significance for this study is that the *Harmel Report* initiated the “dual-track” approach to security. Alongside defence and deterrence, NATO increasingly pursued non-military means to security, specifically elements of détente and arms control. NATO’s understanding of the non-violent political elements of geopolitics was evolving.¹⁸

Post-Cold War

Reflecting the end of the Cold War, *The Alliance’s New Strategic Concept* in 1991 signalled a significant shift in NATO’s geopolitical relationships. Although collective defence remained at the heart of the Alliance’s mission, security was now to be pursued increasingly through partnership and cooperation with past adversaries. Indeed, the new strategic concept indicated that the objectives of the *Harmel Report* were being realised. Moreover, NATO was now taking a much broader view of security. The 1991 strategic concept identified a wider range of threats, including instability and ethnic conflict, especially in areas peripheral to Europe; WMD proliferation; terrorism; and disruption to resource flows. Importantly, the strategic concept recognised that “Alliance security must also take account of the global context.” It stopped short of including NATO out-of-area operations, but did note that NATO

¹⁸ Jamie Shea, “How the Harmel Report Helped Build the Transatlantic Security Framework,” *New Atlanticist*, January 29, 2018, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-the-harmel-report-helped-build-the-transatlantic-security-framework/>.

nations may be required to use their military forces for global peace and stability operations under the auspices of the United Nations.¹⁹

Although NATO was adapting to the new security environment, the latter continued to change and present new challenges. The 1990s witnessed war and ethnic cleansing in Europe, specifically in the former Yugoslavia. Against this backdrop, in April 1999 NATO released *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*.²⁰ This was done in the middle of the Alliance's air campaign against Serbia as part of the Kosovo War. Interestingly, the strategic concept contained no direct mention of the Kosovo conflict or NATO's resultant air campaign. This is despite the fact that the Kosovo conflict had instigated a considerable debate within NATO over whether the alliance should conduct offensive operations.²¹ Once again, NATO's security outlook slightly expanded to include crisis management, migration, organised crime, support for peacekeeping, peace support, and crisis response operations, potentially under the UN or OSCE.

From a geopolitical perspective, and with an eye to the current situation, possibly the most significant statements in the document relate to Russia and Ukraine. Even in 1999 the Alliance was conscious of the key role these two countries play in post-Cold War European geopolitics. The 1999 strategic concept acknowledges that Russia plays a key role in Euro-Atlantic security, and that: "A strong, stable and enduring partnership between NATO and Russia is

¹⁹ NATO, *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, 1991, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm.

²⁰ NATO, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept*, 1999, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm.

²¹ Ivo H. Daalder, *NATO in the 21st Century: What Purpose? What Missions?*, April 1, 1999, Brookings Institution, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/nato-in-the-21st-century-what-purpose-what-missions/>.

essential to achieve lasting stability in the Euro-Atlantic area." Additionally, the strategic concept notes that "Ukraine occupies a special place in the Euro-Atlantic security environment...," and that NATO is committed to its sovereign independence and territorial integrity.²²

The 2010 strategic concept, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, was published following NATO's first operations beyond the Euro-Atlantic area.²³ These included counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa, and the 11-year NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan. In terms of NATO expansion, 2004 had witnessed the memberships of the Baltic states, which took the Alliance yet closer to the borders of Russia.

This strategic concept further embraced the closed global political system, and by association out-of-area operations, stating that NATO intended to "further develop doctrine and military capabilities for expeditionary operations, including counterinsurgency, stabilization and reconstruction operations ..." for crisis management. Moreover, it promised the Alliance's global partners more political engagement and the ability to help shape NATO-led operations. That being said, in terms of membership, NATO's open-door policy was still limited to democratic countries in the Euro-Atlantic area. Finally, the range of threats was expanded again to include energy and environmental security. More significantly from a geopolitical perspective, the 2010 strategic concept included reference to the space and cyber domains, noting the possibility that attacks in the latter could "reach a threshold that threatens national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security and stability."²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 2010, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm.

²⁴ Ibid.

The *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* represents another significant development in NATO's geopolitical outlook, one that is not surprisingly quite pessimistic.²⁵ Not only does it respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it directly references the People's Republic of China for the first time; the deepening partnership between the two; the related rise of authoritarianism and challenge to the rules-based international order; threats to the maritime domain; instability in NATO's southern neighbourhood; nuclear modernisation; the erosion of arms control and the non-proliferation regime; hybrid threats, including misinformation campaigns and interference in the democratic process and institutions; the instrumentalization of migration; manipulation of energy supplies; terrorism; and, it ramps up the rhetoric on threats to the space and cyber domains. In a signal of how significant these two domains have become, the strategic concept notes that "[a] single or cumulative set of malicious cyber activities; or hostile operations to, from, or within space; could reach the level of armed attack and could lead the North Atlantic Council to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty."²⁶ This is the clearest signal yet that the geopolitical territory of NATO has expanded to include these technologically reliant domains.²⁷ A similar statement is made in reference to hybrid actions.

In response to this growing list of global threats, NATO has adopted what it calls a 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence, meaning that it can respond to threats from whichever direction they emanate. In

²⁵ NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, 2022, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ For a discussion of the geopolitical significance of cyberspace, see Brandon Valeriano and Ryan C. Maness, *Cyber War Versus Cyber Realities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

geopolitical terms, this equates to NATO enhancing its global awareness and reach across all domains, and working with partners across the globe in areas such as the Middle East, North Africa, the Sahel, and the Indo-Pacific region.²⁸ Geopolitically, the 2022 strategic concept does not make NATO a global alliance; it is still focused on the defence, security, and well-being of the Euro-Atlantic area. Nonetheless, it does cement NATO as a global actor, one that increasingly engages with the broader world and occasionally conducts military operations therein.²⁹

Conclusion

NATO's geopolitical journey encapsulates both the stability and changeable nature of the subject. The geography has largely remained the same (with the exception of the space and cyber domains), but the geopolitical landscape has changed quite dramatically. NATO has responded in various ways. It has maintained its central focus on the defence and security of the Euro-Atlantic territory, whilst acknowledging increasingly important linkages to other areas, both close and far. In this sense, NATO's geopolitical stance has increasingly echoed Mackinder's prophecy of a closed global political system. Perhaps the biggest geopolitical challenge to NATO has been its relationship to Russia in the post-Cold War world. Here, NATO seems to have been caught in something of a paradox. On the one hand, NATO has enacted a policy of eastward expansion, seeking to spread the benefits of security and stability afforded by the Alliance. At the same time, it has seemingly

²⁸ NATO, *NATO 2022*.

²⁹ For a brief discussion on some of these issues, see "In About a Hundred Words on NATO's Global Political Priorities," *Globsec*, September 27, 2023, available at <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/commentaries/about-hundred-words-natos-next-secretary-general-gylf-edition>.

trod on the geopolitical toes of Russia. As both Colin Gray and John Erickson note, geopolitics has strong resonance in modern Russia.³⁰ It is, therefore, difficult not to conclude that geopolitical tensions played some part in the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Whatever one concludes about the extant war in Ukraine, it is clear that geopolitics still retains substantial explanatory power in international relations.

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³⁰ Gray, "Inescapable Geography," and John Erickson, "Russia Will Not be Trifled With: Geopolitical Facts and Fantasies," in Sloan and Gray (eds.), pp. 242-268. For further discussion of these issues, see Kaarel Piirima, "'Geopolitics of Sympathy': George F. Kennan and NATO Enlargement," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 35/1, 2024, pp. 182-205, and Leo von Breithen Thurn, "The (Geo)Politics of Sweden's NATO Ascension," Situation Report, January 26, 2024, *Geopolitical Monitor*, available at <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-geopolitics-of-swedens-nato-ascension/>.

NATO is Historic and Indispensable

Franklin C. Miller

NATO is the most successful political-military alliance in modern history, indeed perhaps of all time. As a *political* alliance, it has brought together in common cause a series of nations who over the previous decades had often warred with each other, plunging the European continent into chaos time and again. As importantly, after twice being drawn into European wars that many Americans initially believed were irrelevant to their security, it coupled the security of the United States to that of Western Europe in a realization of the fact that the balance of power in Europe was integral to America's own security. *Militarily*, it fostered the creation of interoperable North American and European forces through a continuing series of exercises and deployments featuring common tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), common command and control systems, shared logistics assets, and integrated command structures. In so doing, it also allowed for the construction of a means of extending America's nuclear deterrent to its European allies that involved allied participation, thereby not only enhancing NATO's collective defense capability but also supporting global nuclear non-proliferation goals. In short, if NATO did not exist now we would have to invent it. But NATO does exist, and our challenge is to keep it strong, cohesive, and relevant in a world in which it is challenged both from within and externally.

It is useful to recall NATO's origin. Arising from the ruins of World War II, its reason for being was to prevent the Soviet Union from initiating a third world war which would once again devastate Western Europe. This not only meant forestalling first a conventional—and then later a combined conventional and nuclear—attack, but also preserving and fostering liberal democracy and the free

enterprise system. The end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union suggested to some that NATO had run its course, that it no longer had a role in the world, that it should disband. That this was short-sighted was demonstrated first when the Alliance was required to intervene to halt the internecine bloodshed among the various nations emerging from the collapse of Yugoslavia – nations whose policies had helped provoke the first World War. It was demonstrated again when the threat posed by the situation in Afghanistan prompted the United Nations to ask NATO to establish a military force – the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – to help moderate the situation. And throughout those years, voices, particularly in Eastern Europe, began warning about the danger posed by revanchist elements in Moscow. Knowing something about Soviet domination, and therefore much more alarmed than their counterparts in many of NATO's founding nations, they (presciently) sought the Alliance's protection from future aggression from the East including – most importantly – coverage under NATO's nuclear umbrella. It took the Alliance as a whole some time to dispel the illusion of a threat-free Europe but dispel it it finally did – reflecting the re-emergent threat from Russia at a series of critical summits in the late 2010s.

As NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary, the Alliance faces at least three fundamental challenges: a real but miscast debate over defense spending; a contentious but misguided controversy over the role of the United States; and a submerged but real and potentially highly dangerous method of decision making which could paralyze and even undo the Alliance in a time of crisis.

Failure to fund adequate military forces has been an issue for NATO since its inception. In the late 1970s, under President Carter, the United States characterized individual NATO nations' commitments to the common defense by measuring the percentage of GDP each devotes to defense

spending. The Carter Administration's goal was three percent for all NATO nations, a target which was honored only in the breach. More recently NATO Defense Ministers at the Alliance's 2006 Summit, later reaffirmed by the Alliance's leaders at the 2014 Summit, committed to setting a goal of two percent for all NATO nations by 2024—a goal which only 11 of 32 NATO allies currently meet.¹ But in many ways defense spending is an imperfect measure of military capability, as was demonstrated by Cold War comparisons of U.S. and Soviet defense budgets. A more meaningful metric, if not more difficult to measure, would be output: how many brigades/ships/airwings does a country deploy? At what readiness levels? With what degree of modern capability?

As NATO moves through its eighth decade, we need to find more accurate and more useful methods of determining each nation's contribution. This does not remove the requirement for all NATO nations to contribute their fair share, just that we need to find better ways to assess their contributions. As former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said to his fellow NATO defense ministers in February 2017: "Americans cannot care more for your children's future security than you do."²

Over the past few years various European leaders have advanced the notion that NATO Europe needs to become significantly more self-sufficient, in essence to reduce dramatically, if not eliminate, the American role in the Alliance. Part of this reflects the damage done by former President Trump's rhetoric and comments while in office;

¹ Elliott Davis Jr., "Only 35% of NATO Countries Meet the Group's Defense Spending Target," *U.S. News*, March 7, 2024, available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2024-02-12/only-35-of-nato-countries-meet-the-groups-defense-spending-target>.

² Helene Cooper, "Defense Secretary Mattis Tells NATO Allies to Spend More, or Else," *The New York Times*, February 15, 2017, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/world/europe/jim-mattis-nato-trump.html>.

part of it reflects the fear that if he is re-elected he will diminish the U.S. commitment to NATO and act in ways more amenable to Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Part of it also reflects the failed Obama Administration policy of “pivoting to Asia,” a theme unhelpfully revived today by some American pseudo-strategists. While worrying about such nightmares is understandable, acting on them before they materialize, if indeed they do materialize, is not.

Equally pernicious is the pretension and conceit of some French presidents past and present that France can replace the United States as NATO’s leader. That notion is demonstrably false, both politically and militarily. My long experience in NATO has convinced me that American presence and leadership is indispensable to the Alliance’s success. NATO’s binding of the United States to Europe created a dynamic which allowed European nations to rise above their historical disputes with their neighbors to serve a greater cause (the European Union’s success notwithstanding). The recent call for “strategic autonomy” by Emmanuel Macron (which included the gratuitous comment “we need to make sure that we can build ... a Europe that can show that it’s never going to be ... the lap dog of the United States”³) may resonate with some, but it is insulting to his European colleagues and neighbors – and to the United States as well.

