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A New Vision for the Transatlantic Alliance

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A New Vision for the Transatlantic Alliance: The Future of European Security, the United States, and the World Order after Russia's War in Ukraine

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Executive Summary

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has sparked the most serious crisis in Europe since World War II and shattered the post-Cold War international order. It underscored that deterrence failed in the European theater, and the US-led alliance in Europe is now facing unprecedented concurrent threats from Russian imperialism and China's rise.

However, out of crisis comes opportunity. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has unified the transatlantic alliance and its partners — the transatlantic community is stronger than ever, and NATO's core mission is, and remains, collective defense in Europe. The war has revolutionized NATO's military strategy, moving the organization to a more capable war-fighting alliance and toward deterrence by denial. It has also shifted the balance of power in Europe to the east, ushering in the beginning of a strategic realignment.

A simple truth has emerged since February 2022: the future of the transatlantic alliance rests on the future of Ukraine. The equation is simple. Europe is not secure if Ukraine is not secure, and the United States is not secure if Europe is not secure. Failure in Ukraine is not an option for the United States and its allies. As the United States and Ukraine's allies and partners contemplate options for Ukraine's long-term security, however, the bottom line is that the only lasting security guarantee for Ukraine and Europe is Ukraine's membership in NATO. It will strengthen the alliance, improve deterrence, and boost capabilities.

This yearlong study lays out a comprehensive vision and blueprint for Europe's security architecture anchored in eight core strategic tenets and dozens of specific and concrete recommendations.

Eight Core Strategic Tenets

- Ukraine's long-term security is the lynchpin of transatlantic security.
- Europe's security architecture will not be complete without the integration of so-called gray zones in Europe.
- The power balance in Europe has shifted east, which will require modernization of NATO's defense posture, including a permanent presence on the eastern flank.
- NATO's commitment to deterrence by denial requires a sustained and coordinated defense industrial revolution among its members.

- Failure in Ukraine will signal the end of US global leadership with profound and disastrous implications for US deterrence of China: the best way to deter China is by defeating Russia in Ukraine.

- Russia's strategic posture of aggression is unlikely to change in the near or long term: postwar Russian leadership would not rule out military confrontation with NATO.

- NATO's core mission must be to deter Russia in Europe.

- Countries of the so-called Global South will play a key role in determining the future of geostrategic competition: the United States and its allies must form a strategic and targeted approach to key partners in the region.

Specific Recommendations

On Securing Ukraine and the World Order

- Ukraine's promise of NATO membership must be honored speedily and effectively.

- In the interim period prior to Ukraine's NATO accession, the United States must institutionalize its security assistance to Ukraine, safeguarding aid from changing and uncertain domestic political dynamics.

- The United States, NATO, and the European Union (EU) should launch a coordinated diplomatic and soft-power offensive in the Global South, identifying the sources of Russian and Chinese popularity and leverage, and seeing how its members can compete in countering them.

- Winning hearts and minds in the Global South through the best overall offering in terms of partnership and prosperity will require greater engagement, investment, and imagination by the United States, Europe, and other key Western allies and partners than has yet been shown, and a vision of the West which fully includes key leaders in the 21st century, such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia.

- The United States and its allies should concentrate on improving and promoting democratic governance within the West, increasing support to partners, and collectively meeting universal challenges such as accelerating climate change, food insecurity, public health, and managing migration.

On Strengthening NATO and European Security

- "Strategic autonomy" is dead: Russia's war in Ukraine has underscored Europe's humbling dependence on the United States for defense and security. In its place, Europe must continue to shift toward "strategic responsibility," marked by a close but more equal partnership with the United States, prioritization of defense spending and capabilities, and playing to the EU's nonmilitary strengths.

Photo: A Danish soldier hiding in the woods during exercise Crystal Arrow 2023 in Latvia.
Credit: NATO via Flickr.

- NATO and the EU need better coordination, not necessarily increased cooperation. They are sometimes stronger when they "stick to their own swim lanes." The EU should play to its nonmilitary strengths, including by enabling capabilities, financial support, energy system integration, and economic sanctions.

- For NATO, the full implementation of the Deterrence and Defense Concept is paramount. This involves executable regional plans, domain plans, and the Area-of-Responsibility-wide plan, with a full assessment of gaps, and a clear strategy to fill those gaps.

- A combat-credible Allied Response Force, rapidly deployable and employable with the right enablers and capabilities, organized, trained, equipped, and sustained to deter and defend in the 21st century security environment is critical.

- To provide for deterrence by denial, NATO must strike a balance between a permanent presence that provides a constant deterrence value and persistent, rotational forces that provide for readiness and lethality.

- A modern Integrated Air and Missile Defense capacity and capability with networked sensors to counter modern threat systems at all altitudes and in multi-domain operations is critical.

- Invest in a strengthened, robust indicators and warnings system. Additional resources should be specifically allocated to develop indicators and warnings capabilities in the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre, the NATO Command Structure, and in national agencies.

Photo: Polish soldiers peer downrange during a live-fire exercise in Cincu, Romania on 28 April 2022. Credit: NATO via Flickr.

- NATO allies should work to better align their visions and policies to emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs). NATO should also build an interoperable digital backbone, the true "glue" of 21st century deterrence.

- NATO member nations should prioritize investments and technology collaboration in EDTs to bridge defense innovation gaps.

On Safeguarding Alliance Cohesion

- Better internal messaging across the alliance would address a major concern for the future cohesion of NATO.

- Member states should ramp up efforts to convince domestic populations of the need to invest in security. European countries are not evenly affected by the economic impact of this new threat environment, which may lead to increased frictions in the coming years.

- Boosting domestic support for efforts to adapt to this new threat environment may help mitigate the unpredictability of the elections taking place in 2024 in European countries and in the United States and increase domestic resilience.

On Addressing Russia and China

- The United States and its allies should undertake a strategic assessment of the challenge presented by the relationship between Russia and China, of its possible trajectories, and of the scope for joint and separate policy approaches to them.

- To address the "two-front" issue between Moscow and Beijing, NATO must clearly outline its role and presence in the Indo-Pacific region as well as deepen relations with the EU.

- Responses to Sino-Russian gambits should be concrete and issue-specific, commensurate with the level of threat. Countering Russian and Chinese malign influence will involve better defense (resilience) and offense.

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, sparked the most serious crisis in Europe since World War II and shattered the post-Cold War international order. It has highlighted the price of Western complacency, with the losses being paid by Ukrainians directly in blood and tears, and by others indirectly through hunger and poverty. The hard truth is that deterrence failed in the European theater. That raises questions about its efficacy everywhere.

In repairing the damage, decision-makers face difficult choices. The United States is grappling with the costs of constraining China, while more effort, money, and risk appetite is needed in Europe, a continent where most allies have yet to grasp the cost of security. Despite transatlantic unity over Ukraine, European allies have different priorities on China. They also have increasing concerns over the dependability of the United States.

The United States and its allies were slow to see the looming systemic threats from Russian imperialism and China's economic and military rise.[1] The global financial crisis, handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, s distracted decision-makers. Their failures, real and perceived, also did great, mostly overlooked, damage to Western prestige and influence.[2] Most countries of the "Global South" have remained broadly indifferent to Western concerns over Ukraine, reflecting deep-seated and long-standing alienation over political snubs, economic injustices, and other grievances.[3]

The nature of the threats has changed too. The United States and its allies face increasing dangers from information influence operations, cyberattacks, political influence operations, weaponized finance, and economic coercion. These vectors of attack are not wholly new, but globalization and digital communications have removed friction and created new vulnerabilities.[4] The era of Western technological dominance is over. Competitors, notably China, are gaining a strategic edge.[5]

Following the publication in 2022 of the NATO Strategic Concept and NATO's 2023 Vilnius Summit,[6] this report articulates the key short- and long-term challenges for the transatlantic alliance, and their prioritization in a five-to-ten-year time frame; it provides a cohesive strategic framework that elaborates core guiding principles and a vision for the future of European security; and it gives concrete recommendations that the United States, the European Union (EU), and NATO should implement in the short and medium term to achieve the long-term strategic vision.

This report centers on three aspects of the problem.

- *European security*. The war in Ukraine has undermined fundamental assumptions about the post-Cold War European security architecture. How should the United States, the EU, and NATO strengthen their deterrence and forestall future threats?

- *Alliance cohesion*. How can the alliance mitigate disagreements on burden sharing, on the defense role of the EU, and on the scope of NATO's mission? Russia's immediate threat to European security competes with the longer-term challenge of China's rise. How should the alliance balance these priorities, detering, rather than cementing, a full-scale alliance between Moscow and Beijing?

- *The shape of the international order*. How do these new priorities affect other regions, where security imperatives and economic self-interest may collide? What are the implications of these changing dynamics for the international order?

None of this will be easy. For three decades most decision-makers in most Western countries worked from the flawed assumption that Russia and China were converging with the West on basic questions of world order. Countries would work together on common challenges while old geopolitical rivalries would matter much less. This was most clearly represented through Germany's "Wandel durch Handel" [change through trade] approach but was also the approach of successive US administrations. Far from wanting to fit into a US-led international order, Russian and Chinese leaders feared that it would first constrain and eventually pose an existential threat to their regimes.[7] Western countries failed to realize the depth of this disagreement.

The 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) belatedly shifted the strategic focus away from global terrorism, after 16 years of the "global war on terror," to geostrategic competition. But US policy lacked the geo-economic heft to deal with supply-chain dependence and China's technological rise. But even the limited emphasis on China — at least in many eyes — deprioritized European security, providing a tempting opportunity for the Kremlin.

Russia's war in Ukraine has changed this, but not necessarily permanently. Outrage at Russia's aggression initially strengthened transatlantic cohesion. But this initial cohesion risks fraying in countries where voters and elites believe the war has become too costly or futile. Hopes that sanctions and military setbacks would force speedy political change in Moscow have proved fruitless. Other challenges, from decarbonization to migration, are crowding the political agenda. A return to "business as usual" with China and Russia would please many interested parties in countries across the West.

Photo: An armored German Leopard 2 tank fires flare at Exercise Iron Wolf in Lithuania. Credit: NATO

Yet out of crisis comes opportunity. Just as the destruction of World War II paved the way for reconciliation and integration, at least in the countries of Western Europe, the shock of the Russian invasion of Ukraine offers the possibility of revitalizing the Western vision and changing the post-Cold War pattern of complacency, greed, and appeasement. Success or failure in this will define not only European but US and global security for decades. At worst, defeat in Ukraine could mark the "end of the West." At best, renewed geopolitical credibility and legitimacy of its values, norms, and institutions, extending from the "old West" to the countries of the "Global South" would mark the end of what the historian Anne Applebaum has called the "Twilight of Democracy."[8]

NATO is both a solution and a problem here. Prior to 2022, doubts were growing about the US commitment to European security in light of its "pivot to Asia". Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the world's biggest and most successful alliance rediscovered, and united around, its core purpose of collective defense. It is back — albeit at arm's length — in the warfighting business, while adding new emphasis to resilience, crisis management, and cooperative security tasks. NATO's unrivaled breadth, heft, and expertise offers European allies a framework to help the United States with its priorities in other theaters, and to build ties to allies there.

But the war has also highlighted NATO's fragility: the US response has been so crucial that it lays bare Europe's disproportionate dependence on US security. The questions in European minds about the sustainability of that commitment and long-term US military support to Ukraine are urgent and unanswered. For many countries of the Global South, NATO is tainted by the failed US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and by the injustices and perceived slights experienced at Western hands over many decades.

Photo: Vilnius, Lithuania. 12th July, 2023. Rishi Sunak (l-r), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Joe Biden, President of the United States, Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy, and Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, welcome Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, at the NATO-Ukraine meeting during the NATO summit. Credit: Kay Nietfeld/dpa/Alamy Live News.

This report is the culmination of a yearlong research effort from October 2022 to October 2023. The authors include experts and thought leaders in US and European security policy and former senior officials in the United States and European governments and NATO.

The project draws upon a variety of sources, including:

- An in-depth literature review drawing on more than 200 sources from governments and multilateral organizations, policy journals, think tank reports, academic papers, and analytical articles.

- Forty-one virtual and in-person interviews in Washington between December 2022 and June 2023 with senior government officials, politicians, former military officers, analysts, and experts from the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and India.

- Consultations with more than 70 senior government officials from the ministries of foreign affairs and defense, embassies, NATO, the EU, and leading experts from academia and the think tank community in Warsaw, Bucharest, Brussels, and London — cities where we expected the most significant policy divergences within the transatlantic alliance — over the course of a two-week research delegation in March 2023.

- Three virtual sessions of a cross-sector Transatlantic Working Group, which brought together more than 60 high-level experts with a mastery of defense policy, political and diplomatic analysis, and/or grand strategy, including current and former government officials, military officers, and prominent thought leaders from think tanks and academia from the United States, Europe, the EU, NATO, Asia, Australia, and India in January, March, and June 2023. The sessions focused on 1) addressing two fronts: Russia and China, 2) understanding internal threats to the transatlantic alliance, and 3) stress testing the authors' proposed recommendations and strategic framework for this report.