The simple fact is that politically, the European members of NATO are highly unlikely to follow Paris’s lead. In addition, French forces – while highly capable and well equipped – cannot provide anything which comes close to approximating the military contribution of the

³ Joel Gehrke, “Macron touts France’s nuclear weapons to back support for Ukraine,” *Washington Examiner*, April 25, 2024, available at https://www.newsbreak.com/news/3415978552091-macron-touts-france-s-nuclear-weapons-to-back-support-for-ukraine?_f=app_share&s=i0&pd=05SZAILF&lang=en_US&send_time=1714290891&trans_data=%7B%22platform%22%3A0%2C%22cv%22%3A%2224.17.0.36%22%2C%22languages%22%3A%22en%22%7D.

United States. France's refusal to place its forces under NATO command in various crisis situations reinforces the perception that Paris views the Alliance as of secondary importance. And French nuclear forces lack the flexibility and size necessary to deter Russian blackmail and aggression. French nuclear doctrine is unsuited to the Russian threat. Furthermore, Paris's historic, multi-decade refusal to engage in nuclear policy and planning discussions with the United States and the United Kingdom in NATO settings sustains other allies' conclusion that, rhetoric aside, French nuclear forces exist solely to deter attacks on France. To state the obvious, NATO without the United States is not NATO. It is of paramount importance, therefore, that efforts should be directed to strengthening the trans-Atlantic tie. Thus, those who call for European defense autonomy, either because they are taking counsel from their fears or seek to further their own political agendas, should be shamed and shunned.

Finally, there is the fact that the self-congratulatory language which has emerged from think tanks in the United States and in Europe regarding NATO's 75th anniversary has ignored a major potential problem in how the Alliance conducts its business.⁴ NATO operates on a consensus basis. There is no formal reason for this; it's just evolved over the Alliance's history. The only requirement for consensus, enshrined in the Washington Treaty, is for admission of new members.

Consensus decision making in the Alliance's early years was not a major issue: all of the member governments were like-minded as to why NATO existed and who the enemy was. But the original 12-member group now numbers 32, and some of the newer member governments have shown a

⁴ See Eric S. Edelman, David Manning, and Franklin C. Miller, "NATO's Decision Process has an Achilles Heel," *The New Atlanticist*, March 12, 2024, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-decision-process-has-an-achilles-heel/>.

dangerous tendency towards anti-democratic behavior and an affinity for Vladimir Putin. It is not too far-fetched to suspect that in a future crisis one or two of these, acting at Moscow's behest, could block or impede an Article V declaration, thereby facilitating early and potentially decisive gains for invading Russian forces. The Alliance needs to face up to this reality. It needs to ensure that Putin-friendly governments are not able to sabotage a rapid and decisive NATO response to aggression—because effective deterrence of such aggression relies on assuring that the Alliance can in fact meet and defeat any attacks in a timely manner.

It has become clear in recent years that the liberal democratic world faces twin threats from Russia and China. Whether that might materialize in a planned manner (think Molotov-Ribbentrop) or opportunistically, we must be prepared to deter, and defeat if deterrence fails, simultaneous aggression in both the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. Those wars, should they occur, would be quite different. A war in Europe would be first and foremost a ground and air war; US Army reinforcements would be heavily engaged. An Asian war would be primarily a naval and air war. In the case of simultaneous aggression, American naval and air assets would need to be heavily concentrated in the Pacific. This would, in turn, place the primary responsibility for naval and air superiority in Europe on allied units, a task for which they are well capable (especially given the poor performance of Moscow's armed forces against Ukraine). Furthermore, the recent addition of highly capable Swedish and Finnish forces to NATO provides not only a major geographic edge, but very potent and skilled military capability as well. All of this means that we have a solid and powerful Alliance— if we can collectively keep it.

NATO has proven its value over the past seventy-five years; it has demonstrated the wisdom of those American

and European statesmen who birthed it. The challenge for today's and for tomorrow's leaders is to maintain and improve NATO's political cohesion and military strength for the foreseeable future.

Hon. Franklin C. Miller, Principal, the Scowcroft Group, and a Commissioner on the congressionally mandated 2023 Strategic Posture Commission.

“A Time for Choosing”: Urgent Action or Continuing Folly

Keith B. Payne

Introduction

Washington’s global system of alliances is facing extremely tough internal and external problems. These problems are neither fleeting nor prosaic; they are now structural and will require significant efforts to ameliorate. That harsh reality would matter little if alliances were unimportant to Western security. But they are the West’s key advantage over an aggressive, authoritarian bloc, including a Sino-Russian entente, North Korea and Iran, that seeks to overturn the liberal world order created and sustained by U.S. and allied power. To maintain that advantage, Washington must recognize and respond to those threats, while resisting the usual anti-defense spending/anti-military themes of the “progressive” Left and the seeming neo-isolationism of some on the political Right.

U.S. defense budgets in decline when adjusted for inflation,¹ and a trend within parts of the Republican Party to oppose continuing military aid to Ukraine, are not lost on allies who fear for their security and are ultimately dependent on a seemingly reticent United States for their security. As threat conditions become increasingly severe and obvious, some allies, particularly those who are on the

This article is drawn from Keith B. Payne, “‘A Time for Choosing’: Urgent Action or Continuing Folly,” *Information Series*, No. 580 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 26, 2024).

¹ Michael J. Boskin and Kiran Sridhar, “Biden's Budget Neglects the Military,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2024, p. A17, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidens-budget-neglects-the-military-huge-gap-in-american-strength-and-readiness-142ccc30>.

frontlines vis-à-vis Russia, China, and North Korea, understandably are increasingly alarmed.

Evidence of this alarm includes open allied discussions about acquiring independent nuclear capabilities – with the corresponding potential for a cascade of nuclear proliferation. Perhaps most surprising are open German and Japanese discussions of independent nuclear deterrence capabilities.² In Japan, the subject is tied directly to the continuing credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and has moved from being politically taboo to an open public discussion.³ In February 2023, a Japanese defense study chaired by former military chief of staff Ryoichi Oriki reportedly suggested that “Japan ease its three nonnuclear principles that prohibit possessing, producing or allowing entry into Japan of nuclear weapons.”⁴

An alternative potential allied response to security threats is to move increasingly toward accommodating Moscow and/or Beijing. As contemporary power balances shift and fear among some allies grows, greater accommodation to China or Russia—and corresponding distance from the United States—may appear the most practicable option. Turkey appears to have been positioning itself between the West and Russia for years,

² See, for example, Eckhard Lübke and Michael Rühle, “Nuklearmacht Europa: Braucht Europa gemeinsame Nuklearwaffen? Ein Für and Wider,” *Internationale Politick*, No. 1 (Januar/Februar 2024), pp. 110-113.

³ See, for example, Jesse Johnson, “Japan should consider hosting U.S. nuclear weapons, Abe says,” *Japan Times*, February 27, 2023, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/02/27/national/politics-diplomacy/shinzo-abe-japan-nuclear-weapons-taiwan/>.

⁴ Hiroyuki Akita, “Why nuclear arms debate in South Korea cannot be underestimated: U.S. allies must think outside the box to counter new threats from North Korea,” *Nikkei Asia Online* (Japan), May 5, 2023, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/Why-nuclear-arms-debate-in-South-Korea-cannot-be-underestimated>.

while some allies appear to be serving Russia's interests from within NATO.⁵ In the Indo-Pacific, New Zealand deepens economic, trade, and cultural ties with Beijing.⁶

That some allies will hedge their geopolitical bets by seeking accommodations with Russia and/or China, and by distancing themselves from Washington, was demonstrated recently in statements by French President Macron and the European Commission's leadership.⁷ According to Macron, "strategic autonomy" must now be Europe's organizing principle;⁸ and the French ambassador reportedly has advised Canada to begin distancing itself from the United States, and stated that Ottawa must choose

⁵ Eric S. Edelman, David Manning, and Franklin C. Miller, "NATO's Decision Process Has an Achilles' Heel," *New Atlanticist*, March 12, 2024, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-decision-process-has-an-achilles-heel/>.

⁶ See, for example, Laura Zhou, "China and New Zealand are a 'force for stability' in a turbulent world, says Foreign Minister Wang Yi," *South China Morning Post*, March 18, 2024, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3255852/china-and-new-zealand-are-force-stability-turbulent-world-says-foreign-minister-wang-yi>.

⁷ See for example, "Macron Says Europe Should Not Follow U.S. or Chinese Policy Over Taiwan," *Reuters*, in, *U.S. News and World Report*, April 9, 2023, available at <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-04-09/macron-says-europe-should-not-follow-u-s-or-chinese-policy-over-taiwan>. See also, "After Macron, EU Chief Seeks 'Independent' China Policy, Says Abandon US' 'Confrontational' Approach," *Times Now (India)*, May 1, 2023, available at <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/news-plus/after-macron-eu-chief-seeks-independent-china-policy-says-abandon-us-confrontational-approach-video-99916110>.

⁸ See Vivienne Machi, Tom Kington, Andrew Chuter, "French visions for an autonomous Europe proves elusive," *Defensenews.com*, May 9, 2023, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/05/09/french-vision-for-an-autonomous-europe-proves-elusive/#:~:text=EUROPE%20and%20WASHINGTON%20%E2%80%94%20After%20Russia,the%20continent%20standing%20alone%20militarily>.

between the United States and Europe.⁹ As two prominent European commentators have observed, "...based on global American strategic supremacy, the very idea of autonomous European defense has long been considered detrimental to the vital transatlantic link. However, with global strategic challenges growing fast, this principle is no longer tenable."¹⁰

The manifest inconsistency in U.S. behavior important to allies has accelerated this problem. An Israeli analyst described the perception concisely: "The consensus in the region is that the US has abdicated its role as the Superpower vis-à-vis the [Middle East]."¹¹ As allies respond to the reality of rising threats, if a trend toward increasing allied interest in independent nuclear capabilities and/or distancing themselves from the United States expands, sustaining U.S. global alliances will be problematic, to the degradation of U.S. security.

America's experience with North Korea over the past two decades is instructive. During the period of unquestioned U.S. military superiority over any potential foe, Washington solemnly and repeatedly declared a nuclear-armed North Korea to be "unacceptable." Yet, five

⁹ Dylan Robertson, "Canada should link with Europe, surpass 'weak' military engagement, French envoy," *The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2023, available at [HTTPS://WWW.THEGLOBEANDMAIL.COM/POLITICS/ARTICLE-CANADA-SHOULD-LINK-WITH-EUROPE-SURPASS-WEAK-MILITARY-ENGAGEMENT-FRENCH/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-should-link-with-europe-surpass-weak-military-engagement-french/).

¹⁰ Maximilian Terhalle and Kees Klompenhouwer, "Facing Europe's nuclear necessities, Deterrence can no longer be seen as just a bipolar equation – and it's time NATO addresses this fact," *POLITICO Europe Online*, April 22, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/facing-europe-nuclear-necessities-strategy-vulnerability-war-weapon/>.

¹¹ Shmuel Bar, "Self-perceptions and Nuclear Weapons," *Information Series*, No. 558 (July 2023), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/shmuel-bar-self-perceptions-and-nuclear-weapons-no-558-july-13-2023/.

consecutive administrations, Republican and Democrat, have done nothing effective to prevent North Korea's deployment of nuclear weapons that can now target much of the world, including the United States. As a result, North Korea is a nuclear power that now must be deterred.¹²

U.S. officials and commentators have repeatedly offered confident assertions that the risk is minimal because the United States can reliably deter North Korea¹³—assertions based on little more than convenience, hope, and shallow guesswork. Simultaneously, Washington has incessantly pleaded with China to help de-nuclearize North Korea—a problem that Beijing has shown no interest in resolving. Mounting South Korean popular interest in independent nuclear capabilities is a direct consequence of this American failure to deal with a threat that Washington has declared, for more than two decades, to be “unacceptable.”

Russia seeks to recover hegemony in much of Europe, starting with Ukraine, and China is on track to be able to

¹² See for example, Timothy W. Martin, “Top U.S. General Sees Changing Nuclear Threat From North Korea,” *The Wall Street Journal Online*, March 11, 2024, available at <https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/top-u-s-general-sees-changing-nuclear-threat-from-north-korea-4788270a>.

¹³ See, for example, Wolfgang Panofsky, “Nuclear Insecurity: Correcting Washington’s Dangerous Posture,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 5 (September/October 2007), pp. 113-114; David E. Sanger, “Don’t Shoot. We’re Not Ready,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2006, p. 1; Mike Moore, “Missile Defenses, Relabeled,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (July/August, 2002), p. 22; Joseph Cirincione, “A Much Less Explosive Trend,” *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2002, p. B-3; Carl Levin, *Remarks of Senator Carl Levin on National Missile Defense, National Defense University Forum Breakfast on Ballistic Missile Defense*, May 11, 2001, p. 4, available at www.senate.gov/~levin/newsroom/release.cfm?id=209421; Craig Eisendrath, “Missile Defense System Flawed Technically, Unwise Politically,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 23, 2001; and, Sen. Joseph Biden, “Why Democrats Oppose Billions More on Missiles” (Letter to the editor), *The Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2006, p. A11.

take Taiwan by force within a few years.¹⁴ Recent “leaked” Russian nuclear planning documents reveal a corresponding shockingly low Russian threshold for nuclear use,¹⁵ and in 2022, the Central Intelligence Agency reportedly concluded that there is a 50 percent or greater chance that Moscow will use nuclear weapons if facing defeat in Ukraine.¹⁶ This is devastating commentary on the West’s contemporary deterrence position.

In this grim threat context, the fundamental alliance problem is the enduring U.S. preference to look away from stark security challenges and to prioritize non-defense goals. Western allies have unparalleled potential human and material advantages over virtually any combination of foes—Russia’s and China’s combined GDPs, for example, are a fraction of the combined GDPs of Western allies. The

¹⁴ The U.S. Commander in the Indo-Pacific reportedly testified before Congress that Beijing is on track to its goal of being able to invade Taiwan by 2027. See, Bill Gertz, “U.S. Indo-Pacific commander warns of growing danger of war over Taiwan: *Aquilino tells lawmakers \$11 billion in added funds needed to deter China*,” Washington Times Online, Mar. 21, 2024, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/mar/21/us-indo-pacific-commander-warns-of-growing-danger-/>; Jesse Johnson, “China on track to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, U.S. commander says,” *Japan Times Online* (Japan), March 21, 2024, available at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/03/21/asia-pacific/politics/taiwan-china-invasion-2027/#:~:text=The%20top%20U.S.%20military%20commander,a%20single%20day%20this%20year.>

¹⁵ See Mark B. Schneider, “The Leaked Russian Nuclear Documents and Russian First Use of Nuclear Weapons,” *Information Series*, No. 579 (March 18, 2024), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-leaked-russian-nuclear-documents-and-russian-first-use-of-nuclear-weapons-no-579-march-18-2024/.

¹⁶ Ronny Reyes, “CIA estimated 50% chance that Russia would nuke Ukraine if it risked losing war: report,” *New York Post*, March 10, 2024, available at <https://nypost.com/2024/03/10/world-news/cia-warned-50-chance-that-russia-would-nuke-ukraine-report/>.

United States and allies have the potential to contain the Sino-Russian entente, North Korea and Iran. But they have continually punted in this regard and now confront multiple existential challenges.

Washington's actions, and more often inaction over many years, are a primary reason that authoritarian states now pose serious military threats to the West's future. The longer they go unanswered, the more likely it is that today's threats will be the source of tomorrow's crises and catastrophes. Whether the allied powers will act in unity and urgency, or ultimately move in different, disparate directions that undercut Western security, is an open question.

Who and What is to Blame?

The United States and allies may, in the foreseeable future, face a reckoning with harsh security realities. The immediate reason for this possible reckoning, of course, is the growing power and aggression of a hostile, authoritarian bloc that seeks to recast the world order, violently if necessary.

However, the United States and allies have facilitated the security challenges they now face. The antecedents to Moscow's aggression in Europe and China's belligerent expansionism have been blatantly obvious for well over a decade. These threats would be less significant had Washington taken needed steps over the past three decades. But many political leaders, Republican and Democrat, have made decisions based on convenient illusions, and the severe results of those decisions are increasingly obvious. That is, contemporary challenges, in principle, were largely manageable had Western leaders not been captured by unrealistic expectations regarding Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and a cooperative, post-Cold War "new world order." Instead, Washington has facilitated foes' hostile

moves and magnified their significance by its failure to recognize and prepare proactively for obviously mounting dangers; as two serious experts have emphasized, Western “weakness is provocative.”¹⁷

The U.S. defense budget, defense industrial base and nuclear infrastructure, starved for decades, have not caught up with the great power military threats now confronting the United States and allies.¹⁸ And, for more than a decade beyond any reasonable expectation of Russian or Chinese reciprocity, Washington has continued to pursue antiquated arms control thinking and practices that constrain needed U.S. military preparation and deterrence capabilities. Many in Washington still fail to recognize their culpability in this regard. They have extended the immediate post-Cold War “strategic holiday,” “peace dividend” and fixation on arms control solutions decades longer than prudent.

For example, in an unprecedented threat context, rather than responding urgently to an increasingly dangerous and hostile bloc of states, the Biden Administration’s “grand strategy” appears to prioritize pressing the United States and the world into the progressive political mold fashionable in Washington. As Professor Colin Dueck writes, “If the Biden administration’s grand strategy could

¹⁷ Eric Edelman and Frank Miller, “Understanding that Weakness is Provocative is Deterrence 101,” *The Dispatch*, August 8, 2022, available at <https://thedispatch.com/article/understanding-that-weakness-is-provocative/>.

¹⁸ For a discussion of frustrated efforts to align the defense budget with threat realities see, Bryant Harris, “A Nearly \$1 Trillion Defense Budget Faces Headwinds at Home and Abroad,” *Defense News Online*, March 7, 2024, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2024/03/07/a-nearly-1-trillion-defense-budget-faces-headwinds-at-home-and-abroad/>.

be summed up in a single phrase, it would be *-progressive transformation at home and abroad.*"¹⁹

Professor Dueck's apt and jarring assessment of Washington's focus is confirmed in numerous ways. In response to looming military threats, including the prospect of nuclear war, Washington seems uninterested in correcting course significantly. America now pays more annually to service the national debt than is devoted to national defense. Despite a threat context that is more dangerous than that of the Cold War, the percentage of GDP devoted to defense is roughly half of what it was during the Cold War. And, as currently planned, U.S. defense spending will essentially be flat from 2023 through 2028,²⁰ and adjusted for inflation, the real buying power of the U.S. defense budget will actually decline.²¹ The Commander of Indo-Pacific Command reportedly testified that the administration's current budget request is \$11 billion short of that needed to provide the means identified as necessary to deter conflict with China.²² At the strategic nuclear force level, by the end of the decade, it appears that Washington will have to retire aging existing forces before their replacements can be deployed. These are not the behaviors

¹⁹ See Colin Dueck, "The Biden Doctrine," *The Caravan*, Hoover Institution, March 5, 2024, available at, <https://www.hoover.org/research/biden-doctrine>. (Emphasis in original).

²⁰ Congressional Budget Office Report, *Long-Term Implications of the 2024 Future Defense Program*, October 25, 2023, available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/59511#:~:text=The%20proposed%20budget%20for%20DoD,2024%20in%20the%20previous%20FYDP>.

²¹ Elaine McCusker, "Don't Be Fooled by Biden's Budget: He's Cutting Military Spending as Our Needs Grow," *AEI Op-Ed*, March 10, 2023, available at <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/dont-be-fooled-by-bidens-budget-hes-cutting-military-spending-as-our-needs-grow/>.

²² As reported in, Gertz, "U.S. Indo-Pacific commander warns of growing danger of war over Taiwan," *op. cit.*

of a sensible alliance leader prepared to, or preparing to, address unprecedented security dangers.

To be sure, a lack of serious focus on emerging security threats is not new. Washington's dramatic drawdown of forces from Europe, for example, began immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and inexplicably occurred even with Russia's attack on Georgia in 2008 and its first assault on Ukraine in 2014.²³

Russia and China combine unprecedented nuclear buildups and expansionist geopolitical goals, yet Washington remains mired in some of the most optimistic thinking of the immediate post-Cold War period. For example, the 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) calls for "urgent" U.S. moves to advance long-standing arms control goals with no prospect for Russian or Chinese reciprocation. In the harsh contemporary threat context, the NPR asserts that "Mutual, verifiable arms control offers the most effective, durable and responsible path to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and prevent their use."²⁴ The comforting expectation that arms control now is the "most effective" way to prevent Chinese or Russian nuclear employment is otherworldly thinking given Moscow's and Beijing's words and deeds over many years—yet it continues in Washington.

In a most disturbing reflection of Washington's misplaced priorities, John Kerry recently asserted that if Moscow would "make a greater effort to reduce emissions now," it would "open the door for people to feel better

²³ See, Michael Allen, Carla Martinez Machain, and Michael Flynn, "The US Military Presence in Europe Has Been Declining for 30 Years – the Current Crisis in Ukraine May Reverse That Trend," *The Conversation* (January 5, 2022), available at <https://theconversation.com/the-us-military-presence-in-europe-has-been-declining-for-30-years-the-current-crisis-in-ukraine-may-reverse-that-trend-175595>.

²⁴ Department of Defense, *2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, October 2022, p. 16, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

about” Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine.²⁵ In fact, a Russian commitment to “reducing emissions” would do nothing to ease Moscow’s crime of invading Ukraine or alter its commitment to violently changing borders in Europe. Similarly, while China and Russia see themselves as in a long-term war with the United States, Washington continues to label engagement with Russia and China as “great power competition,”²⁶ – a rhetorical obfuscation that prolongs the pretense of a relatively benign threat environment rather than confront stark threat realities.

In contrast to the Biden Administration’s NPR, the near-contemporaneous Congressional Strategic Posture Commission’s 2023 report repeatedly calls for “urgent” U.S. movement to meet looming security threats. The need to call for urgency, and the fact that it has been criticized as being overwrought,²⁷ is testament to Washington’s decades-long preference for convenient illusions over recognition of rising threats.

In short, the immediate cause of the West’s unprecedented security challenge is a hostile bloc of revisionist, authoritarian states. A deeper cause is the decades-long failure of Washington and allies to recognize and rise to the threat—which could have been managed given their unparalleled combined power potential. Ultimately unrealistic, antiquated U.S. and allied thinking

²⁵ Quoted in, Sarah Rumpf-Whitten, “John Kerry says people would ‘feel better’ about the Ukraine war if Russia would reduce emissions,” *Fox News*, March 6, 2024, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/john-kerry-says-people-feel-better-about-ukraine-war-russia-reduce-emissions>.

²⁶ 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁷ For example, Harlan K. Ullman, “America’s strategic nuclear posture review is miles off the mark,” *The Hill Online*, October 30, 2023, available at <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/4282404-americas-strategic-nuclear-posture-more-deterrence-and-more-weapons/>.

and behavior are responsible for the significance of contemporary security challenges.

Burden Sharing

Some U.S. leaders claim that overly dependent allies who refuse to contribute enough for Western defense are the problem. To be sure, many wealthy allies, such as Holland, Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy, devote an essentially trivial fraction of their GDP to Western security – preferring to rely on the United States. Their defense efforts are wholly out of sync with the character of threats posed by a hostile Sino-Russian entente.

Washington, however, has been on its own “strategic holiday” for decades and generally has passively indulged allied free riding. U.S. leaders have called on allies for greater defense “burden sharing” for decades. But Washington’s simultaneous actions have, with few exceptions, consistently countenanced allies’ continued indolence.

Washington continually assures allies that the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence umbrella covering them is solid and reliable. The United States can hardly criticize allies for engaging in wishful thinking and indolent behavior when it continually offers “ironclad” assurances. Why expect allies to spend serious national treasure when Washington promises its unfailing protection? Why should allies want to change a security formula that demands so little from them – until, of course, that formula is manifestly unreliable.

U.S. and allied thinking are comparably naïve and self-serving: Washington for seemingly expecting – beyond any logic – that its extended nuclear deterrent promises will continue to be credible absent significant new effort, and allies for imprudently going along for the ride because it is most convenient and inexpensive. Allies may be castigated

for their share of this folly, but doing so is not slightly hypocritical, and U.S. finger-wagging will ultimately prove unhelpful without real U.S. commitment and leadership.

A Structural Problem: Extended Nuclear Deterrence Credibility

A credible U.S. extended nuclear deterrent is critical to prevent regional war and is an essential glue that holds the alliance system together. Regarding Finland's recent joining of NATO, Finnish President Alexander Stubb said that, "I would start from the premise that we in Finland must have a real nuclear deterrent...which comes from the United States."²⁸ In the absence of a credible U.S. extended nuclear deterrent, key allies have indicated that they could be compelled to acquire independent nuclear capabilities – which would likely unravel the alliances, unleash a cascade of nuclear proliferation, and cause unpredictable, paranoid responses by Russia and China.

It is important to pull back the curtain on the extended U.S. nuclear umbrella: It is the U.S. and NATO threat to escalate a regional non-nuclear conflict, potentially to a thermonuclear war, in response to an attack on an ally. It includes the U.S. threat that Washington may resort to a level of warfare on behalf of an ally that could escalate to the destruction of both allies and the United States.