As a result of the in-depth literature review, expert consultations, and cross-sector convenings, the findings in this report take a holistic look at the problems facing the transatlantic alliance and provide a comprehensive set of recommendations for policymakers. The study aims to inform and guide policymakers with rigorous, substantive, policy-relevant research at a time when governments and multilateral organizations are rethinking national strategies in this new security environment.

The report starts by addressing the immediate threat to European security posed by Russia's war in Ukraine. It outlines the origin and nature of Russian aggression and the wider danger that it poses to European security and US transatlantic and global leadership. It highlights the need to provide lasting security for Ukraine and for other countries, including an invitation for Ukraine to join NATO at the alliance's 75th anniversary summit in Washington next year. It outlines the steps that NATO has taken, and has yet to take, to rebuild its defense and deterrence. It outlines the failure to win support for Ukraine among countries of the "Global South." It notes the death of European dreams of "strategic autonomy" and the resulting prospect of a productive relationship between the EU and NATO.

It then considers the seeming dilemma facing the United States: to deal with the challenge of a rising China or to counter Russian imperialism. This is also a potentially grave threat to alliance cohesion. The report argues that the dilemma is false. Abandoning Ukraine would destroy US prestige in Europe, and globally. It discounts the danger of a full-scale Russia-China alliance and argues that each threat should be considered, and countered, separately.

It then makes practical recommendations on all these fronts, on improving defense and deterrence in the nuclear, conventional, and subthreshold arenas; on strengthening alliance cohesion; and for building support for Western goals in the rest of the world. Put bluntly, to win the east-west conflicts, the world's democracies need to fix their north-south problems. All these steps require practical and rhetorical commitments, and will come at a political and economic cost to some countries. However, seen through a national-security lens, this price is worth paying.

Chapter One: Ukraine, Russia, and NATO

- Russia's war in Ukraine will shape US and allied thinking about defense, deterrence, and alliance cohesion for a generation.

- The Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine underscored the failure of the US-led alliance over many years to understand the nature of the threat from Russia and the failure of deterrence to forestall the aggression, or to stop it when it started.

- Postwar Russia could reconstitute its capabilities within three to five years, while European allies need at least a decade to build their own defenses, which leaves a significant gap in NATO's defense and deterrence.

- The West should expect that the postwar Russian leadership would consider military confrontation with NATO.

- The war in Ukraine has brought to the fore that agreements with Russia, notably the NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA), are now null and void.

- The war has highlighted the widespread indifference to Ukraine's plight and Russia's aggression in most countries in the so-called Global South.

First and foremost, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a failure of deterrence. Although NATO allies were not treaty-bound to protect Ukraine, they invested in its capabilities, training, institutions, and armed forces, particularly since Russia's initial invasion in 2014. They warned Russia against a full-blown attack, threatening sanctions and other penalties. This did not work. The result is the greatest catastrophe in Europe since 1945, with hundreds of thousands of people maimed and killed, millions of refugees, colossal environmental damage, a bill of many hundreds of billions of dollars for reconstruction, global food shortages, and the continuing danger of escalation.

That sobering failure now overshadows European security, while the war's outcome will determine its future. Any result that leaves Russia capable of further aggression only postpones the next war. The result will also either strengthen or erode alliance cohesion, shaping the continent's defense, deterrence, and resilience for decades to come.

In the short to medium term, both throughout the war and in the postwar period, the alliance must, therefore, ensure that Ukraine wins both the war and the peace. The sooner Ukraine wins, the less the risk of divisions in the alliance. Regardless of the timeline for allied consensus on its NATO membership aspirations, Ukraine must be given credible security guarantees. It will require assistance in institution building, defense capacity, and defense industrial base investment to promote interoperability.[9]

Photo: President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy talk at the Walk of the Brave, Monday, February 20, 2023, during an unannounced visit to Kyiv, Ukraine. Credit: Adam Schultz/White House

For now, the alliance largely agrees on the conduct of the war and the desired outcomes:

- a military and political victory that leaves the Kremlin incapable of launching another attack
- a full restoration of Ukrainian territorial integrity
- security guarantees, followed by speedy accession to NATO and then the EU

These could result from a Russian military collapse, or from a war of attrition that paves the way for negotiations with Russia from a position of Ukrainian strength. But at a minimum, the West must ensure that Russia does not "win" and that Ukraine does not "lose." In practical terms, this means an outcome in which Ukraine is fully sovereign (able to join the EU and NATO), economically sustainable (with access to its ports), and militarily defensible (with a combination of Russian military withdrawal and Western security guarantees).[10]

However, the war already comes at a serious diplomatic cost. A signal feature has been the lackluster interest shown by countries of the Global South, including some of the world's largest democracies — Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa. In many of these countries, the costs of the war, especially its effect on food supplies, are perceived sharply, whereas its outbreak is attributed to Western geopolitical adventurism that provoked Russia.

For example, in all but one of the 14 countries surveyed in a special Arab News-YouGov poll on where Arabs stand on the war in Ukraine, a majority of respondents who expressed a view believed the blame for the war lies with NATO. The only exception to this was in Syria, where blame was apportioned equally.[11]

This was an unpleasant surprise for Ukrainians, who assumed that their struggle against a former imperial overlord would resonate in countries that had themselves experienced European colonialism. Ukraine's ambassador to South Africa received a public rebuke after urging her host government to be "on the right side of history" in a video that would have passed without comment in much of the world. South Africa's international relations and cooperation minister, Naledi Pandor, tweeted "Ambassador, you know this is wrong and undiplomatic," adding that South Africa would not take sides in the conflict.[12]

Underlying this disdain for Ukraine is the perception of Western double standards. An African delegate, speaking in an unattributable setting, summarized views of the conflict among many in the Global South with this mocking version of stereotypical Western attitudes to conflicts in Africa: "It's just one lot of Europeans killing another lot of Europeans. They've been doing it for centuries and will continue to do so for decades. It's just not our business."[13]

Decision-makers in the Global South also contrast the uproar over Russian human rights abuses with the seemingly low-key criticism of abuses in countries that matter more to Western commercial interests. Attitudes toward NATO countries and the West in general are characterized, rightly or wrongly, by disappointment, skepticism, or outright hostility.[14]

These arise from, but are not limited to:

- the legacy of former colonial powers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America[15]
- failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the fallout from the "Global War on Terror
- the inadequate response to climate change, especially in fulfilling climate financing commitments under the Paris Agreement
- the weak response to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of vaccine distribution
- lack of urgency and generosity on debt relief as well as "rich country protectionism"

- underrepresentation of the Global South in international organizations, notably the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank

- the belief that the "rules-based international order" is a Western construct to which even its supporters sometimes only pay lip service.

These criticisms, and the accompanying depth of feeling, can easily be overlooked in the backslapping and insular atmosphere of alliance decision-making. The positive side to this criticism is that it is based on disappointment rather than the belief that there is a better alternative out there. Countries of the Global South do not reject the UN Charter. They just object to the West's à la carte view of it, and amnesiac response to past breaches.[16]

Dissatisfaction with the West creates fertile ground for Russian and Chinese information operations.[17] These propaganda efforts do not need to explicitly promote the virtues, real or otherwise, of the political systems run from Moscow and Beijing. Both Russia and China are explicitly engineering the information space to show that the West and its values are declining: they highlight Western failure and hypocrisy, especially on human rights violations, and link them to local grievances. In this, Russia and China are playing a longer game in the Global South than the West often does.

The West is in competition with Russia and China in a large part (in population terms the majority) of a world that is, if not anti-Western, increasingly de-Westernized.[18] Countries that explicitly reject Western models of liberal economics, the rule of law, and competitive multiparty democracy include Saudi Arabia, Iran, authoritarian African countries such as the Central African Republic (CAR), and — at least in terms of some public rhetoric — Turkey. These countries align easily with Russian or Chinese interests.

Diplomatic engagement allows the Kremlin to rebut the narrative that the war in Ukraine has left Russia friendless and isolated. But these alignments do not create durable alliances. Russia can count on help in sanctions-busting from countries like Venezuela, and enjoys lucrative commercial ties with regimes that it props up in places such as the CAR. It receives useful military drones from Iran — but on a strictly commercial basis. No African, Asian, or Latin American country with political ties to Russia has provided military assistance on the scale that Western allies have provided to Ukraine.[19] Chinese influence is similarly transactional.

Yet the advances that China is making in the Global South risk distraction for US decision-makers when it comes to European security. China's attempts to position itself as a European security actor may lack substance or engagement from a Ukrainian (and Western) point of view. But it is seen differently in countries suffering from the economic fallout of the war.

Photo: President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin welcomes Burkina Faso Interim President Ibrahim Traoré. Credit: Kirill Kazachkov/RosCongress

This is, of course, an incomplete picture. The majority of NATO members did not have overseas empires. NATO and the United States are not identical. EU priorities, particularly in development, differ strongly. Counter arguments can be made against some of the criticisms mentioned above, and they must be made.

A further potential diplomatic cost is related to cohesion within the alliance. An attritional war could stoke doubts about Ukraine's ability to withstand costs that Russia bears unflinchingly.[20] This could divide NATO allies between those of the eastern flank who would regard the de facto partitioning of Ukraine as unacceptable, and those who would argue that the best way to deal with an unwinnable war is to end it. Similarly, some allies could find a decisive Ukraine victory uncomfortable, particularly if it is depicted as "backing Russia into a corner." Russian threats of further escalation, including the use of nuclear weapons, play on these divisions.[21] A related worry is that Ukraine wins the war but loses the peace. Reconstruction will be a mammoth burden on multilateral and national financial resources.[22] Private sector involvement will be vital, but largely contingent on security guarantees.[23] NATO's Vilnius Summit in July 2023 failed to settle this issue.

Ukraine's NATO membership (along with Georgia's) was agreed in principle at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg affirmed last April that "Ukraine's future is in NATO."[24] Ukraine gained a promise at the Vilnius Summit that it will be NATO's next, 33rd, member. But the decision on when that will happen has, in effect, been postponed to the alliance's 75th anniversary summit in 2024 in Washington. The alliance instead introduced an upgraded partnership format via a NATO-Ukraine Council in which all members can directly engage and consult with Ukraine on "security issues of mutual concern." The effort is meant to bring Ukraine "politically closer" to the alliance.[25]

Ukraine's future security and prosperity, and NATO's credibility, depend on doing better than this.

It is true that NATO has never admitted a country that is at war. But if that becomes the paramount principle, then the Kremlin has an almost complete veto on Ukraine's membership. Barring a complete Russian collapse and surrender, the Kremlin need only maintain low-level fighting to give hesitant allies an excuse to say that the war is continuing, and thus that Ukraine cannot join. NATO has extended membership to countries with contested borders (West Germany). Russian occupation of parts of Ukrainian territory run by puppet administrations could be compared to the Soviet military presence in the "German Democratic Republic" — a state that the Federal Republic never fully recognized. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, more popularly known as the Washington Treaty, is drafted with considerable wiggle room.[26] It does not mandate NATO to respond with force to an armed attack on any member. It merely obliges each member state to react with "such action as it deems necessary."

For now, Ukrainians and their friends believe that military success on the battlefield will bring a humbled Russia to the negotiating table. But three distinguished retired alliance officials[27] have argued that NATO should use the prospect of membership to end the war and guarantee Ukraine's security through deterrence.[28]

Assuming military exhaustion on both sides, this could take the form of a cease-fire, after which, pending Ukrainian admission to NATO at the Washington Summit in 2024, the main allies (the United States, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland) would then issue interim bilateral security guarantees of the kind offered to Finland and Sweden. These would extend only to territories controlled and administered by the Kyiv authorities, which would have to pledge not to retake Russian-occupied regions of the country by force.

Any such deal would involve painful compromises for all sides. Russia would have to accept further expansion of the alliance — something which it now depicts as a huge Western infringement of its fundamental security interests. Ukraine would

have to accept that it would seek recovery of its territory still occupied by Russia through diplomatic and political, rather than military, means. Western countries would have to accept that they are directly and irrevocably involved in protecting Ukrainian security. Their faith in deterrence would have to outweigh their fear of escalation.

This approach, or some version of it, might solve Ukraine's Russia problem in the short term. More importantly, it would merely add to, rather than solve, NATO's long-term Russia problem.

The Russia Problem

As already argued, Russia's war in Ukraine results from 30-plus years of failure by Western decision-makers to grasp Russia's aims and capabilities. Warnings from Russia's neighborhood were abundant but ignored. Estonia's then president Lennart Meri presciently explained the dangers of the "Karaganov doctrine" — that Russia has the right and duty to intervene on behalf of its "compatriots" in ex-Soviet territories. [29] This is the wellspring of Russian President Vladimir Putin's delegitimization of Ukraine's identity and statehood. Meri also lamented the West's naïveté and cynicism.