When the United States was reasonably well-protected from nuclear attack by wide oceans and defenses, Washington could, in relative safety, issue such strategic

²⁸ Anne Kauranen and Louise Breusch Rasmussen, "NATO's nuclear deterrent must be real for Finland, says new president," *Reuters*, March 1, 2024, available at [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-inaugurates-alexander-stubb-president-nato-era-2024-0301/#:~:text=NATO's%20nuclear%20deterrent%20must%20be%20real%20for%20Finland%2C%20says%20new%20president,By%20Anne%20Kauranen&text=HELSINKI%2C%20March%201%20\(Reuters\),fought%20election%20on%20Feb.%202011](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/finland-inaugurates-alexander-stubb-president-nato-era-2024-0301/#:~:text=NATO's%20nuclear%20deterrent%20must%20be%20real%20for%20Finland%2C%20says%20new%20president,By%20Anne%20Kauranen&text=HELSINKI%2C%20March%201%20(Reuters),fought%20election%20on%20Feb.%202011).

nuclear deterrence threats on behalf of allies. However, as the Soviet Union became increasingly capable of targeting the United States with its own strategic nuclear forces, U.S. extended deterrence nuclear threats became increasingly problematic. During the Kennedy Administration, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev asked U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk directly why Moscow should believe that Washington would risk self-destruction in a thermonuclear war on behalf of distant allies. Rusk's answer was reduced to, "Mr. Chairman, you will have to take into account the possibility we Americans are just [expletive] fools."²⁹ This answer did not even try to claim any logical credibility for the U.S. extended deterrent, but that Moscow should fear that Washington might foolishly be self-destructive.

The questions, of course, are: How credible is this 'we may be fools' basis for extended deterrence, against which enemies, and in what contexts? In 1979, Henry Kissinger addressed this question directly, telling allies publicly that they should *not* expect the United States to abide by suicidal U.S. strategic nuclear threats for their security: "Our European allies should not keep asking us to multiply strategic assurances that we cannot possibly mean, or if we do mean, we should not want to execute, because if we execute, we risk the destruction of civilization."³⁰

During the Cold War, Washington undertook numerous steps to restore credibility to the U.S. extended nuclear umbrella. This included maintaining an enormous standing U.S. force in Europe, including over 300,000 troops throughout the 1980s, to help prevent an easy fait accompli that might tempt Soviet aggression, and brandishing approximately 7,000 locally-deployed or deployable,

²⁹ Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 228. See also, Arnold Beichman, "How Foolish Khrushchev Nearly Started World War III," *The Washington Times*, October 3, 2004, p. B 8.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, "The Future of NATO," in *NATO, The Next Thirty Years*, Kenneth Myers, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 8.

nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) to buttress the credibility of the U.S. extended strategic deterrence umbrella. The expectation was that conventional forces and NSNW would add credibility to the nuclear umbrella and manifest links to the U.S. strategic nuclear threat of intercontinental missiles and bombers. The United States also developed a deterrence doctrine that planned limited strategic nuclear options in support of extended deterrence, in the expectation that limited U.S. strategic nuclear threats on behalf of allies would be more credible than massive, potentially self-destructive U.S. threats.³¹ These theater and strategic moves intentionally added multiple layers to the U.S. extended deterrent in the search for what Herman Kahn called a “not incredible” U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

Yet, the United States and allies have since minimized or eliminated the multiple theater deterrent layers that reinforced the credibility of the U.S. extended strategic deterrent during the Cold War – and, with few exceptions, have not advanced new and different measures to replace them. The 2001 and 2010 *Nuclear Posture Reviews* touted U.S. advanced conventional weapons as deterrence tools enabling Washington to reduce the number of, and reliance on, nuclear forces. But the United States has done very little in terms of actually deploying advanced conventional weapons; key allies have noticed. And, while Moscow disdains arms control, expands its nuclear arsenal, and increases its reliance on nuclear weapons,³² Washington

³¹ See, Keith B. Payne, *The Great American Gamble* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2008), pp. 95-96.

³² For discussions of increasing reliance see, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 6, 2023), p. 14, available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reportspublications/reports-publications-2023>; and, The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 2022), p. 26, available at

inexplicably continues to prioritize the goals of constraining its strategic and theater capabilities, and reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, as emphasized in the 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review*. This includes continuing to embrace unmitigated vulnerability to Chinese and Russian strategic missiles, rejecting new NSNW, abiding by arms control agreements that Russia has clearly abandoned, and harboring an enduring aspiration for a No-First-Use nuclear policy that would serve only to further degrade extended nuclear deterrence credibility, as multiple allies have warned for decades. These behaviors reflect a Washington that remains largely stuck in the post-Cold War “strategic holiday,” “peace dividend,” and demonstrably vapid hope that arms control can solve serious force posture problems.

This continuing fundamental lack of Western realism contributes to the declining credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent—a structural problem for the U.S. alliance system given the hostile bloc now confronting the West. The burden for extended nuclear deterrence is largely on the U.S. strategic nuclear triad, which may be insufficiently credible for this purpose without layers of supporting deterrence capabilities because, as Henry Kissinger emphasized in 1979, it connotes a threat Washington “cannot possibly mean” and “should not want to execute.”

Conclusion

Washington and many allies continue to behave as if they are still in the immediate post-Cold War springtime of great expectations. It may be too late to deter a reckoning that decades of indolence and wishful thinking have effectively invited. Recognizing and addressing the threats and structural problems that now beleaguer U.S. global alliances are urgent needs. That recognition and effort must begin in

Washington. Ronald Reagan's famous Cold War speech, "A Time for Choosing," included a line that fully pertains to Washington and allies today: "We're at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars, and it's been said if we lose that war, and in so doing lose this way of freedom of ours, history will record with greatest astonishment that those who had the most to lose did the least to prevent its happening."³³

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³³ Ronald Reagan, *A Time for Choosing*, October 27, 1964, available at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/ronald-reagan/time-choosing-speech-october-27-1964>.

NATO at 75: Deterrence and Beyond

Michael Rühle

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) can celebrate its 75th anniversary with a sense of achievement, and even pride. The very fact that the Alliance has lasted that long can be read as a testimony to the strategic value of a transatlantic security framework. The accession of Finland and Sweden is strengthening NATO's military clout. Military budgets are on the rise. And an increasingly broad agenda, which now also includes the protection of critical infrastructure and climate security, helps to ensure that responses to non-traditional security challenges are also being developed in a transatlantic context.¹ Accordingly, no cliché will be spared at the anniversary celebrations: accolades will range from the trite "the world's strongest alliance" to the emotional "shield for the innocent."² To demonstrate that the Alliance can also celebrate in less orthodox ways, it will publish a "graphic novel" that amalgamates dozens of science fiction short stories related to NATO.³

Alas, this optimistic picture does not tell the full story. For one, the birthday celebrations are taking place against the backdrop of a war raging at NATO's borders. And while this is not an entirely new experience for NATO—its 50th anniversary in 1999 coincided with the bombing campaign

¹ For a recent detailed overview of NATO's history and policy, see John A. Olsen, *The Routledge Handbook of NATO* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2024).

² Speech by the Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, at the anniversary celebrations at NATO Headquarters, April 4, 2024, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_224414.htm.

³ Some of these stories are collected in Florence Gaub (Ed.), *NATO 2099: The Science Fiction Anthology*, Insight 2/2024, NATO Defense College, available at <https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=815>.

against Serbia – this time around NATO is not in control of events. Hence, too much self-congratulation would look out of place. NATO cannot fiddle while Rome burns.

There is yet another reason for modesty, however. NATO is suffering from a number of shortcomings that, if left to fester, could bring its current rise in popularity to a rather abrupt halt. Uncertainty about the future of U.S. involvement in NATO, a confused debate about the concept of deterrence, but also an overly one-sided focus on the challenge posed by Russia threaten to throw the Alliance off balance again. If the member states do not address these challenges, attempts to demonstrate NATO's relevance through an ever-busier agenda will be to no avail.⁴

The End of the “post-Cold War” NATO

NATO's renewed popularity as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine has led many observers to forget that all key assumptions on which NATO's post-Cold War development was based have been proven wrong. These assumptions included that Russia would remain a difficult but predictable partner, that a new Euro-Atlantic security architecture could be achieved primarily through the gradual enlargement of the Western institutions like NATO and the European Union (EU), and that NATO would from now on gain its legitimacy primarily through crisis operations beyond the Alliance's territory.

These assumptions, which have been guiding NATO's evolution since the early 1990s, are no longer tenable. President Putin's war against Ukraine has shown that Western hopes for a gradual modernization and democratization of Russia were far too optimistic. Russia remains an authoritarian state that is not only questioning the expansion of Western institutions such as NATO and the

⁴ See Michael Rühle, “NATO's Fragile Rejuvenation,” *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, October 27, 2023, available at <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/natos-fragile-rejuvenation>.

EU, but is even trying to reverse some of the most important developments since the early 1990s.⁵ Western hopes of wooing Russia into a partnership with an enlarged NATO and EU have been dashed. Similarly, NATO's largely U.S.-inspired forays into engaging outside its treaty area ("out-of-area or out-of-business") have failed, culminating in the allies' hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. The disappointing results of this mission—as well as the strategic failure of NATO's 2011 Libya operation—brought home that NATO's military involvement in such conflicts cannot be translated into sustainable political influence on developments on the ground. In light of this sobering experience, allied agreement on another larger-scale operation appears unlikely, at least in the shorter term.

And there is more. Donald Trump's presidency has shown that the United States—NATO's only truly indispensable member—can quickly turn from leader to liability. President Trump's dismissive attitude towards some allies as free riders that are taking advantage of the American taxpayer is now prevalent in large parts of the U.S. political system. Many Republicans, who once quipped that they "owned" NATO,⁶ are questioning the value of the Alliance for the United States and threaten the Europeans with the end of American protection. Regardless of the Biden Administration's unabashedly pro-NATO stance, NATO will from now on have to live under the sword of Damocles of a gradual U.S. disengagement—a historically unique situation. The fact that the Congress, in a deft bipartisan move, has made it impossible for future presidents

⁵ See Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees, December 17, 2021, available at https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en; Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, December 17, 2021, available at https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en&clear_cache=Y.

⁶ A quip made 20 years ago by a (Republican) high-level NATO official.

to easily pull the United States formally out of NATO offers little consolation.

NATO's enlargement process after the end of the Cold War has also reached a turning point. For the West, NATO's enlargement represented the ultimate expression of the principle of free choice of alliance for the Central and Eastern European democracies. For Moscow, by contrast, that same process was an attack on Russia's great power status, which had to be fended off. Moscow continues to adhere to a foreign policy concept that regards spheres of influence as crucial to its security. In the early phases of NATO's post-Cold War enlargement process, allies were hopeful that they could square the circle, notably by ensuring that the enlargement process would proceed in a militarily "soft" manner, i.e. without stationing large combat units or nuclear weapons on the territory of the new NATO members.

However, Russia's return to authoritarianism and its Soviet-style siege mentality, as well as NATO's premature decision to earmark Ukraine and Georgia as future members, turned a once nervous relationship into a hostile one. While Russia's five-day war against Georgia in August 2008 did not prevent attempts at a "reset" of U.S.-Russian relations, Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 ended whatever had been left of the NATO-Russia relationship. As a consequence of Russia's actions, NATO decided to establish a moderate military presence in its East, notably in Poland and the Baltic states. Although allies were putting their membership promises to Ukraine and Georgia on the back burner, NATO's "open door" policy remains a constant challenge to Russia's self-image as a great power. Even if Russia's narrative about NATO enlargement as a major reason for attacking Ukraine may not sound all too convincing, any further continuation of NATO's eastern expansion will carry much higher risks than did previous enlargement waves.

Military and Hybrid Threats

NATO's political problems are compounded by military ones. Since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has refocused its planning on the core function of collective defense, but the political context for the strengthening of NATO's military capabilities remains ambiguous. For example, all major planning documents put the threats posed by Russia and terrorism on an equal footing. While this is necessary in order to achieve allied consensus, it suggests a role for NATO in the fight against terrorism that it simply does not have.

More importantly, however, NATO's re-discovery of the concept of deterrence remains woefully inadequate. While the increase of NATO's military presence in the eastern NATO member states remains politically and militarily sound, it is accompanied by alarmist rhetoric that greatly overestimates both Russia's military capabilities and Moscow's intentions to attack NATO. Although the course of the Ukraine war to date has revealed Russia's military weakness, and although Moscow is clearly seeking to avoid any widening of the conflict, large parts of the Western strategic community do not treat Russia's attacks on Ukraine and previously on Georgia as post-Soviet conflicts, but as evidence of relentless Russian expansionism that will not stop at NATO's borders.⁷ The crucial question as to what political goal would compel Russia to attack a far superior NATO is hardly ever explained in great detail, with the notable exception of Russia staging a "fait accompli" in one of the Baltic States, which could be difficult for NATO to reverse.⁸ While some alarmism may be intended to sustain

⁷ For a typical example of such sweeping assumptions, see Peter Dickinson, "Putin is on an historic mission and will not stop until he is finally defeated," *UkraineAlert*, The Atlantic Council, March 5, 2024, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putin-is-on-an-historic-mission-and-will-not-stop-until-he-is-finally-defeated/>.

⁸ See Michael Kofman, "Getting the Fait Accompli Problem Right in U.S. Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, November 3, 2020, available at

the West's military and financial support for Ukraine, it also reveals a problematic tendency to (over)interpret Russia's war against Ukraine as a first step towards a fundamental clash between the West and a revisionist power that seeks to overturn the established order.

This alarmism is reinforced by a confused debate about "hybrid threats." Since aggressive actions without a direct military dimension (e.g., cyberattacks or disinformation campaigns) happen virtually all the time, some observers conclude that NATO is already "at war" with Russia.⁹ Aside from raising tricky legal matters, calls for NATO to respond to hybrid attacks in kind consistently ignore that an alliance that is geared towards existential military risks simply does not have the appropriate means to do so.

None of these problems change the fact that all allies are aware of the advantages that NATO offers for their security and political predictability. However, if NATO is to continue to fulfil these functions, member countries need to be clearer about the future course of their Alliance. Three areas require particular attention.

Getting Transatlantic Security Relations Back on Track

The transatlantic relationship lies at the heart of NATO. Hence, re-invigorating this relationship must be NATO's top priority. The United States' continuing interest in NATO and Europe is not only crucial for the security of the old continent or for the future of Ukraine. Trustful transatlantic relations are also a prerequisite for a coordinated approach

<https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/getting-the-fait-accomplish-problem-right-in-u-s-strategy/>.

⁹ See Emma Burrows, "Russia Is Waging a Shadow War on the West That Needs a Collective Response, Estonian Leader Says," *Associated Press*, May 22, 2024, available at <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2024/05/22/russia-waging-shadow-war-west-needs-collective-response-estonian-leader-says.html>.

to other global challenges. This pertains in particular to China, whose rise will increasingly shape global security dynamics.

The main responsibility for such a rejuvenation of the transatlantic security relationship lies squarely with the European allies, who will have to come up with a convincing response to Washington's demands for a fairer distribution of the defense burden. While many allies have started to increase their defense budgets since 2014, these increases still do not match either NATO's ambitions or U.S. expectations. Hence, it may require specific initiatives by the larger European NATO states, e.g., the joint procurement of certain key military capabilities or even greater support for Ukraine, to convince the United States that its call is being heeded. Even if such steps would never satisfy those U.S. lawmakers who fundamentally question the wisdom of the transatlantic bargain, they could nevertheless make it easier to work with a future U.S. administration, because a large part of the U.S. defense establishment, including Congress, remains Atlanticist. Moreover, a greater investment by Europeans in the defense of their own continent might also help to address the concerns of those who worry that, in the years ahead, China will require most of the U.S. attention.

By contrast, European calls for "strategic autonomy" or even a European nuclear arsenal would send the wrong signal. They suggest a European desire to distance itself from the United States, which would cause difficulties for those in the United States who still argue in favor of close security ties with Europe. When it comes to transatlantic security, Europe's approach of advancing integration by sometimes setting overly ambitious goals for itself could easily backfire.

Getting Deterrence Right

NATO also needs a more enlightened approach when thinking about and organizing deterrence. Deterrence was

NATO's central paradigm during the Cold War. As a result, the Alliance has developed a reflex to seek a deterrence solution for almost every problem. For example, NATO has linked "new" threats in areas such as cyber, hybrid or outer space with a potential response under Article 5—the commitment to collective defense—assuming that such a linkage will send a stronger deterrence message. However, the increasing number of hybrid actions against allies shows that the concept of deterrence is hardly effective below the kinetic threshold. For years, NATO has emphasized the importance of resilience as a "first line of defense," i.e., one accepts that some attacks (e.g., against information networks) will happen and, hence, one must seek to minimize the impact of the attack. However, as the issue of resilience touches on numerous national competencies, NATO's role in this area remains limited. The result is paradoxical: NATO is constantly warning of new threats, but is hardly able to respond to them.

The greatest shortcoming of NATO's approach to deterrence, however, is the increasing decoupling of this concept from its political context. For example, the belief that a militarily stronger NATO could have prevented Russia from annexing Crimea or invading Ukraine reveals a complete misunderstanding of the political and psychological mechanics of deterrence.¹⁰ Ukraine was not within the declared Western defense perimeter; hence the West was never likely to go to war over that country. By contrast, Moscow's willingness to take military risks in order to prevent Ukraine's integration into the West was far greater than the willingness of the NATO allies to risk a conflagration with Russia. Political interests were more important than the military balance of power. Worse, the

¹⁰ For examples see, Michael Rühle, "The (Incomplete) Return of Deterrence," in Amelia Morgan and Anna Péczeli (Eds.), *Europe Evolving Deterrence Discourse*, Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, February 2021, pp. 13-26, available at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/csss/assets/europes-evolving-deterrence-discourse.pdf>.

belief that a stronger NATO or a tougher Western stance could have deterred Russia's assault on Ukraine suggests that peace in Europe is solely a question of the West's strength and determination.¹¹ In this worldview, which centers around Western "resolve," Russia becomes a mere opportunistic predator who only strikes when Western negligence allows it to. Such a view may help the West to conveniently sidetrack any possible political mistakes it might have made in dealing with Russia, yet it saddles the West with massive military demands that will be difficult to meet. Even if they could be met, however, they would not provide the kind of deterrence—or, rather, compellence—that is being sought.

As long as the deterrence debate in NATO remains stuck in such spurious logic, the Alliance will continue running the risk of being surprised, both politically and militarily. Strengthening NATO's military capabilities to keep potential attackers at bay is both logical and feasible.¹² However, believing that a stronger NATO could deter any unwelcome behavior is bound to lead to disappointment. For example, should Georgia, which is another NATO accession candidate, want to make good on NATO's membership promise, even a significantly strengthened NATO could not deter Russia from intervening again. Preventing another such tragedy requires other means.

Strengthening NATO's Political Dimension

NATO must also seek to strengthen its political dimension, notably with respect to contributing to a new European security architecture. There is broad agreement that the old mantra, according to which security in Europe can only be built together *with* Russia, is no longer valid and that

¹¹ See John Bolton, "How Russia Is Beating the West at Deterrence," *Time*, March 9, 2022, available at <https://time.com/6155990/russia-ukraine-invasion-deterrence/>.

¹² See the contribution by Todd Clawson in this volume.

European security must instead be organized *against* Russia. However, this does not mean that NATO should focus exclusively on restoring its military strength. The current alarmism about Russia's expansionist designs may be an effective means for obtaining higher defense budgets, yet except for a major escalation of the war in Ukraine, it appears doubtful that the Russian threat could galvanize U.S. and allied publics in the same way as the Soviet threat did in the early Cold War. Moreover, too much alarmism would signal to NATO's own publics that the Alliance could not offer sufficient protection.

Moreover, an alliance that focused exclusively on deterring Russia would also hasten the alienation of its southern members, who are already voicing their frustration that NATO is not paying enough attention to the security of its southern periphery.¹³ Relations with partner countries around the globe would also suffer if NATO were to be perceived solely as an anti-Russian bulwark. Hence, in a world shaped increasingly by the forces of globalization, NATO cannot afford to neglect its political-diplomatic dimension. Once a major crisis eventually forces NATO to snap out of its current post-Afghanistan intervention fatigue, the value of partners would quickly reveal itself.

None of this changes the fact that Russia represents the greatest challenge to European security. However, its right of veto in the United Nations Security Council also makes Russia an actor whose cooperation on challenges such as climate policy or nuclear non-proliferation will be in the West's interest. Even with respect to Ukraine, where Russia has largely destroyed its credibility as a serious interlocutor, a lasting solution will require some form of agreement with

¹³ For a recent analysis on NATO's challenges in the South, see the "Final Report of the Independent Expert Group supporting NATO's Comprehensive and Deep Reflection Process on the Southern Neighbourhood," May 2024, available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/5/pdf/240507-NATO-South-Report.pdf.

Moscow, regardless of Western security guarantees for Ukraine or even NATO membership for that country.

NATO is too narrow and inflexible a framework for a dialogue with Russia on security issues. Since its focus is on deterring Russia, and since it cannot offer Moscow positive incentives to cooperate, it is up to the United States and key European allies to find ways to re-engage with Moscow, irrespective of accusations of appeasement that will inevitably accompany such an endeavor. However, even if NATO is not in the lead, it should at least avoid decisions that could hinder such a dialogue, for example, by measuring the pace of any further enlargement. While NATO cannot abandon the principles of its “open door” policy, it can implement these principles in a way that at least seeks to minimize foreseeable frictions with Moscow.¹⁴

Conclusion

NATO remains a unique alliance. It represents the closest cooperation on security and defense that is achievable between sovereign nation states, and the gold standard on military planning and interoperability. However, one should keep in mind that NATO’s current rejuvenation is not the result of allies’ enlightened policies, but of Russia’s assault on Ukraine. If allies do not address the deeper problems in the transatlantic relationship, conduct a more enlightened deterrence debate, and keep focused on NATO’s political dimension, this rejuvenation could be short-lived. If NATO, in President Truman’s words, should be “a positive ... influence for peace,” and if its influence should be “felt not only in the area it specifically covers but

¹⁴ See the e-mail by William Burns to Condoleeza Rice about “avoiding trainwrecks” at the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, published in William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for its Renewal* (New York: Random House, 2019), pp. 232-233.

throughout the world,"¹⁵ it must be more than a bulwark against Russian aggression.

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¹⁵ Harry S. Truman, "Address on the Occasion of the Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty," April 4, 1949, available at <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/68/address-occasion-signing-north-atlantic-treaty>.

NATO at 75: A Good Opportunity to Celebrate, Learn from Past Mistakes, and Address and Prepare for Current and Future Challenges

Petr Suchý

On April 4 of this year, we marked 75 years since the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Had the largest war in Europe since World War II not begun on February 24, 2022, there would have been more opportunities for celebrations and festivities. Regrettably, the Russian brutal and dastardly onslaught on Ukraine and its peace-loving civilian population continues. Therefore, other activities than celebrations are necessary – continuous massive support for the fighting Ukrainian armed forces so that they are able to prevent further intrusions deeper in its territory and can succeed in driving out the invading brutal, bloodthirsty, looting Russian hordes back to the taiga where they belong.

There can be no doubt that NATO has been a big success story. It has played a unique and substantial role in establishing a framework for decades-long security and defense cooperation in the Trans-Atlantic area. It became a politico-military alliance that made it possible to continually engage the United States of America, still rather hesitant to take on a global role in the second half of the 1940s, in the security and political stability of its European allies.

Back then, as today, it was far from sure that the United States would not withdraw back to some kind of isolation, taking care of its own business. To paraphrase Lord Ismay, NATO's first Secretary General, the Alliance was substantial to keep Americans in, the Soviets out and not keeping West Germany down, but helping it to become a strong yet benign democratic country and a valuable Alliance member. NATO

was a substantial instrument of the democratic West that helped clearly and decisively win the Cold War over the Soviet Union (USSR) and its captive nations in Central and Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the Cold War's end, NATO played a substantial and still often unrecognized and underappreciated role in political as well as security stabilization in some parts of Europe and later even significantly beyond the old continent.

If NATO is to continue to be a successful alliance, it needs to learn from its past mistakes, be inspired by past successes, and have sound, bold, decisive leadership both in the Alliance and in each of its member states. Moreover, it needs to have courage, clear mission and strategy, and resolve to follow words by deeds. Because it seems more and more evident that challenges are not only outside but also inside the Alliance, the biggest clear and present danger being a multiplication of Russian Trojan horses (member states' governments openly pursuing a pro-Russian agenda) within.

NATO in the Cold War

The establishment of NATO was one of the key steps that helped—along with other policies and instruments, such as the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the Berlin airlift—to stand for and defend democratic values, independence, and the security of its members during the post-World War II period of political and economic instability, turmoil, and disarray. This period was also accompanied by a temporary, but still significant growth of sympathy and appeal for communism despite the increasing difficulty to hide its true nature as an inhuman ideology responsible for millions of victims.

George F. Kennan, one of the founding fathers of the strategy of containment, who later did his utmost to deny

his parenthood,¹ never recognized NATO's significance in helping carry out what he had called for—a vigilant containment of the Soviet Union.²

Yet, it is clear that NATO greatly helped to contain the Soviets through continuous deterrence, particularly nuclear deterrence. Nuclear sharing through the U.S.-guaranteed extended deterrence helped not only to decrease worries of Western European states that they would be left to their own devices and fates, but also helped, through assurances of Allies, to limit and control horizontal nuclear proliferation within the Alliance.