Instances of Russia's transgressive behavior before its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 included:

- support for Serbian aggression in the former Yugoslavia
- coercive use of gas and oil exports in countries dependent on Soviet-era pipelines
- the wars in Chechnya (1994-6 and 1999-2009)
- election meddling in Ukraine in 2004
- the cyberattack on Estonia in 2007
- the war in Georgia in 2008
- illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014
- eight years of war in Donbas since 2014
- numerous instances of subthreshold sabotage, assassination, subversion, and influence operations in NATO and non-NATO countries

The significance of these events, and warnings about them, were dismissed for reasons that remain deserving of scrutiny. They include a Russo-centric worldview, which ignored other countries in the region and prioritized the Kremlin's concerns and talking points. Russia's land mass and nuclear stockpile — in both cases the largest in the world — as well as its cultural clout rightly give it prominence. But such

assessments should be coupled with recognition of Russia's economic weakness and declining demographics, and the interests of other countries.

The combination of Russo-centrism and ignorance was the basis for arrogance and wishful thinking in the years following 1991. A further and perhaps decisive element was greed. Trade and investment with Russia were lucrative. Those who warned about the trajectory toward repression at home and aggression abroad, and the interaction between these two tendencies, were bad for business. This was particularly marked in Germany (because of the political weight of the Russia-dependent energy industries) and in the United Kingdom (financial services). [30]

Furthermore, those signals that the West did send to Russia, both verbal and practical, were muddled and lacked credibility.[31] The Kremlin's messaging was also ignored or misinterpreted. At every stage, Western decision-makers failed to learn lessons from experience and sought to return to "business as usual with the Kremlin".[32] Moscow exploited this Western weakness to its advantage.

The era of complacency is now over. The most important result of Russia's war in Ukraine is a change in awareness. There can be no return to business as usual with Russia in the short or medium term, even when Putin is no longer in the Kremlin. But the change in Western thinking is not yet permanent. Divisions are visible within and between countries over the war. In particular, a realistic and comprehensive assessment of the threat Russia poses to NATO is still lacking. The biggest question is the timeframe in which Russia can regenerate its military power once fighting stops in Ukraine. At this point it can pose a renewed threat to Ukraine, to other neighboring countries (such as in the Caucasus or Central Asia), or to the countries of the Baltic Sea region.

Russia's Capabilities

The war in Ukraine has tested Russian military capability and operational art. After severe initial setbacks, Russia succeeded in building substantial defensive fortifications protecting its occupied territories. However, the verdict is mostly negative. So far, Russia has failed to establish air superiority. It failed to build an accurate intelligence picture of its adversary. Its command and control (C2) structures are divided and ineffective, graphically highlighted by the mutiny and subsequent demise of Yevgeny Prigozhin, former head of the Wagner Group private military company (PMC). Ukraine has learned faster and fared better. Russia's performance has been impressive chiefly in the ability of ill-led, ill-supplied, ill-equipped, and ill-trained soldiers to withstand hardship.

However, the current conflict is a sandbox. It involves Russia's air force or navy only to a small extent; it takes place in limited geographical confines. It does not provide

Photo: Practical firearms training with motorised rifle units continues in Kaliningrad region.
Credit: Russian Ministry of Defence.

immediate lessons about how Russia would conduct military (and subthreshold) operations against NATO countries which are peer competitors, or technologically more advanced ones.[33] More work is needed to establish common threat perceptions across the alliance and build a commensurate strategy and plan.

The authors' discussions with intelligence analysts confirm the most pessimistic estimates in the think tank community.[34] Answers to the reconstitution question range from "never" (if Russia sustains a catastrophic military defeat and descends into political chaos) to an alarming three to five years depending on the platforms and capabilities in question.[35] This period would involve force reconstitution (in particular of Russia's land forces) as well as reequipment, procurement, and overall recapitalization. Clearly, Russia has expended colossal stocks in Ukraine and suffered huge damage to its human resources. But intelligence estimates struggle to assess the effects of sanctions on the Russian military supply chain. Russia has built a war economy while NATO countries are still searching for a commercial model that corresponds to the new military necessity.

The debate about how fast Russia can rebuild its force and recapitalize its military equipment is ongoing. Whether it can reequip in a mere three to five years or up to a decade, Russia remains a threat to NATO interests.[36] Western analysis will require more detailed and unified assessments of precisely in which domains and with what

capabilities the Russian armed forces can still contest Western military superiority — whether in the conventional realm or asymmetric capabilities.

The political will to rebuild Russia's forces appears undiminished, just as high-value capabilities — nuclear forces, integrated air defense systems, asymmetric capabilities — remain almost untouched. These, and especially long-range missile systems, are what Kremlin decision-makers would use in a conflict with NATO. In this context the key comparator is that few believe that the alliance's European members will regain full-scale territorial defense capability, after decades of neglect, within the next 10 years.[37]

The particular concern is Russia's ability to threaten the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.[38] Despite the enlargement of NATO to include Finland and Sweden, the geographical position of the Baltic states creates unusually difficult problems for defense and deterrence. Longstanding shortcomings on the escalation ladder, difficulties in reinforcement, and inadequate stockpiles will not be remedied quickly. NATO must also manage the risk of potential spillover to other theaters, including the North Atlantic, Arctic, and North Pacific.

Given the restoration of capability, the next question is whether Russia has the risk appetite for a military or other confrontation with NATO. The stand-out aspects of the threat accentuated by the war are:

- conventional escalation (horizontal and vertical)
- nuclear/strategic threats
- sub-conventional tools/cross-domain coercion

Answers begin with an analysis of Russia's motives. These are not mutually exclusive and can be self-reinforcing. They include:

- a neo-imperial, post-colonial outlook, which treats neighboring countries as the "near abroad," a predetermined sphere of influence
- fears, real or feigned, of a NATO military buildup on Russia's borders
- an attempt to recast European security in a way more favorable to Russian interests
- the desire to weaken NATO and US credibility in Europe
- Putin's personal "legacy moment" as the leader who restored Russia's great-power status[39]
- an identity project for Russia, shaping the country's self-image as a bastion of socially conservative, Orthodox Christian values, necessarily militarized in response to Western pressure[40]

Defeat or stalemate in Ukraine will not necessarily diminish any of these patriotic imperatives.

Furthermore, Western frameworks of analysis may offer little help in predicting Russian behavior. NATO has greatly improved its indicators and warnings efforts focused on Russia since 2014. UK and US intelligence in particular were fully cognizant of the impending offensive against Ukraine in February 2022. Yet allies and partners were in many cases skeptical about the nature of the threat and the Kremlin's intentions. Russian behavior often appears irrational and counterproductive from a Western mindset. For example, Swedish and Finnish NATO membership are a severe strategic setback for Russia.[41] So are rising defense spending, the consolidation of transatlantic ties, and the end of a decades-long Kremlin effort to sell natural gas to Europe. Seen through a Kremlin lens, none of these issues matter against the factors outlined above.

Some believe that the war in Ukraine has nonetheless diminished the wider threat.[42] At the time of this study's publication, the Kremlin has not overtly attacked supply lines through Poland and other countries. That suggests that NATO's deterrence, at least in a narrow sense, is credible (although Poland has arrested Russian saboteurs who were allegedly tasked with blowing up railway lines carrying military shipments to Ukraine).[43] At any rate, Russia is now arguably weaker than it was in February 2022. It failed to fulfill its prime aims of a speedy victory and regime change in Ukraine, dealing a heavy blow to Putin's reputation for good decision-making. It incurred other diplomatic, economic, military, and political damage.

But a weaker Russia is dangerous too. Either under the current regime, or post-Putin, the Kremlin may prove to have a higher, "roll-the-dice" risk appetite.[44] Particularly if the Kremlin senses weakness in NATO, the temptation to avenge defeat in Ukraine (or, less likely, consolidate a partial victory) will be strong. From the Kremlin's point of view, the pluses of confrontation may outweigh the minuses. The Russian leadership finds a hostile external environment a useful backdrop to its domestic policies. An ongoing national security emergency allows the Kremlin to depict and prosecute critics as self-indulgent or outright treasonous, and to operate a lucrative war economy in which property rights and other legal protections are brushed aside.[45] It would be rash, therefore, to believe that a postwar Russian leadership would rule out military confrontation with NATO.

This assessment is controversial. Yet it is sobering to note how wide of the mark complacent alliance predictions and assessments of Russian capabilities have been in previous years and decades. Expectations of Russian prowess and Ukrainian defeat proved equally misplaced. NATO needs a bottom-up reassessment of the Russian threat based on a deep understanding of Russia's strategic culture and operational doctrine, and the likely trajectory postwar (and perhaps post-Putin).

Photo: Russian artillerymen perform combat coordination trainings in the Russia's polar region.
Credit: Russian Ministry of Defense

Views differ sharply, for example, about the likelihood and implications of a period of disorder (smuta in Russian) in a post-Putin era. Countries neighboring Russia regard these eras as broadly beneficial, with the advantages of Russian weakness outweighing the risk. "Russia is already a failed state: we shouldn't worry about it becoming one," a Polish interlocutor told the authors.[46] Countries farther West prioritize stability, to the point that they might be willing to offer a new leadership in Moscow concessions in the hope of forestalling full-blown disintegration, outright dictatorship, or the capture of Russia into China's orbit.

The main point is that NATO cannot remove these threats, it can only learn to mitigate and minimize them. Regardless of whether Russia is a "declining power," the Kremlin remains for the foreseeable future a nuclear, conventional, and sub-conventional threat to NATO.[47] Furthermore, existing agreements with Russia, notably the NATO-Russia Founding Act, are now null and void. They can no longer be used as an argument for reconsidering posture, resources, and alliance objectives toward the Kremlin.

NATO must "get Russia right."[48] How far the alliance has succeeded in that is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Two: NATO's Response

- Deterrence by denial, deterrence by resilience, deterrence by direct and collective cost imposition, deterrence in the information operations domain, and tailored deterrence vis-à-vis the full range of potential threats will be critical if NATO countries are to have an edge over their competitors and enemies.

- The ongoing war in Ukraine exemplifies the importance of innovation and adaptation in developing, integrating, and using new technologies in warfare, including commercial and dual-use systems.

- As a result of climate change, Russia's remilitarization of the Arctic, and the accession of Finland and soon Sweden into NATO, the Arctic region's impact on European security will continue to grow.

- The varying prioritization between the Baltic and Black Sea regions was an asymmetrical eastern flank deterrence effort by the alliance.[49] Russia may have perceived this as an opportunity.

- The security of the Black Sea will depend heavily on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, and the alliance needs to have a proper strategy toward the region. This must include enforcing freedom of access and trade in the Black Sea, including the Sea of Azov.

- As NATO adapts to the changing security environment and strengthens its defense and deterrence, it must avoid "self-deterrence." This will require the alliance to abandon the idea that provoking the Kremlin spells disaster.

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas in 2014, NATO at its Wales Summit in 2014 adopted the Readiness Action Plan. Adaptation measures for long-term changes to NATO force and command structure included an enhanced NATO Response Force (NRF), a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) under the NRF umbrella encompassing around 5,000 troops with some of its elements to be ready for deployment within 48 hours. In addition, the allies pledged to strengthen national cyber defenses, recognizing cyberspace as a new operational domain.

Additionally, allies added six multinational NATO C2 centers to facilitate the rapid deployment of the VJTF and allied follow-on forces units.[50] At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, the allies committed to enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) with four multinational battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Multinational and combat-ready in nature, these battle groups were at the time the biggest reinforcement of NATO's collective defense in a generation and led to a significant reinvigoration of NATO's deterrence posture. The alliance also developed a tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in Bulgaria and Romania.

Photo: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (C) during a European summit of EU countries' leaders to discuss Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and continued EU support to the country. Also discussed were the economy, security, defence, migration and external relations. Credit: Jonas Roosens/ANP.

None of this was enough. Four months into Russia's full-scale invasion, NATO heads of state and government therefore endorsed a new Strategic Concept, the first since 2010, during the alliance's summit in Madrid in June 2022. The 2022 Strategic Concept reinvigorates the strength and unity of NATO and refocuses the alliance on defense and deterrence, reaffirming its founding purpose by returning to the pre-2010 tradition of presenting the core pillar of collective defense as the key responsibility.