Nevertheless, nuclear issues sometimes became sources of bitter quarrels and disputes within the Alliance. An example is the attempt to create the Multilateral Force (MLF) in the mid-1960s, and especially the Euromissile crisis of the early 1980s. This dispute showed how vulnerable democracies are when some of their leaders abandon their leadership and sacrifice needed security measures, such as their original support to the NATO Dual-Track Decision of December 1979 (reacting to the Soviet nuclear buildup and deployment of its new intermediate-range ballistic missiles or IRBMs SS-20s tipped with three multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles) for gaining some political points. The Euromissile crisis also revealed the vulnerability of democracies not only from the outside, but also from within. This was clearly demonstrated by the reinvigoration of the Western peace movement so effectively utilized by the KGB and other secret services of communist states.³

¹ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1925 – 1950* (Boston/Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), p. 367.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 409-414, 462-465; W.L. Hixson, "Reassessing Kennan After the Fall of the Soviet Union: The Windication of X?," *The Historian*, Summer 1997, vol. 59, pp. 852-853, 855.

³ Vladimír Černý and Petr Suchý, 2020, "Spies and peaceniks: Czechoslovak intelligence attempts to thwart NATO's Dual-Track Decision," *Cold War History*, 20(3), pp. 273-291, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2020.1724963>.

Markus Wolf, a famous East German spymaster, later confirmed this in his autobiography: “One of the greatest pressures on governments East and West throughout the 1970s and 1980s came from the burgeoning peace movement. [While the] secret police in the East spared no effort to repress ‘ideological diversion’ among the burgeoning peace groups at home [the communist bloc wanted to capitalize on the Western predicament because] such [anti-nuclear] protests in the West broadly suited our purposes, since they provided political complications for NATO.”⁴

I will never forget my dismay and disbelief as a 13-year boy living behind the Iron Curtain in then Czechoslovakia, while watching mass protests aired by the Czechoslovak communist propaganda machine in West European cities, where people would proudly display banners with claims such as “better red than dead.” Populism exploiting wishful thinking and cowardice was a challenge for NATO then, as it is now. The Soviets were ready to exploit it then, and Putin’s Russia excels at that even more.⁵ The deployment of medium-range missiles in Western Europe was one of the blows to the Soviet leadership (together with a general U.S. military buildup reinvigorated by the Reagan Administration, the Strategic Defense Initiative, limitation of cooperation with the most rigid communist regimes), and became one of the nails in the coffin of the communist bloc and later the Soviet Union itself. It also significantly helped, despite the Soviet walkout from Geneva talks, to finalize the negotiations on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty based on the “zero option” proposal, which was considered a completely ridiculous, unrealistic, and

⁴ Markus Wolf, Anne McElvoy, *Man without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Times Books, 1997), p. 242.

⁵ For more on this subject, see, for example, Michaela Dodge, *U.S.-Czech Missile Defense Cooperation: Alliance Politics in Action* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2020), pp. 159-182.

unacceptable proposal at the time of its announcement in November 1981.

The final decision to go ahead with the planned deployments of Pershing II IRBMs and ground-launched cruise missiles in West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, and Italy had a much more positive impact on the Alliance and its overall position towards the USSR and the Warsaw Pact than was generally perceived at that point.

NATO After the Cold War

The first 40 years of NATO's existence were celebrated and crowned by a clear and decisive victory over the Soviet Union and its satellites. However, it soon became clear that this defeat of the long-term foe posed many challenges and questions to NATO itself, especially concerning its *raison d'être* and the roles it should play in a profoundly changed international security environment.

NATO did its utmost to engage future adversaries, also including Russia, through various platforms such as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) or the Partnership for Peace. Significant cooperation between NATO and former adversaries also occurred within the IFOR and SFOR missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, the biggest impulse and new breath of life for the Alliance came from its continuing gradual enlargement, through which it doubled its size from 16 to 32 members within 25 years. George F. Kennan, who traditionally held the opinion that smaller states in Central Europe must take into account the interests of their larger neighbors, whether they like them or not,⁶ was one of the staunchest opponents

⁶ George F. Kennan, *From Prague After Munich: Diplomatic Papers 1938-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 5.

and most vocal critics of NATO's further enlargement, calling it the worst mistake in U.S. foreign policy.⁷

From a Central European perspective, accession to NATO was the most significant step, not only in terms of obtained unprecedented security guarantees. The unforgettable Colin S. Gray understood and expressed this perfectly: "Their [Central and East European countries] appalling experience over the past two centuries, squeezed between the competing monstrosities of rival Russian, German, and even Austrian and Turkish, power, has made them very clear sighted about national security. They know the truth in the old saying that 'geography is destiny.'"⁸

This sense, this instinct, has been vindicated many times in the last two decades, most vividly in February 2022. It became clear that earlier expectations that NATO would not play any role in strengthening security of its members and partners against the Russian threat did not hold for long. Kennan's 1998 claim that "Russia's democracy is as far advanced, if not farther, as any of these countries we've just signed up to defend from Russia"⁹ proved false.

Despite all the attempts to engage Russia in a cooperative relationship, for example, through the NATO-Russia Council, revisionist tendencies of Putin's Russia, its inability to cope with its terrible past (compared with West Germany after World War II), its growing sympathies for the Soviet past and crimes, together with louder and louder claims to its supposed rights to former spheres of influence, made this cooperation collapse.

⁷ George F. Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1997, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/05/opinion/a-fateful-error.html>.

⁸ Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London, Phoenix Press, 2005), p. 75.

⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, "Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X," *The New York Times*, May 2, 1998, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>.

It will always remain an irony to see that Putin's "strategic genius" and Russia's dastardly attack and invasion of Ukraine caused the most significant growth of NATO's popularity and support in modern times. Moreover, it also led to the decision of the two formerly neutral countries, Finland and Sweden, to reevaluate their long-term posture and to join NATO in response to the growing Russian threat. This was one of the most significant events and "cultural" changes in Europe since the end of the Cold War, through which military capabilities of NATO were significantly improved and the Alliance obtained two new members who cannot in any respect be considered strange bedfellows or passengers without a ticket.

While NATO's gradual enlargement can be generally considered a success, despite all the broken promises of increasing defense expenditures or other problems sometimes caused by some new members, NATO made a fateful error at the 2008 Bucharest summit when Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium blocked granting Georgia and Ukraine a green light to join the Membership Action Plan, one of the conditions to obtain a full NATO membership later down the line. This was another lesson learned we should never forget: weakness and softness towards Russia will always be used against peaceful and freedom-loving countries. This wrong decision was a missed opportunity for which Ukraine and Georgia have been paying a very high price ever since – with the loss of lives, and in Ukraine's case, hundreds of thousands of lives, the loss of territory, and economic and other hardships. The continuing strife of Ukrainians and Georgians wishing to leave Russia's sphere of influence, which has never brought them any good, and to belong to the Western alliances can be watched in real time.

To continue NATO's successful existence and performance, serving its members and their interests, NATO members need to do significantly more than they currently do, to provide Ukraine with all the needed military

assistance so that it can defend itself effectively and push away the Russian invaders. Ukrainian victory over Russia is in NATO's interest; a defeated and weakened Russia will be easier to contain in the years to come. Russia's defeat will also weaken the position of Putin's Trojan horses in NATO, such as Hungarian and Slovak Prime Ministers Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico. Other measures must target Russian hybrid warfare against NATO and the West. We can see once again how much easier it is for Russia to exploit opportunities provided by open societies to undermine them.¹⁰ Recent NATO member states' intelligence services' successes in curbing operations of Russian intelligence within their respective territories shows that data and information sharing is a very effective tool which brings real results.

Seventy-five years of NATO provide plenty of evidence that, despite all the challenges and setbacks it had to cope with, the Alliance was able to carry out the missions it was given. It is also evident that its performance has always significantly depended on its leadership and that of its members, particularly U.S. leaders. This should be kept in mind especially now when NATO is sometimes portrayed not as a great asset and opportunity but rather as an unnecessary burden. If this perception grows in importance, not only European members, but the United States in particular, will be very negatively affected.

Only a united and a very resilient Alliance can effectively stand up to current challenges and threats that lie ahead.

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¹⁰ Kevin Riehle, "The Ukraine war and the shift in Russian intelligence priorities," *Intelligence and National Security*, 39(3), 2024, pp. 458-474, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2024.2322807>; and, "Statement by the North Atlantic Council concerning malicious cyber activities against Germany and Czechia," May 3, 2024, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_225229.htm.

NATO at 75: What Explains NATO's Success?

Bruno Tertrais

This author was wrong when he surmised 20 years ago that “*permanent multinational alliances appear increasingly to belong to the past.*”¹

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the Atlantic Alliance has not only survived many crises since its inception, from Suez to Syria, but it has thrived. It is now the oldest multinational defense alliance (with the Rio Treaty of 1948). Article Five of the Washington Treaty is a deterrence success: no state has ever militarily attacked the sovereign territory of a member, while some of their non-member neighbors—think only Georgia and Ukraine—were attacked. No member country has ever withdrawn from the Treaty and NATO today has almost as many members (32) as the East-West Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe had (35). It has contributed to two of its other original purposes: “*forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent, and encouraging European political integration.*”²

NATO is not unique as a U.S.-based defense agreement. The official list of formal U.S. collective defense commitments includes treaties signed with countries of the American continents (Rio Treaty, 1947), Europe and Canada (Washington, 1949), South Korea (1951), Australia and New Zealand (1951), the Philippines (1951), Japan (1951, 1960),

¹ Bruno Tertrais, “The Changing Nature of Military Alliances,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2004, available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1162/016366004773097759>.

² NATO International Secretariat, “A Short History of NATO,” June 3, 2022, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm.

and members of the—largely forgotten but still officially valid—Southeast Asia Treaty (the Manila Pact of 1954).³

If the United States has created and maintained these treaty-based alliances for so long, it is because such alliances serve its interests. They ensure stability for prosperity, through deterrence. U.S. leadership—manifested by the nationality of the supreme commanders of NATO and the Combined Forces Command (South Korea)—was also a way for Washington to limit the risk of a war being started in Europe or Asia. The United States maintains freedom of action: the treaties do not commit Washington to full-scale military action (by contrast with the 1948 Brussels Treaty, for instance, which committed signatories to “*all the military and other aid and assistance in their power*”). Most modern defense commitments are vaguer than they were in the past in terms of the anticipated allied response.⁴ But this was essential to ensure ratification of the pact by the U.S. Senate and to address the traditional concern about “entangling alliances.”

Their existence was also an incentive for allies to buy U.S. defense equipment. U.S. allies were not always democracies—Greece, Turkey, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines in the early days of the Cold War—but they all shared a common value: the need to resist communism.

³ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements (archived content 2009-2017), available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/1/treaty/collectivedefense/index.htm>). Two Asian countries which are members of the Manila Pact are also covered by other U.S. commitments (the Philippines by treaty, Thailand through the Rusk-Thanasit Communiqué of 1962). Pakistan withdrew from the (now defunct) Southeast Asia Treaty Organization or SEATO in 1968 and no longer appears on the list of Manila-Pact-related U.S. defense commitments.

⁴ The Dual Alliance of 1879 committed Austria-Hungary and Germany to come down on Russia with “the whole war strength of their empires.” The French-Russian alliance of 1892 committed both countries to employ “all available forces” against Germany.

This meant that consultation was always part of these alliances. Finally, a novelty of the post-1945 alliances is their nuclear dimension, the bedrock of extended deterrence. It has been fundamental for U.S. allies from France to Finland.

As a result, as U.S. political scientist Hal Brands put it, “no peacetime alliance network has been so expansive, enduring, and effective as the one Washington has led since World War II.”⁵ More precisely, according to Mark Bell and Joshua Kertzer, “when seen in a historical perspective, US-based alliances tend to last twice as long as non-US-based ones, and that the main treaty-based American alliances forged after 1945 are historical outliers in terms of their duration.”⁶

But NATO is still unique on two accounts. First, though not the only multinational defense alliance (the Rio Treaty was signed in 1947; the Europeans have had their own defense alliance with the Brussels Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty), it is the only multinational alliance which includes a military organization. Second, it is the biggest by far. In 2024, there were almost twice as many parties to the Washington Treaty (32) than to the Rio Treaty (17). As stated, not only has NATO enlarged, but no country has ever withdrawn from the Alliance. In the past, France and Greece withdrew from the military organization, only to rejoin it later.

⁵ Hal Brands, “The New Autocratic Alliances,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2024, available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/new-autocratic-alliances>.

⁶ Mark S. Bell and Joshua D. Kertzer, “Trump, Psychology, and the Future of US Alliances,” in Sharon Stirling (ed.), *Assessing the US Commitment to Allies in Asia and Beyond*, The U.S. German Marshall Fund, 2018, available at https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/Assessing%20the%20US%20Commitment%20to%20Allies%20in%20Asia%20and%20Beyond_0_0.pdf.