The right mix of both the tactical-technical (training of forces) and political-strategic (political messaging, deterrence, and defense planning) approaches is crucial for NATO to reinforce deterrence.[51] Russia poses a military threat that cannot be defended against with the current NATO eFP in Poland and the Baltic countries. This is essentially a tripwire approach to indicate to Russia that, were it to invade alliance territory, it would be at war with NATO, and thus deter Russian land grabs. The concept behind a tripwire approach is no longer appropriate. The war in Ukraine makes clear the very high costs involved in regaining lost territory. Allies pledged to "defend every inch" of NATO territory with a shift in NATO's military posture.[52] No ally wants to experience the destruction and loss involved in a war of liberation on its territory.[53]

© OpenStreetMap contributors

	NATO Member		Partnership for Peace		NATO Ratification Process
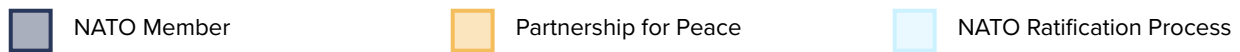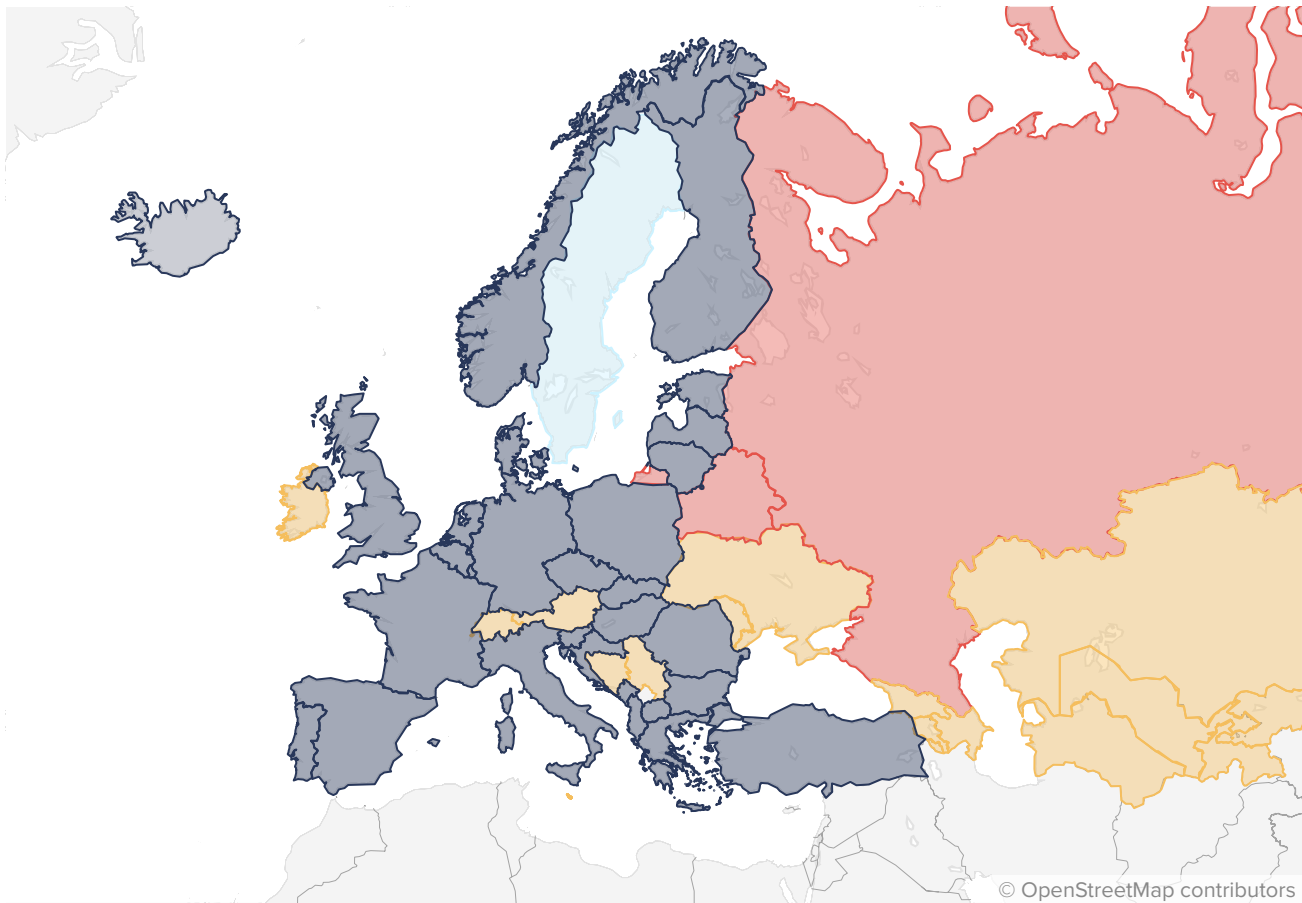
Map created by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine has thus revolutionized NATO military strategy, moving the organization to a more capable, war-fighting alliance. This approach calls for more troops based permanently along the Russian border; more integration of US, NATO, and other national war plans; more military spending; and more specific requirements for allies, including types of forces and equipment to fight (including pre-assigned plans).[54]

Conventional deterrence measures agreed to in Vilnius included:

- Three new regional plans to defend NATO allies on all flanks, along with new C2 arrangements.

- The eight eFP battle groups (which includes the four battle groups agreed to at the 2016 Warsaw Summit) "are now in place" and the ambition to scale up to brigade-sized units "where and when required" remains. Before the summit, Canada offered to double its contingent in Latvia,[55] adding 1,200 troops, while Germany confirmed it would send a permanent brigade of up to 4,000 troops to Lithuania in the future.[56]

- Enhancements were made to NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) posture, including rotating modern air defense systems across the eastern flank and increasing readiness. To further strengthen air exercises and activity, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania also signed a Declaration of Cooperation on cross-border airspace management.[57]

This marks a far stronger focus by NATO on conventional military forces at the strategic level. The alliance is strengthening its forward defense with an increase in forward-deployed combat forces. Some of the existing multinational battle groups will shift toward brigade-size units, but only "where and when required." Those brigades are to be supported by credible rapidly available reinforcements, pre-positioned equipment, and enhanced C2. The commitment also envisages the United States increasing its forces on the eastern flank, which includes a brigade combat team in Romania and additional rotational deployments to the Baltics.

Second, the Vilnius Summit set in motion a transformation of the NRF. This includes an increase in NATO high-readiness forces from 40,000 to 300,000, an adjustment based on a new NATO Force Model (NFM).[58] This force model consists of two tiers of high-readiness forces — 100,000 forces at 10 days or less readiness to deploy (as opposed to the previous model of 40,000 at 15 days), and a further 200,000 forces at 30 days or less. Progress on the NFM appears slow — the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Adm. Rob Bauer, cautiously admitted before the Vilnius Summit that NATO is "working towards those numbers" — and no detail is available yet on the new reaction force.[59]

For the first time since the Cold War, NATO is planning for "forces pre-assigned to defend specific allies." These forces will train and exercise in the countries where they are pre-assigned to be deployed in times of crisis.[60] This will allow them to learn how to operate together with the home forces stationed in the respective member country. In the long term, allies will enhance their contingency planning and interoperability and strengthen their ability to defend and protect all allies, including those in the eastern part of the alliance.

Third, allies agreed to pre-position military equipment, stockpiles of military supplies, and facilities in frontline countries and to complement this with forward-deployed capabilities, including air defense units, strengthened C2, and preassigned forces. In addition to the reinforcement boost, a new set of plans —regional, domain, and across the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR's) Area of Responsibility (AOR) — are in final development. The goal is executable plans with the appropriate forces assigned to deter and defend the depth and breadth of NATO territory.

Measures to deter nonmilitary hybrid threats included new resilience objectives; a new Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure; a new cyber defense concept and Virtual Cyber Incident Support Capability; a NATO Space Centre of Excellence in France; and a commitment to protect energy infrastructure and secure energy supplies to military forces. NATO also opened a new Centre of Excellence for Climate Change and Security in Montreal, Canada.

Russia's war in Ukraine has had ripple effects across the whole of the SACEUR's AOR.

Nordic-Baltic

Finland and soon to be Sweden's NATO membership is not simply a political victory, but a change to the entire framework of northeastern European security.[61] The five Nordic-Baltic allies in Northern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and Finland), along with the regional defense heavyweight Poland, share broadly similar perceptions of the Russian threat. Finland and Sweden joining the alliance will allow for integrated control of the region and enhance the defense of the Baltic states. It will bring valuable new capabilities, including additional advanced aircraft and submarines.[62] It also shapes responsibility, burden sharing, and decision-making power on future developments (enhancement of forward presence, development, and implementation of regional plans, etc.).[63]

Belarus is isolated from the European security architecture.[64] But its role as a regional threat is increasing.[65] Though Belarus has so far refrained from using its own forces in Russia's war in Ukraine, Russia used its neighbor as an invasion platform, and is now starting to station nuclear weapons there. The Wagner Group mercenaries involved in the failed coup in Russia have also been reported as redeploying there.

The Arctic and the High North

As a result of climate change, Russia's remilitarization of the Arctic, and the accession of Finland and soon Sweden into NATO, the Arctic region's impact on European security will continue to grow.[66] The only non-NATO Arctic country is Russia, which describes itself as an "Arctic civilization" and "hyperboreal" country. Russia continues to expand its Arctic presence.[67] Over the past decade, Russia has increased its military presence, reopened long-closed military installations, and modernized its facilities. In 2021, the Northern Fleet was reorganized and upgraded to become Russia's fifth military district, and in August 2022, Russia announced a new naval doctrine emphasizing the importance of the Arctic.[68]

The future of Arctic governance remains constrained by the exclusion of Russia from the Arctic Council in the wake of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine as well as by the absence of a dedicated forum to discuss military security issues.

Photo: Finnish artillery units fire Howitzers At Rovajärvi exercise area In northern Finland. Credit: NATO

The Black Sea

The Black Sea is where everything is tested: freedom of navigation, hybrid threats, and attacks on democracy.[69] At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO prioritized the Baltic Sea region by deploying eFP battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland while applying tFP measures for Romania and Bulgaria. The tFP included a more ad hoc approach to improving mission command, regional air policing, and exercises. This sought to strengthen coastal radar systems, establish new land force headquarters, and expand US capabilities at Romania's Mihail Kogălniceanu air base, but the tFP was not a coherent approach.

The varying prioritization between the Baltic and Black Sea regions was an asymmetrical eastern flank deterrence effort by the alliance.[70] Russia may have perceived this as an opportunity. One aim of Russia's war in Ukraine is to maximize its access to and control of the Black Sea, in which Crimea is key.[71] (Moscow's original goal in 2022 was to take over all of Ukraine's Black Sea coast and create a land bridge to the Russian-occupied separatist Transnistria, a territory in Moldova). Russia still constrains Ukrainian access to the Black Sea.

As Russia takes time to reconstitute its forces, NATO has the opportunity to increase its presence in the Black Sea and in the Caucasus/Central Asia region.[72] The security of the Black Sea will depend heavily on the outcome of the war in Ukraine, and the alliance needs to have a proper strategy toward the region.[73] This must include enforcing freedom of access and trade in the Black Sea, including the Sea of Azov.

The Mediterranean

Russia has become an important player in the Eastern Mediterranean over the past 20 years, setting up a military presence in North Africa and Syria, including naval facilities and access points across the region. This presence impacts the threat perception of the southern flank of NATO. At the same time, the war in Ukraine has led the alliance to shift its primary focus to the eastern flank.[74]

Despite this, Russia continues to maintain a significant presence and influence in the Mediterranean. This is evident not least in North Africa where Russian PMCs continue to play a notable role. NATO will need to monitor looming threats on the southern flank. This should encompass improving its deterrent capabilities, including intelligence sharing, domain awareness, freedom of navigation exercises, among others. NATO also needs to maintain awareness of, and wherever possible contest and counter, Russian presence and influence in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Best of the Rest

At NATO's Madrid Summit in 2022, allies agreed that NATO enlargement has been a success and that the security of aspirant countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine) is closely interconnected with allied security. NATO membership is cheaper than other security guarantees.[75] Allies agreed to maintain an interest-driven, flexible, and focused approach to this core task in order to address shared threats and challenges, and to adapt to changing geopolitical realities.[76] NATO will struggle to promote its interests and influence in the Central Asian region, where it has at times been considered more of a problem than a solution.[77]

Critical commitments, tailored to the respective partners' needs and aspirations, include:

- strengthening political dialogue and cooperation with aspirants, assisting them with enhancing their resilience against malign interference
- building capable and resilient institutions
- increasing practical support to ensure that partners are able to defend and secure their borders
- establishing economic security that enhances their ability to invest in emerging technologies and strengthen the defense industrial base

The war in Ukraine has made clear for the first time that this is about defense, rather than just European integration. "We must find a path for securing our vulnerable partners."[78] This pillar also envisages the alliance increasing cooperation and

The Future of European Security

Map of NATO Operational Locations
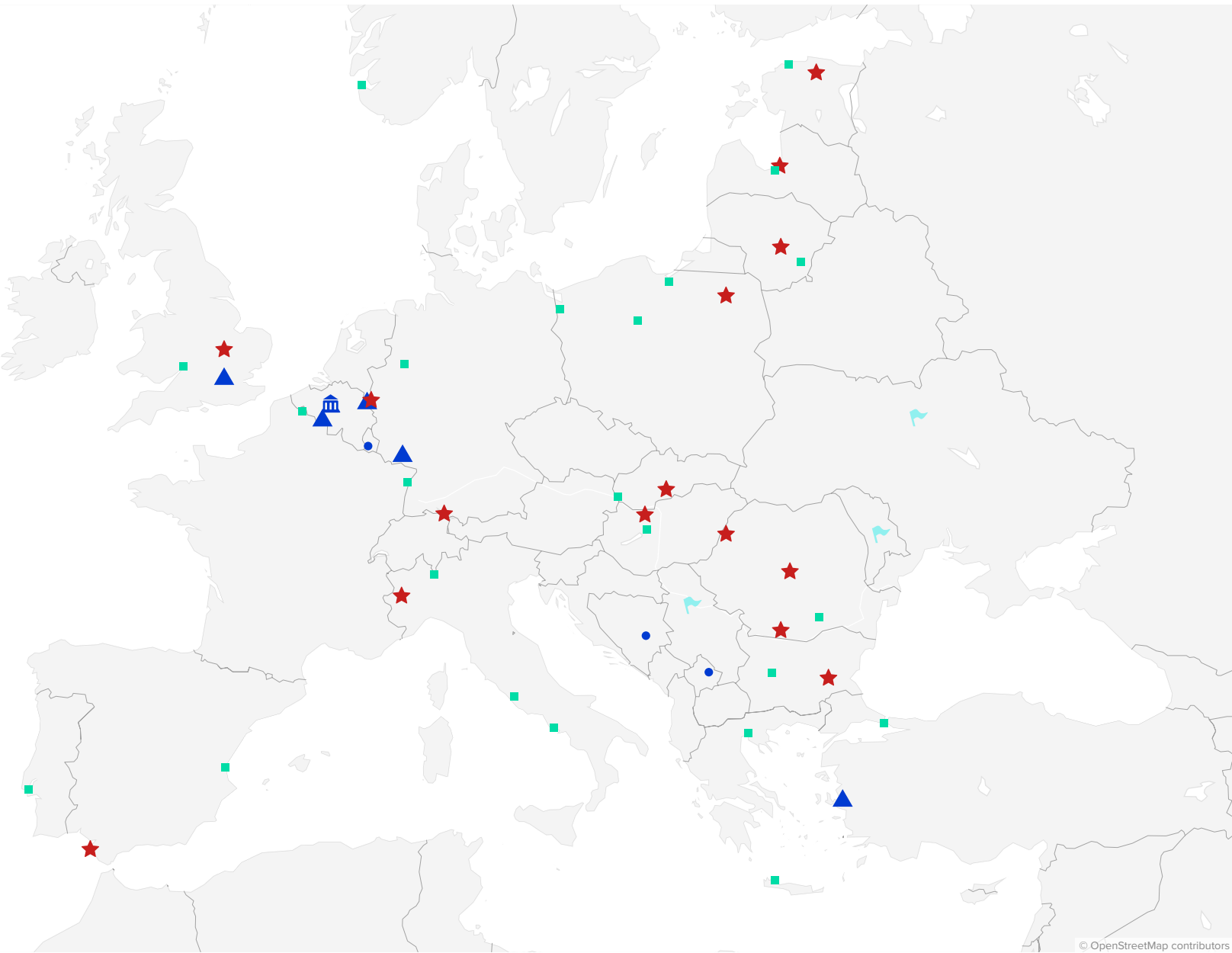
Map created by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

🏛 NATO Headquarters		⭐ Deterrence and Defense Operations
🔺 NATO Base		🟩 Civilian and Military Structures
🔵 NATO Operational Hub		🏳 Official Diplomatic Mission

Photo: Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, with Sweden, 12 JULY 2023 Left to right: President Voldymyr Zelenskyy (Ukraine) with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and US President Joe Biden. Credit: NATO

dialogue with countries in its broader neighborhood and across the globe, remaining open to engagement with any country or organization, when doing so could bolster mutual security.

During the post-Cold War era, NATO's main focus was on non-Article 5 crisis management (i.e., allies' military engagements in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, the Sahel, and Syria) with collective defense and deterrence taking a back seat. The 2022 Strategic Concept sought to rebalance the three core tasks, placing defense and deterrence front and center in adapting the alliance to a new era of competition.[79] Crisis management and prevention remain critical for the southern flank, in particular. The threats of terrorism, organized crime, proliferation of small weapons, and migration will continue to destabilize and threaten security in the region. In addition, Russia's war in Ukraine not only threatens Eastern Europe and the Black Sea, but is having spillover effects in the Mediterranean region, including on energy prices and food security.

The alliance should, therefore, maintain its investments in crisis response, preparedness, and management through regular exercises and leveraging its ability to coordinate, conduct, sustain, and support multinational crisis response operations.[80] The EU will continue to have an important role in civilian and small-

scale military crisis response operations and is an important partner for NATO.[81] The relationship between NATO and the EU, and need for greater alliance cohesion that it exemplifies, is considered in detail later in this report.

Even if they are belated, all these measures are commendable. The question is how they match the gap outlined above between Russia's ability to reconstitute its military in as little as three to five years and the decade or more that European allies will need to rebuild their defenses. Combined with perceived uncertainties over the US commitment to Europe, this gap offers a strategic opportunity for a ruthless and decisive Russian leadership in the years leading to 2035. Recommendations on how to deter the Kremlin from exploiting such an opportunity are listed in chapter five.

All forms of deterrence require credibility, capability, and communication.[82] These are evidently lacking. The fact that Russia attacked Ukraine rather than (say) Latvia is a tribute to the deterrent power of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and the US nuclear guarantee to Europe. Yet even this success is partial. Russia conducts extensive subthreshold operations in NATO countries, including lethal sabotage, assassinations, and election interference and subversion. The combination of sanctions, protests, and expulsions that some of these attacks have prompted have clearly not deterred Kremlin decision-makers from mounting new ones.

Unfortunately, after more than three decades of strategic neglect, the West is not ready for a serious discussion on deterrence, nuclear and otherwise. Since the 1990s, the security focus has been on discretionary crisis responses rather than a longer-term strategic approach to an existential threat. Compounding this, allies disinvested in defense and allowed forces, capabilities, and the underlying industrial base to erode. To contain Russia and counter China (and others), the alliance now needs a coherent, comprehensive medium- and long-term strategy.

Deterrence by denial, deterrence by resilience, deterrence by direct and collective cost imposition, deterrence in the information operations domain, and tailored deterrence vis-à-vis the full range of potential threats will be critical if NATO countries are to have an edge over their competitors and enemies. NATO's current deterrence posture can be viewed in three tiers: nuclear, conventional, and hybrid.[83] In the conventional tier, Russia's capabilities are changing. Because Russia's conventional land forces are so devastated and its stockpiles of missiles depleted, Moscow may pivot to an increased reliance on nuclear and hybrid threats.[84] Changes in the character of war, regionalization, and the division of labor have become increasingly relevant.

However the top priority is conventional deterrence against Russia, investing in military capabilities able to contest, disrupt, and disable Russian asymmetric

advantages — its long-range missile systems, integrated air defense systems, electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, offensive cyber capabilities, and space-based systems. Improving technological capabilities will be key.

Increased forward defense is also necessary, notably through a further strengthening of forward presence battle groups and air forces, improved IAMD, pre-positioning of equipment, full implementation of NATO's new set of plans and the promised new NATO Force Model of 300,000 plus high-readiness forces, and a return to more forward-based forces in Europe, including in Germany.

Finally, deterrence depends on better communication, internal and external. If effective defense and deterrence is the priority, then the primary goal should be influencing the adversary's behavior. All of this must be accomplished while avoiding "self-deterrence." The first step in implementing this approach is to abandon the idea that provoking the Kremlin spells disaster.

Among the key lines of effort for NATO are:

- establishing a robust indicators and warnings program across all elements of national power and being able to deny that situational awareness to its adversaries

- building the demonstrated military ability and political will to impose a range of unacceptable costs on an adversary, and infrastructure, pre-positioning, stockpiles, and an industrial base able to sustain the imposition of costs longer than an adversary

- ensuring the ability to pose to an adversary a plethora of complex dilemmas across domains and geographies simultaneously (e.g., if Russia attacked allies in the northeast of the alliance, allies could also counterattack in the southeast, or in Asia).

- ability to make political and military decisions at a faster rate than its adversaries

A conventional military attack may be backed by threats of nuclear escalation.[85] The lack of military-to-military communication channels and hotlines, compounded by a potential Russian shift to launch-on-warning, increases the risks of this. Nuclear weapons are rarely talked about in public in NATO countries. But they are frequently discussed in Russia, not least as it deploys nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Belarus.[86] Particular Russian sensitivities include the collapse or destruction of its multilayered air defense network.[87]

NATO countries have no ability to promote democracy directly inside Russia. What they can do is protect their own societies against attack. Western countries should be prepared for the consequences of increased isolation of Russia: that it

Photo: British infantry advance across open ground as part of a section attack drill during Exercise Engineer Thunder 23. Credit: NATO

becomes a beleaguered, disruptive but nevertheless still significant presence on the international stage. The new focus must be primarily on containment.

The strategic patience of the Cold War should be the template here. If the Kremlin is for its own reasons determined to pursue a policy of confrontation, it is futile and dangerous to promote a different future for Russia. Far better to restrain the Kremlin's decision-makers by limiting the quantity and quality of their options.

Nuclear posture needs a rethink.

Talking Nukes

The arms control construct established over the past 60 years, a centerpiece of European security, has largely collapsed. "Nuclear and conventional agreements on arms control, disarmament, and risk reduction have been shattered by Russia."[88] And the prospects for arms control in the near term are bleak. The trilateral dynamic (the United States, Russia, and China) adds another layer of complexity to the challenge. Nuclear threats by major powers are back on the map in a way they have not been for decades. The world is arguably on the cusp of a new nuclear age where reaffirming, strengthening, and, where needed, rethinking the rules of the game and how to prevent nuclear use is critical.[89]

In the years before robust arms control with the emergence of treaties, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, and other arms control apparatus including conventional arms control, the risk of arms miscalculation and nuclear competition and threats dictated nuclear powers to invest heavily in security. As the alliance mandates base-level defense spending at 2% and higher gross domestic product (GDP) for members, the United States and other nuclear powers were spending anywhere from 6% (the United States) to 17% (the Soviet Union) of their GDP on defense prior to the implementation of bilateral and multilateral agreements.[90]

But even as the future of arms control structures is in doubt, the foundation of the alliance's deterrent is unchanged: a powerful and ready nuclear force; a survivable nuclear command, control, and communications system; and a responsive nuclear weapons infrastructure. Nuclear deterrence is vital to addressing strategic threats and ensuring the alliance can confront unwanted behavior with confidence and at lower levels of violence.

The alliance and partnerships remain the greatest strength. NATO's current nuclear posture is broadly adequate but could be strengthened with better nuclear burden-sharing agreements across the alliance.[91] Unlike the conventional security and collective defense measures of the alliance, members are not required to participate in the nuclear-sharing group. Members can opt out of the nuclear mission of NATO, exposing the alliance to not speaking with one voice on all aspects of the NATO mission, resulting in fissures of alliance unity. This line of separation between pillars of alliance strength hinders the alliance's ability to cohesively and collaboratively integrate plans, deterrence options, exercises, etc. The strength and steadfast commitment to deterring threats, in all domains and synchronized, must be the primary focus and foundation going forward. This integration of conventional and nuclear domains by the alliance will decrease risk, increase deterrence, and be an integral basis for any future attempts to negotiate and rebuild an arms control architecture by coming from a position of strength.

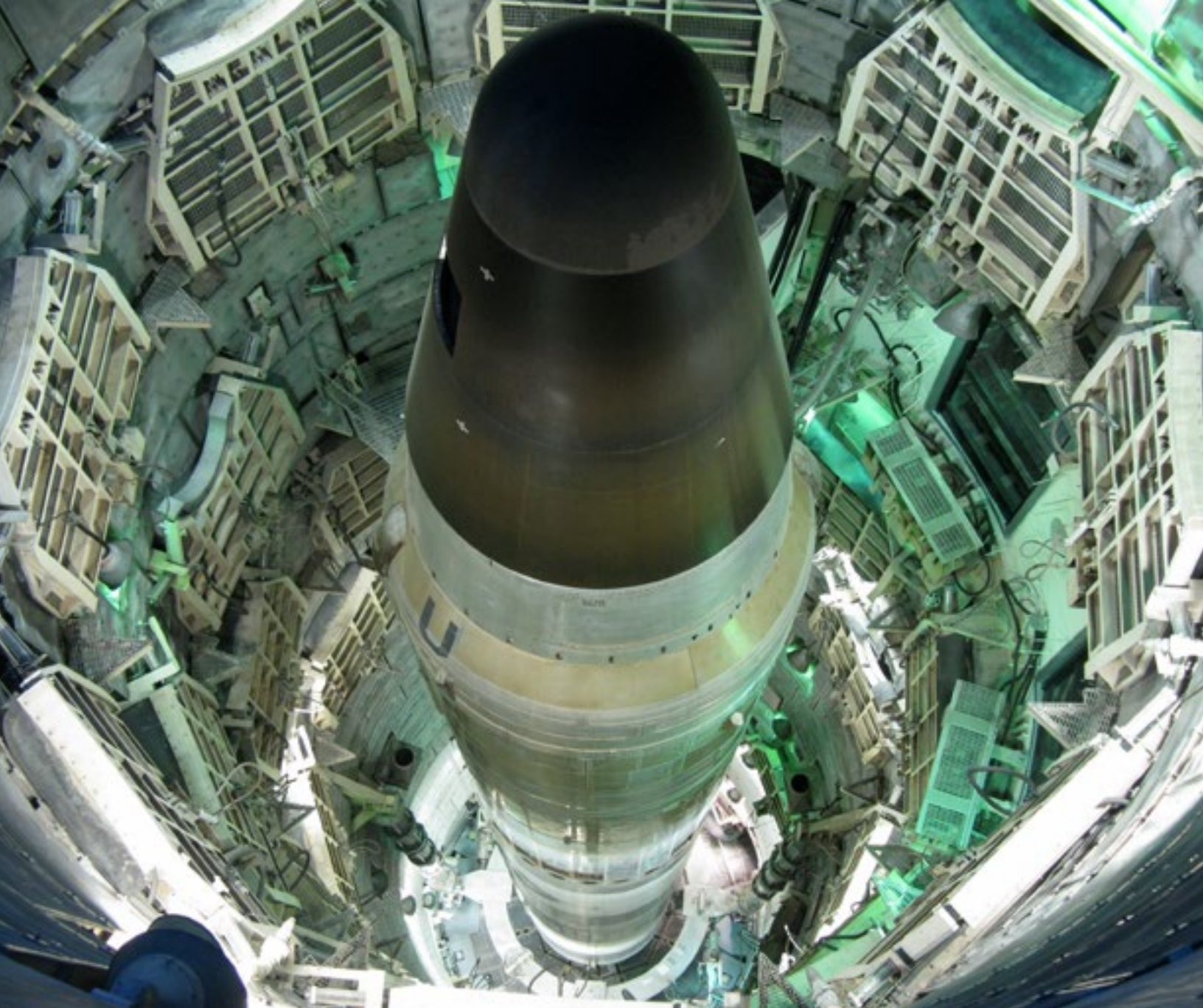Photo: A view from above the silo housing a Titan II missile at the Titan Missile Museum in Green Valley, Arizona. Courtesy photo via DVIDS.