Three decades ago, RAND scientist Richard Kugler explained NATO's endurance by "alliance cohesion."⁷ But how to explain that cohesion?

An essential factor has been the combination of the inflexible consensus rule with U.S. leadership. Washington has to take into account its allies' views and objections but as NATO's biggest contributor, it has the loudest voice. NATO takes all decisions by what could be called "leadership-based consensus." It is also an alliance where political guidance from the top is constantly given – notably since the end of the Cold War: summits of heads of state and government have now become annual.

The other key factor has been that the Alliance quickly became more than just an alliance. It is what political scientists call a "security community." As Michael Rühle reminds us, Walter Lippman had it right when he surmised that the new pact described a "*community of interests that was much older than the conflict with the Soviet Union and would therefore outlast it.*"⁸

First, NATO has always been a multipurpose alliance, not just a defensive one. Article 2 of the Treaty states that "*The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of*

⁷ Richard L. Kugler, *Commitment to Purpose: How Alliance Partnership Won the Cold War*, The Rand Corporation, 1993, available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR190.html.

⁸ Michael Rühle, "From Pacifism to Nuclear Deterrence: Norman Angell and the Founding of NATO," *Information Series*, No. 582 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 4, 2024), (emphasis added), available at https://nipp.org/information_series/michael-ruhle-from-pacifism-to-nuclear-deterrence-norman-angell-and-the-founding-of-nato-no-582-april-4-2024/.

them.”⁹ The mere existence of NATO helped German and Italian democratization, acted as a dampener against the return of militarism, and made European integration possible. Lord Ismay’s famous 1952 words—“to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down”¹⁰—still had more than a kernel of truth.

This also means that when the Communist Bloc dissolved, NATO could still claim that its other functions endured. As an official history of the Organization puts it, “NATO endured because while the Soviet Union was no more, the Alliance’s two other original if unspoken mandates still held: to deter the rise of militant nationalism and to provide the foundation of collective security that would encourage democratization and political integration in Europe.”¹¹

To be sure, NATO was never a fully democratic alliance: Portugal (joined in 1949), Turkey and Greece (both joined in 1952) were not exactly liberal democracies when they became a part of the Alliance (and Hungary and Turkey today are not exactly beacons of freedom). But in the post-Cold War context, it would have been unthinkable to welcome an autocratic regime: to join NATO (and the European Union), former Warsaw Pact countries had to consolidate their own democracies.

Finally, to some extent, NATO sometimes had a *de facto* collective security function by dampening bilateral rivalries, in particular the one that exists between Greece and Turkey.

Importantly, this security community developed through a web of mutual military cooperations and

⁹ NATO, The North Atlantic Treaty, (emphasis added), available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

¹⁰ NATO, NATO Leaders, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_137930.htm.

¹¹ NATO International Secretariat, “A Short History of NATO,” June 3, 2022, (emphasis added), available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm.

dependencies: a network of multinational military commands where allies were given top responsibilities; common norms to ensure a high degree of interoperability, practiced by exercises; and, most importantly, the procedure known as nuclear sharing, through which the forces of non-nuclear allies can carry U.S. nuclear bombs. While the Warsaw Pact had a similar arrangement – albeit entirely controlled by the Soviet Union – NATO now is unique in this regard (though Russia and Belarus have announced they would rekindle such arrangements).

A final explanation of NATO's enduring cohesion is that members never attempted to change its fundamental structure. Had a real debate been opened about the pillars of the Washington Treaty – the unanimous agreement rule, or the area covered by the Treaty – it may have led to its demise. Member states also refrained from fully implementing Article 2 of the Washington Treaty: political consultation beyond security issues has never been a core day-to-day mission of the Organization. In 2019, French president Emmanuel Macron famously warned that we were experiencing “*the brain death of NATO*.”¹² But he was complaining about the lack of solidarity among allies in Syria and referring to the transatlantic alliance as a political one, not to the military organization. In fact, one could argue that allowing for “breathing space” where allies can strategically disagree on key security issues outside the Washington Treaty focus and area is one of the reasons behind NATO's endurance.

Alliance cohesion made adaptation possible, which in turn ensured NATO's longevity. Three remarkable adaptations have taken place since 1949.

¹² “Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead,” *The Economist*, November 7, 2019, (emphasis added), available at <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>.

The Atlantic Alliance's main "shield" function has evolved. NATO was conceived as "*a powerful deterrent to war*"¹³ or "*a shield against aggression and fear of aggression.*"¹⁴ The degradation of the strategic environment in the late 1940s and early 1950s—in particular during the Korean War—led the United States to adopt the principle of a permanent presence and the allies to set up a permanent military organization. Another indication of NATO's ability to adapt is the way Article 5, the cornerstone of the Washington Treaty, has been understood. Not only was Article 5 invoked for the first time—and last time so far—in response to the 9/11 attacks against the United States, but allies have also made sure since then that the interpretation of what an "armed attack" is could possibly include a cyberattack, or an attack in space.¹⁵

After the Cold War, the "shield" was complemented by a "sword." Crisis management became, for 25 years, the day-to-day work of NATO, notably in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya. In addition, Article 4 of the Treaty—the request for consultations—began to be used by several allies, notably Turkey, due to concerns about the Middle East (starting in 2003), and Central European members in light of Russian aggression (in 2014 and 2022).

¹³ State Department Press Release, Transcript of Broadcast, March 18, 1949, (emphasis added), available at <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/state-department-press-release-transcript-broadcast?documentid=NA&pagenumber=9>.

¹⁴ Harry S. Truman, Address at the Occasion of the Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949, (emphasis added), available at <https://www.trumanlibraryinstitute.org/this-day-in-history-nato/>.

¹⁵ See Bruno Tertrais, "Entangling Alliances? Europe, the United States, Asia and the Risk of a New 1914," The Atlantic Council of the United States, June 27, 2022, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/entangling-alliances-europe-the-united-states-asia-and-the-risk-of-a-new-1914/>.

The third adaptation is of course the enlargement of the Alliance from 12 initial signatories to 32 today, an unprecedented evolution in the history of formal defense commitments. Remarkably, this did not make consensus-building more difficult – because new members were eager to be seen as being in good standing, and because the U.S. leadership remained. In 1948, the U.S. State Department Policy Planning Staff warned against making the Atlantic Alliance too big, risking lack of credibility or overstretch. It recommended that only countries bordering the North Atlantic Ocean (as well as neighbors belonging to the same “union of states”) be accepted.¹⁶ It was proven wrong. To be sure, consensus may have lengthened the implementation of some Alliance decisions, such as the admission of Finland and Sweden in 2023, which were resisted by Hungary and

¹⁶ *“a North Atlantic security pact might properly embrace any country whose homeland or insular territories are washed by the waters of the North Atlantic, or which form part of a close union of states which meets this description. (...) But to go beyond this, and to take in individual continental countries which do not meet this description would (...) be unsound. (...) the admission of any single country beyond the North Atlantic area would be taken by others as constituting a precedent, and would almost certainly lead to a series of demands from states still further afield that they be similarly treated. Failure on our part to satisfy these further demands would then be interpreted as lack of interest in the respective countries, and as evidence that we had ‘written them off’ to the Russians. Beyond the Atlantic area, which is a clean-cut concept, and which embraces a real community of defense interest firmly rooted in geography and tradition, there is no logical stopping point in the development of a system of anti-Russian alliances until that system has circled the globe and has embraced all the non-communist countries of Europe, Asia and Africa. To get carried into any such wide system of alliances could lead only to one of two results; either all these alliances become meaningless declarations, after the pattern of the Kellogg Pact, and join the long array of dead-letter pronouncements through which governments have professed their devotion to peace in the past; or this country becomes still further over-extended, politically and militarily.”* Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the U.S. Department of State, November 24, 1948, (emphasis added), available at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1948v03/d182>.

Turkey. But overall, as expert Leo Michel says, the rule has been “*more helpful than harmful.*”¹⁷

The broader NATO security community has also been expanded to include more than forty countries and international organizations. The Alliance seems increasingly to act like a global strategic magnet. U.S. allies Japan, South Korea and Australia participated in NATO’s 2022 Summit.

When the Washington Treaty was submitted to Congress in 1949, some members worried that the Alliance would mean “*a departure from the UN [United Nations]*” or “*a retreat from the United Nations.*”¹⁸ In a sense, that is exactly what happened: the visionary drafters of the Washington Treaty surmised that the dream of collective security could not survive the Cold War.

To have lived 75 years is not a guarantee to live 100 years. To ensure that members can celebrate the Washington Treaty’s first century in 2049, they would be wise to learn the secrets of its longevity.

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¹⁷ Leo Michel, “NATO decision-making: Is the ‘consensus rule’ still fit for purpose?,” *FOI Memo* 8507, FOI, April 2024, p. 5, (emphasis added), available at <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI%20Memo%208507>.

¹⁸ State Department Press Release, Transcript of Broadcast, 18 March 1949, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/state-department-press-release-transcript-broadcast?documentid=NA&pagenumber=9>.

NATO at 75: Industrial Warfare, Lessons Learned, and Prospects for Mobilization

Kenton White

Introduction

The German philosopher Hegel wrote “What experience and history teaches us is that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.”¹ The lessons learned by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the Cold War, or if not learned then at least understood, have largely been forgotten in the decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Soviet Union. But with the rise of Russia and China, history is being dusted off and re-read with a sharp focus on large-scale, industrial warfare. Experience of the generations of “Cold Warriors,” once derided, is now being sought.

NATO survived the Cold War and the subsequent peace. NATO’s primary military role, that of deterring aggression, has depended and continues to depend upon armed forces that are adequate in strength and readiness, have a high standard of training and mobility, possess modern equipment, and have sufficient logistic support, all with the capability for rapid mobilisation and force expansion. Sadly, the provisions that were made for conflict during the Cold War, including the number of troops and weapons, stockpiles of equipment, protective clothing and supporting infrastructure, were quickly dismantled after 1991. However, the peace that brought an, “... end to

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 3 Vols., 1832 (Duncker & Humblot), p. 1, sec. II.

history ..."² has gone from warm, thanks to Gorbachev, Reagan, and Thatcher, to cold and hostile thanks to President Putin and the ineffectual responses from successive U.S. administrations and Western politicians. The "Peace Dividend" created by the end of the Cold War lulled NATO into a false sense of security.

The lethargy that developed has proven very difficult to overcome, with some NATO members actively working contrary to policies aimed at protecting against increasingly hostile Russian activities. NATO's reawakening was only brought about by the resurgence of an openly aggressive Russia. The price for this short-sightedness may well be incalculable. NATO, and the West more broadly, share an intellectual difficulty connecting military plans with their ultimate purpose. This disconnect has brought NATO to a position of weakness in the face of a determined and ruthless opponent.

The Price of Peace and Recognising its Cost

NATO has relied on several fundamental principles throughout its existence upon which the North Atlantic Council has made policy and strategy. These have included such elements as military capacity and political coordination.

NATO's goal has always been to deter. But in the event of a conflict, the objective is to bring fighting to a conclusion as quickly as possible, knowing that it cannot conduct a drawn-out war. During the Cold War, one foundational feature of NATO strategy was the reliance on, "... establishing and maintaining technical superiority ..."³

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

³ *Report by the Standing Group to the North Atlantic Military Committee on Strategic Guidance for North Atlantic Regional Planning* (Brussels: NATO,

This superiority was intended to compensate for the numerical inferiority of NATO's armed forces.⁴

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, globalisation has offered cheap technology to nations. Leaders of NATO nations have given little thought to the strategic value of that technology, or to other materiel for their armed forces. NATO leaders have slowly realised they have lost the technological advantage enjoyed previously, but without the military capacity to generate a superior, or even numerically equal, force to an opponent such as Russia or China.

Military capacity refers not only to the size of the nations' armed forces singly and collectively, but also the capacity to provide materiel for those armed forces. Supplying Ukraine with the materiel to resist Russia's February 2022 invasion has shown that NATO does not have either the stockpiles or the wherewithal to supply a high-intensity conflict against a determined violent adversary. This is despite each NATO *Strategic Concept* demanding from the Alliance members, "The availability of adequate stocks of conventional ... supplies."⁵ What has confused this seemingly straightforward statement is that there is no agreement within NATO as to what constitutes "adequate." Adequate for what duration of conflict, at what tempo, and where?