Regardless of distaste for the Kremlin regime's domestic and foreign policies, alliance countries should be willing to place renewed focus on strategic arms control. Strategic stability — avoiding nuclear war by accident or miscalculation — is more than ever critical.

Measures to improve NATO's deterrence are outlined in this report's recommendations section. These and other measures could deter a conventional or nuclear attack from Russia. But they will not necessarily prevent attacks below the threshold of armed force. These subthreshold threats have been the hallmark of the Kremlin's policy toward NATO countries, and it is to this topic that the report now turns.

Addressing Subthreshold Threats

Subthreshold threats, sometimes confusingly named "hybrid warfare," do not sit easily in NATO's in-basket. As well as the much talked about "fake news" or information operations, they include:[92]

- economic coercion

- buying political influence through bribery and donations

- legal and physical intimidation of critics

- assassinations and sabotage

- election interference

- cyberattacks, particularly the hacking and leaking of private communications

- organized criminal activity

- migration, including weaponized migration

- public health crises and associated disinformation

- political polarization

- exploitation of ethnic, linguistic, regional, and cultural divisions

NATO countries have mostly failed to deter these attacks and have been slow to deal with them. Indeed, in many countries resilience to them has mostly been deteriorating. The COVID-19 pandemic, the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the effects of climate change, and other factors have increased internal economic, political, psychological, and social stresses. Fiscal constraints, including the need for higher defense spending, have squeezed other budgets, including those for long-term infrastructure, storage and stockpiles, and public spending.

National "resilience" is already implied in the requirement of the Washington Treaty's Article 3 for member states to "maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." However, this requires elaboration. The concept of resilience continues to be open to differing interpretations among allies. Adding resilience as a fourth core task would emphasize the need for allies to define and improve resilience.[93]

Resilience should not be seen as static. An important aspect is future-proofing, with an emphasis on flexibility, agility, and innovation. It involves whole-of-government and whole-of-society participation, including messaging, training, exercises, and gaming. Enhanced partnerships with a broad range of organizations, including the EU, are key. Seen through the prism of resilience, national security is sustained by, and contributes to, social cohesion and the democratic process. NATO's future mission, therefore, encompasses nontraditional challenges to environmental, technological, and economic security. Energy resilience, for example, is not solely a matter of reducing dependence on Russian hydrocarbons and Chinese critical minerals. It will also help cushion the transition to net zero.

Hardening critical national infrastructure (energy, finance, data and telecoms, transportation networks) is not just a business continuity issue to be dealt with by managers, regulators, and insurers. As part of NATO's defense and deterrence mission, the alliance needs deep insights into vulnerabilities that may affect individual member states, and that have cross-border implications.

It is tempting, but mistaken, to leave the response to each of these threats to the national authorities in the countries concerned. This approach has two shortcomings. One is that the visible threats are not necessarily the important ones. The other is that the threats frequently transcend national borders. To cope with subthreshold threats, the alliance needs a cross-border, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approach, cutting across all elements of power and all civilian and military efforts.[94] Specific recommendations are outlined in chapter five of this report.

This more holistic approach is clear from the US approach of integrated deterrence, a concept that underscores the need for all methods of deterrence on a continuum. Articulated by the 2022 US NSS, this envisions a combination

A New Vision for the Transatlantic Alliance

Map of NATO Operational Locations
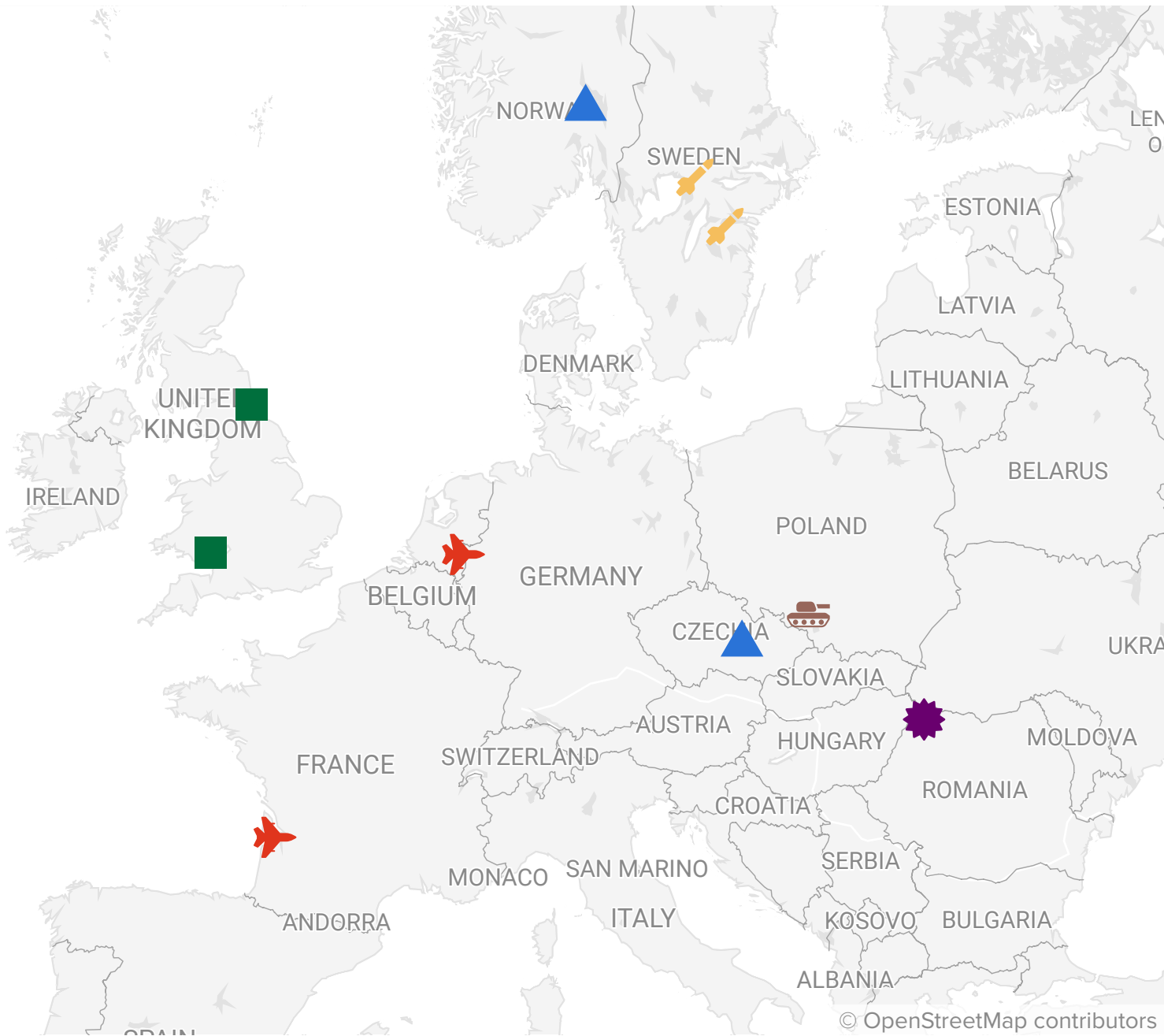
Map created by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

■ Artillery and Ammunition Production	▲ Ammunition Production	✈ Aircraft Production
NLAW Production	Tank Repair	Maintenance and Logistics Center

of capabilities to deter potential adversaries from engaging in hostile activities. Integrated deterrence includes integration across domains (conventional, nuclear, cyber, space, informational), across regions, and across a spectrum of conflicts. It also envisages integration across national tools and instruments and integration with allies and partners (interoperability, joint capability development, competitive posture planning, coordinated diplomatic and economic approaches). Alignment on integrated deterrence will help the United States and its allies effectively counter Russia and China and the threats NATO is to face in the upcoming decade (including from countries like Iran, North Korea, etc.).

A Defense Industrial Revolution

Following the Cold War, European allies allowed their defense industries to fragment and erode, anticipating that there would be no major war on the European continent for the foreseeable future. To move toward a model of deterrence by preparedness versus deterrence by reputation now means increasing and enhancing defense capabilities, and investing in research and development for new ones. As one senior Romanian official stated, "the new world order will belong to those who master knowledge and new technology."[95]

After years of neglect, European governments now broadly recognize the need for a robust defense industrial base, responsive and adequate production capacities, and resilient and secure supply chains. French President Emmanuel Macron has spoken of the need for a "wartime economy."[96] Allies will need to bridge the differences between their respective governments and the defense industry, and invest in capital, training, innovation, and financing.[97] The Defense Production Action Plan agreed to at the Vilnius Summit has potential to enhance unity and foster a sustainable defense industrial capacity across the Alliance.[98] The war in Ukraine has also shed light on Europe's overreliance on imports of critical raw materials, which the EU began addressing by formalizing a proposal for a European Chips Act, reducing European dependence on foreign supplies.[99]

Despite the consensus within the alliance for increased defense spending to backfill stockpiles, increase capabilities, and modernize, the size and timeframe of the increased budgets is contested.[100] The quality of spending matters too. European allies spend too much on salaries and civil servants, too little on advanced weaponry. This places great strain on interoperability.

Other shortcomings abound. Production capacity and stockpiles are inadequate.[101] Replenishing equipment that allies provided to Ukraine will take months, and in many cases years. For example, France, which sent 18 Caesar howitzers to Ukraine in the summer of 2022, will need an estimated 18 months to replenish those stocks.[102] This competes with the priority of acquiring new and emerging defense technologies.

Table: Defense Industry Stockpiles

Military stockpiles of NATO member-states and partners in 2023.

Country	Active	Reserve	Main Battle Tanks	Infantry Fighting Vehicle	Artillery	Fighters	Helicopters	Submarines	Major Ships	Other Surface Vessels
Albania	8,000	0	40	17	32	N/A	14	0	0	N/A
Belgium	25,000	5,900	0	19	60	44	23	0	0	N/A
Boznia and Herzegovnia	10,500	6,000	45	0	224	0	2	0	0	N/A
Bulgaria	36,950	3,000	90	160	176	1	22	0	3	N/A
Canada	66,500	34,400	82	550	287	4	16	4	12	2
Croatia	16,700	21,000	74	102	157	1	3	0	0	N/A
Czech Republic	26,600	0	30	227	96	2	53	0	0	N/A
Denmark	15,400	44,200	44	44	50	50	17	0	5	12
Estonia	7,200	17,500	0	44	168	0	0	0	0	2
France	203,250	41,150	215	706	245	3	67	9	N/A	22
Georgia	20,650	0	123	71	240	0	24	0	0	24
Germany	183,150	32,650	321	680	245	3	153	6	11	5
Greece	132,200	289,000	1,228	175	3,526	11	31	10	13	36
Hungary	32,150	20,000	56	121	33	1	28	0	0	0
Iceland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Italy	161,050	17,900	150	434	769	1	60	8	18	16
Latvia	6,600	15,500	3	0	112	0	2	0	0	N/A
Lithuania	23,000	7,100	0	30	118	0	3	0	0	4
Luxembourg	410	0	0	0	6	0	2	0	0	0
Montenegro	2,350	2,800	0	0	135	0	16	0	0	2
Netherlands	33,600	6,000	0	117	122	3	80	4	6	10
Norway	25,400	40,000	36	91	167	45	13	6	4	27
Poland	114,050	0	647	1,567	773	7	73	0	0	0
Portugal	26,700	23,500	37	30	320	2	17	2	5	22
Republic of Macedonia	8,000	4,850	0	11	131	0	1	0	0	0
Romania	71,500	55,000	377	241	1,136	3	53	0	3	24
Slovakia	17,950	0	30	216	60	1	37	0	0	0
Slovenia	6,400	750	14	0	68	0	16	0	0	0
Spain	124,150	14,700	327	225	1,552	7	64	2	11	23
Sweden	14,600	10,000	120	411	357	6	86	5	0	150
Turkey	355,200	378,700	2,378	645	2,760	9	55	12	16	45
United Kingdom	150,350	71,950	227	388	598	8	220	10	20	26
United States of America	1,359,600	817,450	2,645	2,959	5,096	13	128	67	122	89
Ukraine	68,800	400,000	953	770	1,536	6	25	0	0	0

Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

In a new era of warfare, building a competitive technological edge comes with investing in knowledge and new technology. On this score, developing and investing in the NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund (launched in June 2022) "is essential as they will help us access innovation at a pace of the private sector."[103] It will protect innovation ecosystems, set standards, and commit to principles of responsible use.[104] The aim is to provide deep tech, dual-use innovators with funding and a fast track to adapt their technological solutions to defense and security needs. DIANA will allow NATO to develop its technological edge in priority areas, including big-data processing, artificial intelligence (AI), autonomy, quantum, biotechnologies and human enhancement, energy and propulsion, novel materials and advanced manufacturing, hypersonics, and space.[105] To complement this, the NATO Innovation Fund is set to invest €1 billion in early-stage start-ups and other venture capital funds developing dual-use emerging technologies of priority to NATO. Specific recommendations are outlined in chapter five of this report.

The ongoing war in Ukraine exemplifies the importance of innovation and adaptation in developing, integrating, and using new technologies in warfare, including commercial and dual-use systems.

Uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) — or drones — of all kinds have become an indispensable capability for both Ukraine and Russia, performing a vast array of tasks and missions. Their high vulnerability and demand also confirm the need to establish resilient supply chains and scale up industrial production capacity across the alliance to meet future demand. This is where closer and innovative forms of collaboration between the private sector, including civilian tech companies, academia, civil society, and the broader defense environment, can provide a decisive advantage.

From an operational standpoint, the ubiquitous and constant observation provided by UAS has significantly improved tactical situational awareness and created a "transparent battlefield,"[106] complicating the use of maneuver tactics and limiting the ability to achieve and exploit surprise. The integration of drones and precision fires into friendly-use digital targeting applications has dramatically compressed the kill chain to a few minutes and significantly increased the threat for troops from the frontline to the deep rear.[107] These developments offer important lessons for NATO and its members in terms of capability requirements, countermeasures, force structure, and doctrine.

At the same time, the incorporation at scale of AI is reshaping the way intelligence data are collected, processed, and exploited, expanding drones' capabilities and making them resistant to EW, and laying the ground for the deployment of autonomous drone swarms in the near future, among many other effects. Ukraine, for example, has successfully integrated AI in its digitalized C2 architecture and

Photo: German Rheinmetall KZO drone being launched during Iron Wolf II Exercise in Lithuania.
Credit: NATO

targeting process, while Russia has installed AI-powered autonomous functions in its effective Lancet loitering munitions. Moscow is internalizing the lessons emerging from Ukraine and — along with other NATO competitors such as China — will likely channel more and more resources toward the development of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs).

The war in Ukraine has also highlighted the critical role played by EW. Since the early 2010s, Russia has invested significantly in its EW capabilities, which Moscow considers a pivotal, if invisible, component of its deterrence posture vis-à-vis NATO.[108] Indeed, EW allows Russian forces to challenge the alliance by disrupting or denying the use of its technologically superior capabilities, from long-range precision-guided munitions to airborne intelligence radars and satellite communications. Russia's emphasis on EW already emerged during the eight years of its war in the Donbas, and is now extensively applied to its military operations across eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. As sensors, drones, space, and a broader process of digitalization reshape warfare and military capabilities, the electromagnetic spectrum will be a domain of major contestation in any conflict against a peer or near-peer adversary. Therefore, NATO and single allies should take stock of the lessons emerging from Ukraine and prepare their EW capabilities accordingly.

The defense industrial revolution will also benefit from a renewed emphasis by NATO on economic warfare. However, it and other vital elements in conventional and subthreshold defense and deterrence cannot be achieved without the enthusiastic cooperation of the EU. It is to the NATO-EU relationship, and the challenges and opportunities it presents for alliance cohesion, that this report now turns.

Chapter Three: Alliance Cohesion

- Russia's war in Ukraine has underscored Europe's humbling dependence on the United States, ending dreams of "strategic autonomy."

- In its place, Europe must pursue "strategic responsibility," marked by a close but more equal partnership with the United States, prioritization of defense spending and capabilities, and playing to the EU's nonmilitary strengths.

- The geopolitical heart of the European continent has moved to the east and the north, giving more influence to Central and Eastern European, Nordic, and Baltic partners — the "Crescent Coalition" — making the UK's role in European security even more paramount.

- NATO and the EU need better coordination, not necessarily increased cooperation. They are sometimes stronger when they "stick to their own swim lanes."

- Maintaining a shared perception of the long-term threat Russia poses to European security is vital, particularly for those in Western Europe. If Russia is not defeated in Ukraine, another European war will be imminent.

European dreams of "strategic autonomy" or "emancipation" from US leadership have been at the core of the EU's much-touted Common Security and Defence Policy since the 1990s.[109] They also have been one of the most serious obstacles to the alliance's cohesion, the subject of this chapter. Now history has given its verdict.

The hard truth is that, despite belated increases in defense spending, Europe's economic clout is not matched by military weight. European allies, particularly post-Brexit, could not have prevented a Ukrainian defeat without the help of the United States. The nascent European military headquarters, battle groups, and the acronym soup of other bureaucratic initiatives have been revealed as empty posturing. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has, therefore, cemented US leadership, the preeminence of NATO, and the death (at least in military terms) of European strategic autonomy.[110] It heralds a productive and balanced division of labor between the United States and its European allies, and between the EU and NATO as institutions.

European allies combined are bigger in population and economic terms than the United States. Yet it is US taxpayers who continue to shoulder the biggest burden in Europe's defense. A further threat to cohesion is interoperability. The gap between the US military — the most advanced in the world — and the obsolete and underfunded armed forces of its allies is unsustainable. And lastly, differing perceptions about the threat Russia poses to the European continent, both now and in the future, risk fracturing alliance cohesion.

This chapter starts by highlighting four big developments:

- NATO's revitalization and renewed sense of purpose
- the death of European strategic autonomy
- a shifting center of power from Western Europe to the east and north — the so-called Crescent Coalition
- the EU's new role in security and its relations with NATO

NATO Is Stronger and More Unified than Ever

Ukraine has awakened Europe to the threat posed by Russia,[111] and, as a result, the most powerful military alliance on the planet is back — stronger and more unified than ever. Despite Russia's expectations, member states finally realized that Russia presented a threat to the future European — and international — security order. Now, member states largely agree on the alliance's main purpose of collective defense and how it should respond to the threat emanating from Russia.[112]

This newfound unity stands in stark contrast to the alliance's uncertain direction and shrinking budgets in the years following the Cold War. Even the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were considered by some member states as "out of area" issues. Not any more. NATO members no longer dispute the alliance's relevance and US leadership.[113] Although many Europeans feared an imminent US pivot away from Europe and toward Asia, the United States has demonstrated its commitment to European security. But the scale and sustainability of that commitment are still subject to uncertainty, and European concerns have not been fully assuaged.[114]

European Strategic Autonomy Is Dead

The Russian invasion of Ukraine not only cemented US leadership and NATO's mission, it has confirmed that the concept of European strategic autonomy is "dead."[115] In 2022, it was put to the test, and it unequivocally failed,[116] as "strong US leadership was required to pull NATO together, keep it in line, and keep national agendas in check."[117] The United States, as the "only country capable of engaging in a large, long-term war,"[118] and thus the only country with the credibility to deter the Kremlin and other aggressors, has proven to be an indispensable leader in European security.[119]

European mindsets have shifted fundamentally.[120] Policymakers who previously focused on domestic economic and social priorities now back bigger defense budgets, with Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania promising particularly dramatic increases.[121] Finland joined NATO and Sweden is on the cusp of doing so. Denmark ended its opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.[122]

Photo: Polish and German paratroopers shake hands before taking part in a joint drop over Poland.
Credit: NATO

Even the Swiss and Irish are reconsidering their neutrality, leaving Austria, Cyprus, and Malta as the only remaining security laggards.[123]

This enables a change from dreams of "strategic autonomy" toward practical "strategic responsibility."[124] Key features of this will be a close but more equal partnership with the United States, prioritized defense spending and capabilities, and playing to the EU's nonmilitary strengths.

The Rise of the Crescent Coalition

The **geopolitical heart of the European continent has moved to the east and the north** because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, giving more influence to Central and Eastern European partners, as well as to the Baltic and Nordic states,[125] which makes the UK even more paramount to European security. Europe has more at stake in the east now: states that were once outliers, viewed as overly emotional about the prospect of Russian aggression and longtime skeptics of European strategic autonomy, are now nearer the center of gravity.[126] Conversely, the weight of France, Germany, and Italy, seen as foot draggers in the past, may be reduced.[127] The United States will need to support and strengthen these "crescent" countries before they fully take the reins, by supporting capability development, supporting their candidates for leadership positions, and strengthening interoperability.[128] Thanks to the legacy of decades of Soviet rule, these countries are poor relative to their population size; they generally have worse connectivity and infrastructure; they rely on support such as US Foreign Military Financing and other security assistance; and their defense spending choices in the past have sometimes been patchy.[129]

A New Security Role for the European Union

The war in Ukraine marks recognition of the EU as a significant and relevant security actor.[130] This is not wholly new. Since 2008, the EU has played a major and largely successful role in bolstering European energy security, for example. The continent's ability to withstand interruptions in Russian pipeline gas supplies stems directly from the improved storage and interconnection, and diversification of import routes, pioneered by European Energy Commissioners Andris Piebalgs (2004–10) and Günther Oettinger (2010–14), and by the antitrust proceedings brought against Gazprom from 2012 under European Competition Commissioners Joaquín Almunia and Margrethe Vestager. These efforts, often underappreciated in the United States (and the UK), can be seen as the core of the EU's increasingly robust geopolitical outlook. This includes a newly hawkish stance toward China.[131]

Photo: NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg meets with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Credit: NATO

The war in Ukraine marked a change of gear. EU countries have announced around €200 billion in defense spending increases.[132] The EU has provided substantial aid to Ukraine, amounting to €77 billion as of July 2023.[133] This includes a previously little-known fund called the European Peace Facility that has provided €12 billion in direct military aid.[134] More is planned.[135] After years of European defense cuts, the European Commission is now seeking to address uncoordinated defense spending and prevent further duplication and fragmentation.[136] The crisis also brought post-Brexit UK back into European discussions, with British ministers attending EU summits and also meetings of the European Political Community.[137]

EU-NATO Coordination and Cooperation

Fears that the EU sought to supplant NATO as the essential and sole provider of collective defense have in the past led the United States to try to prevent any security conversations from taking place outside the alliance. With those worries assuaged,[138] the United States has begun to recognize the EU as a useful ally. In 2022, the Biden administration took part in the first EU-US Defense and Future Forum.[139] The EU and NATO have identified clear avenues for complementarity[140] and signed a declaration in January 2023 outlining expanded/deepened cooperation in several areas, including:

- geostrategic competition
- resilience and the protection of critical infrastructure
- EDTs

- space
- climate change and its security implications
- foreign information manipulation and interference[141]

Significant untapped potential for further coordination and synergy between the two organizations should be leveraged over the next several years.

NATO provides to exposed eastern flank allies what the EU cannot: defense, deterrence across multiple domains, and security reassurances.[142] The EU offers lethal equipment, but also help that NATO cannot provide: financial support, energy system integration, infrastructure, humanitarian assistance, and a future in a shared European political community. It is crucial in enabling, capabilities, and integrating neighboring partners (such as Ukraine) in the single market.[143] The EU also has levers that NATO does not and should not have, such as economic sanctions.[144]

EU-NATO cooperation is critical when speaking of sub-conventional challenges,[145] such as cyber and other hybrid threats where EU deterrence and resilience capabilities are particularly useful. NATO and the EU should synergize responsibilities here.[146] Critical infrastructure is another key area of cooperation in which the EU's financing could support NATO planning efforts. Examples of the success of this cooperation in action include the Multinational Multi-Role Tanker Fleet, based at Eindhoven and Cologne Air Bases. The fleet is owned and managed by NATO, but the initiative was led by the European Defence Agency more than 15 years ago.[147]

EU and NATO staff also maintain regular contact and information exchanges on cyber activities, including policy developments. Examples include the Solarwinds cyber operation in April 2021 and the Microsoft Exchange Server compromise in July 2021.[148]

Some concerns remain. First, neither NATO nor the EU has buy-in from all members on further cooperation or coordination.[149] Countries that belong to one organization but not the other (non-NATO EU members Austria, Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus, and non-EU Türkiye) have sometimes strong reservations about intensified cooperation. The EU's Joint Procurement Act may harm NATO's ability to set demand signals for capabilities.[150] Conflicting national and commercial interests have long hampered attempts to develop a unified defense industrial base.