The problem for NATO is not in deploying the troops it has, but in supplying them for any length of time once they are in combat. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, admitted the need to manufacture more ammunition and

March 28, 1950), para. 6.d, NATO, MC 14, available at <https://www.nato.int/archives/strategy.htm>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *A Report by the Military Committee to the Defence Planning Committee on Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area*, January 16, 1968, para. 19.d, NATO, MC 14/3, available at <https://www.nato.int/archives/strategy.htm>.

strengthen NATO's defence industry to provide ammunition to Ukraine, and also to replenish NATO's stocks.⁶ This is a failure amongst the most productive industrialised nations in the world. The active reduction of the industrial capacity can be seen in the United Kingdom (UK) Government's 2005 *Defence Industrial Strategy White Paper*.⁷ The paper identifies a "substantial overcapacity in production facilities" in the UK defence industry. The result was a cut in capacity to reduce costs. Reinstating that axed capacity will be far more expensive than maintaining it would have been. The capacity was replaced by the "Just-in-time" (JIT) business philosophy.

As this author wrote in 2017, "Just-in-time (JIT) is aimed at reducing stock holdings, and thus costs, with replacement of stock closely tied to production or sale levels. New stock is delivered 'just in time' to replace diminished levels, thus reducing stock holdings and improving cash-flow. JIT relies on predictable usage rates, and on predictable delivery of the necessary products."⁸ The singular problem is that war is unpredictable, despite academic reassurances that theory will provide answers. When good data are available regarding ammunition usage, and they are ignored in favour of cost savings, the problem is self-sustaining. Thus, the problem is self-sustaining. The practitioners – military officers, strategists and planners – understand this dichotomy, but are rarely in a position to do anything about it. Admiral Rob Bauer of the Royal

⁶ "Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels," February 13, 2023, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_211698.htm.

⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Defence Industrial Strategy White Paper*, HC 824 (London: House of Commons, 2006).

⁸ Kenton White, "Effing' the Military: A Political Misunderstanding of Management", *Defence Studies*, 17.4 (2017), pp. 1-13, available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2017.1351879>.

Netherlands Navy, Chair of NATO's Military Committee,⁹ and Military Adviser to the Secretary General and the North Atlantic Council, spoke at the 2023 Warsaw Security Forum, commenting, "We need large volumes. The just-in-time, just-enough economy we built together in 30 years in our liberal economies is fine for a lot of things—but not the armed forces when there is a war ..."¹⁰

Collectively we have forgotten that the true function of the armed forces is not peace. We cannot assess their capability in peacetime. Their true role is war and violence. What may be efficient in peacetime can be dangerous in war.

In the House of Commons Defence Committee report on the "Special Relationship" between the UK and the United States, questions were raised regarding the level of industrial capacity of the NATO nations for materiel production. Ben Wallace, Member of Parliament and then Secretary of State for Defence, commented to the committee, "It turns out that, for even the most basic munitions, the just-in-time or made-to-order supply chain, including for the NLAWS [Next-generation Light Anti-tank Weapons], finishes when you stop buying them. Sure enough, when you try to reheat the NLAWS supply chain, you discover there is a shortage of the optics or the explosives, and you have to start that all over again. That may take 18 months or whatever."¹¹ The same applies to most NATO-based weapons and ammunition manufacture. The United States, one of the largest arms manufacturers in the world, has

⁹ Rob Bauer, *Warsaw Security Forum*, October 3, 2023, available at <https://warsawsecurityforum.org/previous-editions/wsf-2023-archive/wsf-2023-day-1/>

¹⁰ James Landale, "Ukraine war: Western allies say they are running out of ammunition," *BBC News*, October 3, 2023, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-66984944>.

¹¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Special Relationships? US, UK and NATO – Report Summary*, HC184 (House of Commons: House of Commons Defence Committee, March 7, 2023).

suffered from a shortfall in manufacturing replacements for items sent to Ukraine. This includes basic items such as Javelin anti-tank missile systems, Stinger surface-to-air missiles and 155 mm artillery pieces and ammunition. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the number of Javelin missiles sent to Ukraine by the United States up until August 2022 represented 7 years-worth of standard production.¹²

A weakened, or absent, armaments manufacturing capacity leaves NATO nations at a clear disadvantage in the immediate future. Historically, NATO's strategy has relied on a limited availability of weapons and ammunition for engagements in small or "come-as-you-are" conflicts. The question now is whether the West should establish a robust arms manufacturing capability to be able to support potential wartime production levels.

Some NATO members, notably those former Soviet republics or Warsaw Pact members, are already answering this question. Poland has taken the decision to build the Korean K2 main battle tank under license in its own factories. The benefits are obvious. If war is to come to NATO, as the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has warned, it will likely occur first in those former Soviet republics or Warsaw Pact nations. Having seen the tactical developments in Ukraine, Poland is preparing to fight an industrial war. As we know, war uses up resources extremely quickly. Fighting a modern war relies primarily on the profligate use of weapons and equipment. This may even outperform clever strategy and tactics, or whatever technological superiority NATO might still retain.

Until 2014, very few seriously considered that war would come to Europe. Even after Russia annexed Crimea a few NATO members still considered the possibility remote. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the

¹² Seth G. Jones, *Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the U.S. Defense Industrial Base* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

atmosphere of optimism aided by works such as Fukuyama's *The End of History* made the governments of many Western liberal democracies rather complacent about the future.¹³ This reflected the spirit of euphoria of the immediate post-Cold War period, and echoed President Bush's statement of 1991 that there was a "new world order."¹⁴ A period of relatively peaceful co-existence allowed politicians to turn their thoughts towards social improvements, and within Europe to concentrate on the development of the European Union and its further political integration.

NATO has thrown away many of the hard-won practical lessons of the Cold War and relied too much on theory from business and academia, often to justify cost savings. NATO, and in turn Ukraine, might have faced obstacles of political and military decision making because of the confusion stemming from differing interpretations of Russian actions. Academic theories have added to this confusion, making it hard for NATO leaders to agree on a clear course of action.

NATO's strategy, from its inception, tended to focus on high-intensity, large-scale war with the Warsaw Pact. After 1991, NATO struggled to find a reason for its continued existence. After 9/11 in 2001, the focus, driven by the United States, shifted to counter-insurgency (COIN). Theorists and academics, along with some in the military, believed that large-scale warfare was a thing of the past.¹⁵ Western politicians and academics have emphasized theories of International Relations, often to a fault. Supposedly new concepts, such as 'hybrid,' 'grey-zone,' 'asymmetric,' and 'effects-based' warfare are hard to define and do not

¹³ Fukuyama, op. cit.

¹⁴ George H.W. Bush, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War," Unpublished Speech, Washington, D.C., 1991).

¹⁵ Michael Mandelbaum, "Is Major War Obsolete?," *Survival*, 40.4 (1998), pp. 20-38.

provide much insight for practitioners.¹⁶ They merely describe actions, both military and non-military, that have been part of war for centuries. As Professor Brian Holden-Reid wrote, "Quite frequently an uncomprehending gap has developed between academics writing within universities and serving officers within their staff colleges."¹⁷

During the Cold War, NATO's strategy was clearly defined in documents such as the Military Committee Series. NATO's new post-Cold War *Strategic Concepts* reflected the "businessization" and "academicization" of the military function. The concepts seemed to lose their focus and sought to justify NATO's existence by broadening its remit to "Out Of Area" threats and crisis management. Additionally, more than just lip service was paid to the "theoretical" aspects of conflict management pushed by the academic, political and business world, to the detriment of the practical. Thus, the threat from Russia developed ahead of NATO's recognition of it, despite significant warnings from the 2008 conflict in Georgia, the 2014 annexation of Ukraine, and the increasing hold on power gained by President Putin. However, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 made the serious nature of the situation clear. Despite this, NATO members still struggled to come to a unified decision on how to respond.

Regardless of political differences and theoretical arguments, NATO can still demonstrate some of its latent military capability. During the Cold War, it undertook regular large-scale exercises to practice the mobilisation and

¹⁶ Antulio J. Echevarria, "How Should We Think about 'Gray-Zone' Wars?," *Infinity Journal*, 5.1 (2015), pp. 16–20; Ofer Fridman, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst & Company, 2022); for example, see Alessio Patalano, "When Strategy Is 'Hybrid' and Not 'Grey': Reviewing Chinese Military and Constabulary Coercion at Sea," *The Pacific Review*, 31.6 (2018), pp. 811–839.

¹⁷ *Military Power: Land Warfare in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Brian Holden-Reid (London/Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1997), p. 2.

deployment of thousands of forces into and around Europe. Exercises demonstrated the speed and size of reinforcement, both as a reassurance by the United States to European NATO countries, and as a demonstration to potential enemies of NATO's ability to quickly put forces into the field. Exercises are part of deterrent communication. However, exercises are expensive, and regardless of the value for the forces involved, NATO scaled down its schedule after 1991 to save money.

Training at scale for all the armed forces of NATO was vital during the Cold War, and is necessary now. This type of training exposes problems with large formation command, communication and coordination; such concerns were manifest during Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. NATO cannot afford to suffer from these problems if it goes to war. However, it must be careful what it trains for. As General Wavell wrote in 1933, "... so far as training is concerned I hold that it is a positive advantage to have to train simply 'for war' and that to train 'for a war' is a danger because that particular war never happens ..."¹⁸ NATO seems to train for "... a war ..." rather than war generally. NATO trained, exhaustively, for "... a war ..." against the Soviet Union up to 1991. From the end of the Cold War, training was more limited in scope for budgetary reasons. NATO then trained for, "...a war...", specifically COIN. The ability to fight general war amongst NATO allies diminished rapidly. The weakening of the capability to fight a large-scale war has enfeebled NATO and the political determination behind its decision making.

But NATO has not completely lost the ability to create and deploy a sizeable force. The largest exercise since 1988, STEADFAST DEFENDER is a series of NATO military

¹⁸ Extract from "The Training of the Army for War" by Brigadier AP Wavell, CMG, MC, Ministry of Defence, *Army Doctrine Publication – Training*, DGD&D/18/34/65 (Ministry of Defence, 1996), IV, p. 24, Army Code No 71621.

exercises to be conducted from January to May 2024. The exercise is meant to simulate an, “emerging conflict scenario with a near-peer adversary.”¹⁹ This is a thinly disguised reference to Russia, and shows that NATO is taking the threat of direct conflict more seriously. However, the scale of the exercise is far short of the largest exercises undertaken at the height of East-West tensions. The largest Cold War-era exercises, REFORGER or LIONHEART, approached 150,000 personnel deployed. Importantly, one aspect of STEADFAST DEFENDER is the transatlantic reinforcement by U.S. and Canadian forces, very much in the mould of the REFORGER exercises undertaken by NATO during the Cold War.

NATO trains and prepares what we most understand: the military instrument. It is clear and tangible. We understand less the relationship between the means – the military instrument – and the ends – the usually ill-defined post “victory” conditions. Historically, we know what victory is, we know it when we see it. But NATO’s role of deterrence has no tangible victory conditions. This was true during the Cold War, but as long as deterrence did not fail, then NATO had succeeded. Today, the situation is different. Russia was not deterred from invading Ukraine. How do we know now that deterrence is working? In the liberal Western nations, there is difficulty connecting military plans with their ultimate purpose. Very few people have a long-term view of the link between the military instrument and a state of peace in Europe.

¹⁹ STEADFAST DEFENDER 24, Factsheet, SHAPE Public Affairs, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Mons, Belgium January 23, 2024, available at, <https://shape.nato.int/stde24/newsroom/factsheet.aspx>.

Conclusion

One of NATO's greatest assets is also one of its greatest weaknesses—the diversity of military capability, culture and doctrine that the various nations bring to the Alliance. Political unity (or lack of it) and speed of response are the chinks in NATO's armour. Additionally, short-term political thinking affects long-term policy outcomes. In peacetime, weapons take notoriously long to develop and deploy.

After 1991, NATO gave up its enormous strategic advantage in technology, capability and sheer capacity. No NATO member has, until recently, considered that the loss of that advantage would be so costly, or even impossible, to reconstruct. There is an awareness that significant war-stocks are needed within a sustainable supporting infrastructure. JIT is not workable for a wartime military. Defence in depth and a protracted war require a large, established industrial base capable of switching to war production very quickly. No Western government has such capabilities, nor have they been interested in making them. These are expensive to create and maintain.

While certain NATO members boast professional and well-equipped troops, their military forces are comparatively modest in size. Consequently, numerous nations find themselves with budgets that merely suffice to sustain their existing forces. With NATO's focus towards counter-insurgency operations due to engagements in Afghanistan, the emphasis veered away from preparing for conflict with peer adversaries like Russia. Consequently, there has been a reduction in the numbers of conventional combat units, armoured vehicles, naval vessels, aircraft, and personnel. While this reduction has resulted in financial savings for nations, one must ponder the potential medium- and long-term costs of such actions. The Western liberal democracies of which NATO is composed are not willing to

accept large numbers of casualties in a conflict. We have seen both Ukraine and Russia suffering enormous losses in the current conflict. Losses at that scale on small, highly trained professional armed forces would be disastrous. Freedom comes at a price, and that price is inevitably the lives of the service personnel we put in harm's way, often without adequate equipment for their job.

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