The Future of EU-NATO Relations

Understanding the future trajectory of EU-NATO relations is paramount to NATO's future in Europe. Beyond European strategic autonomy and alliance cohesion, the EU-NATO relationship has all too often added up to less than the sum of its parts, despite ambitions to increase cooperation.

There is a good case to be made that the period since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has been the high-water mark, if not a "honeymoon,"[151] with NATO focusing on its core role of defending allies, and the EU focusing on making the best use of its economic instruments to sanction Russia and offer humanitarian, financial, and reconstruction assistance to Ukraine.

Yet the relationship becomes more complicated with regard to the EU's limited security and defense role. The question of the respective roles and delineation of responsibilities of NATO and the EU has vexed both organizations for decades. There have been, and will in the future be, opportunities for NATO and the EU to cooperate in operational theaters both within Europe and beyond — for example, in Kosovo and Iraq currently, and in Afghanistan until the withdrawal of Western forces in the summer of 2021.

But cooperation on the ground was often less close than meets the eye, and often hampered by different mandates and command chains, different institutional imperatives, and competing ambitions. There has never been an agreed formula by which NATO and the EU, either separately or together, determine which might lead in which operational circumstances beyond the territory of NATO members, and on the division of labor in the event that both organizations choose to get involved in a particular crisis.

The situation is compounded by the fact that EU-NATO cooperation sometimes impedes progress or introduces complications, if only because their inner workings remain "hermetically sealed" to each other.[152] Institution-building alone is not enough to address the challenges at hand, especially since the benefits of closer working relationships between the institutions has its limits. The logical assumption that a stronger relationship is an end or a "good" in itself has not yet been proven.

NATO and the EU are sometimes stronger when they "stick to their own swim lanes." The starting point to cohesion should, therefore, always be to ask "what are we trying to achieve?" The most effective way forward would seem mostly to be division of labor rather than duplication of efforts.[153]

In this regard, policy for collective defense and larger-scale expeditionary and discretionary operations, defense spending, operational planning, force structures, readiness, capabilities, interoperability, and core military infrastructure should remain NATO leads. The EU should amplify and support the alliance using its nonmilitary toolkit.

Given this division of labor, NATO and the EU thus need better coordination, not necessarily increased cooperation. There are indeed areas where NATO and the EU can have a substantive, synergetic role. This is especially true for strengthening

the resilience of critical infrastructures and supply chains — for instance, increased coordination in building resilient transnational critical infrastructure is a good step forward, as shown by the NATO-EU Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure and the NATO-EU Structured Dialogue on Resilience.[154]

In terms of defense procurement and capabilities, more European defense spending, improved European capabilities, more European high-readiness forces, improved infrastructure, larger stockpiles, and a much stronger European industrial base would all make critical contributions to transatlantic security.

The UK's Role in Post-Brexit Europexit Europe

A further question is the role of the UK. Post-Brexit attempts by the British government to distance the UK from the EU have halted, though the UK's Indo-Pacific defense efforts have hampered its military commitment to Europe. Should the United States signal its approval, a future British government could decide to focus heavily on plugging gaps in European defense, perhaps in return for restoration of trade and investment ties harmed by Brexit.
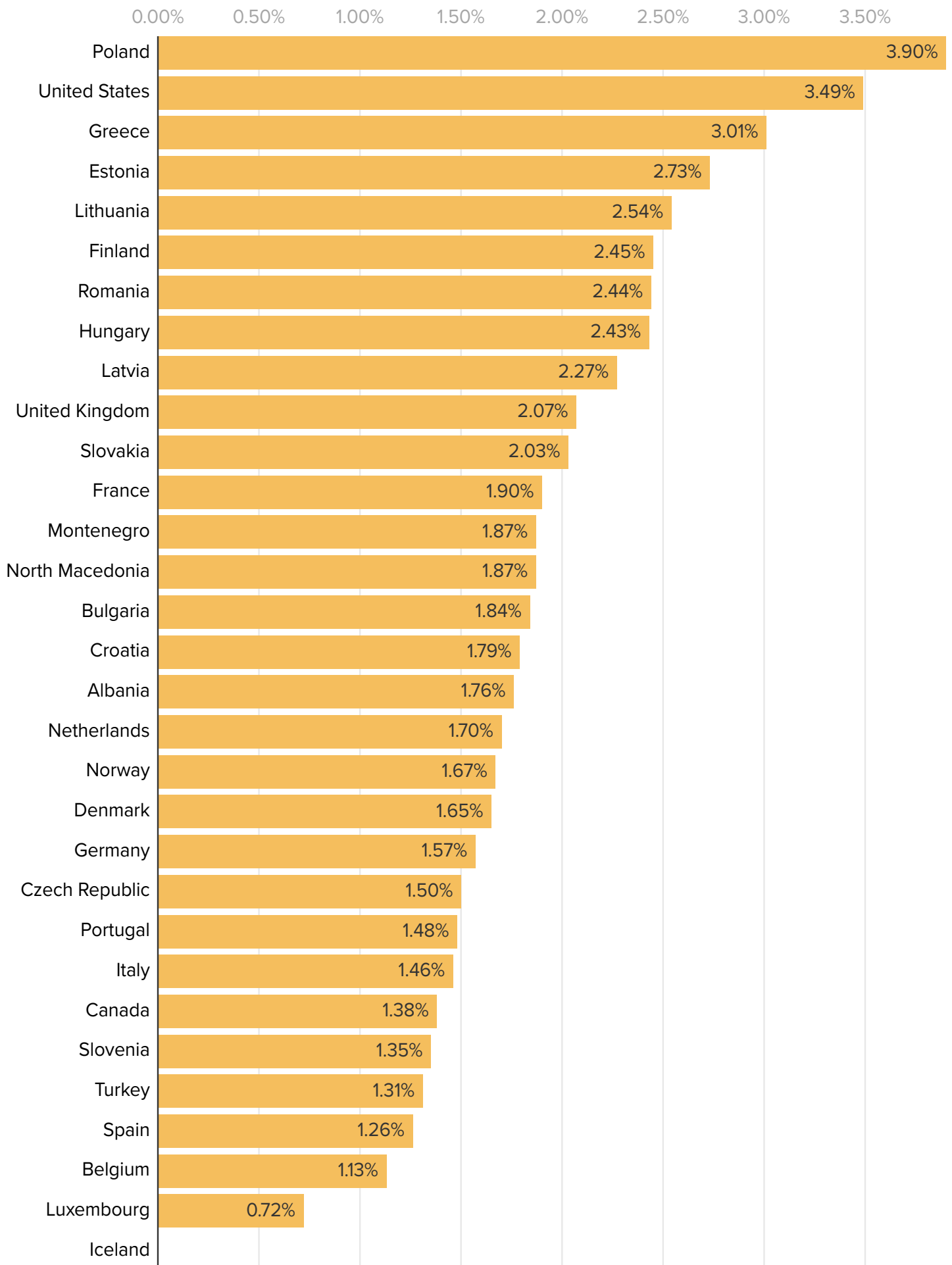
In the short term, the key to success for the EU's defense efforts will be a focus on practical cooperation on projects that also benefit military security. High on the priority list is military mobility: the creation of robust, dual-use transportation infrastructure that will enable rapid, large-scale reinforcement of Europe's eastern flank. Securing even this modest goal will be hard, but also a springboard to more ambitious achievements.

Defense Spending and Burden Sharing

Disagreements about how to fairly share burdens and responsibilities in NATO date back to the founding of the alliance itself. The issue has been a political football, testing the cohesion of the alliance for the last several decades. In the United States, then presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump railed against member states for failing to pay their fair share, calling out "free riders," a "complacent" Europe, and the "fortune" that NATO cost the United States.[155]

However, since Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the vast majority of member states now agree that 2% of GDP should be the floor.[156] Indeed, at the 2023 Vilnius Summit, allies agreed on "an enduring commitment to invest at least 2%" of their GDP into their militaries in the future.[157] As of July 2023, about one third of member states are spending at least this amount, but In interviews with the authors in March 2023, several NATO and European officials expressed certainty that the majority of allies would meet the 2% threshold by the end of

Chart: Amount Spent on Defense as a Percentage of GDP

Country	Percentage
Poland	3.90%
United States	3.49%
Greece	3.01%
Estonia	2.73%
Lithuania	2.54%
Finland	2.45%
Romania	2.44%
Hungary	2.43%
Latvia	2.27%
United Kingdom	2.07%
Slovakia	2.03%
France	1.90%
Montenegro	1.87%
North Macedonia	1.87%
Bulgaria	1.84%
Croatia	1.79%
Albania	1.76%
Netherlands	1.70%
Norway	1.67%
Denmark	1.65%
Germany	1.57%
Czech Republic	1.50%
Portugal	1.48%
Italy	1.46%
Canada	1.38%
Slovenia	1.35%
Turkey	1.31%
Spain	1.26%
Belgium	1.13%
Luxembourg	0.72%
Iceland	

2023.[158] Moving beyond the 2% GDP benchmark, NATO is aligning contributions to specific capabilities. This is vital to meet the executable regional, domain, and AOR-wide defense plans discussed earlier in this report.[159] Regionalization used to be frowned upon by NATO, because allies should be able and willing to deploy forces at scale beyond their own region. That has changed. Regional plans and the linking of regional plans, where nations invest in their strengths and then contribute to fill gaps in the alliance, are now essential to building credible deterrence. So too are NATO's ties with the EU and other nonmilitary multilateral organizations that can exercise elements of power. Regionalization would enable member states to play to their strengths and link the layers of defense plans.

To maximize efficiency and reduce duplication, the United States and its allies aim for a shared, common set of standards for tactics, equipment, practices, and procedures. Over the last several decades, however, proprietary and economic interests have incentivized some nations to produce or purchase components outside of NATO standards.[160] Despite numerous existing standards and more than 1,200 Standardization Agreements,[161] NATO's Committee for Standardization does not have the tools to enforce these standards.[162] Giving the committee the teeth it needs to enforce existing standards would strengthen the alliance's capabilities and fortify cohesion.

The Russia Threat: Aligned Perceptions?

The perception of the "Russia threat" among the transatlantic community has largely solidified since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Views on Russia have also hardened throughout the alliance, as evidenced by the language used in NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept and the 2023 Vilnius Summit declaration.[163] This has led to more cohesion and unity regarding the need to deter an aggressive and vindictive Kremlin.

Although the majority of NATO allies see Russia as a significant threat, perceptions vary. Eastern European and Baltic partners generally see it as a "vindication moment" regarding Russia's hostile intentions and the fact that Moscow poses a direct military threat to their national security. Meanwhile, Western Europe — and first and foremost France, Germany, and the UK — focus more on Russia potentially escalating by using nuclear weapons.[164] All countries generally agree on the fact that Russia is a major threat in terms of non-kinetic capabilities and subthreshold destabilization.

Numerous European interlocutors stress that if Russia is not defeated in Ukraine, the next war is only a matter of time.[165] In some western parts of Europe, however, the war in Ukraine is not even viewed as a European war, but rather an outside conflict in which Europe is supporting Ukraine.[166] For these members, concern centers on potential escalation, particularly the use of nuclear weapons.[167] Despite revolutionary turns in German and French security policies in 2022, some experts

Photo: An Italian soldier waits for the order to resume live-firing during Exercise Steele Crescendo.
Credit: NATO

still call for Ukraine to make peace with Russia or give Moscow an "off-ramp" in order to preserve relations.[168] These pressures are likely to increase if there is a positive change in Russian leadership or domestic concerns intrude.[169] Any pause in the fighting, or the prospect of it, and any political change in Russia, will highlight the divide between allies who yearn for stability and those who put their faith in defense and deterrence.

The biggest threat to NATO remains its overdependence on US capability and leadership. The war in Ukraine has highlighted this, while at the same time exposing in Washington the hard choices that need to be made in prioritizing European and Indo-Pacific defense. It is to how the US-led alliances should treat the twin threats of Russia and China that the report now turns.

Chapter Four: The Russia-China Challenge

- Moscow and Beijing form a dyad that cooperates on common goals, notably on eroding US power and influence. They both see the United States as their most important security challenge.

- However, if a full-blown Chinese-Russian military alliance would represent a grave threat to US and allied security, Moscow and Beijing are not allies and will not become allies. Their relationship is not based on a common worldview, shared values, or deep trust.

- Russia's war against Ukraine is a strategic setback for Beijing, but it also increases Russia's dependence on China. In geopolitical terms, Russia is the biggest loser of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war.

- Responding to the threat presented by Russia and China individually and together is a test of Western statecraft and ultimately of NATO cohesion and unity. In this regard, the best deterrence against China is to defeat Russia in Ukraine.

- To address the "two-front" issue, policy ways forward include outlining NATO's role and presence in the Indo-Pacific region as well as deepening NATO-EU relations.

Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine has belatedly created a security consensus in Europe. But it has also highlighted what seems to be a strategic choice for the United States: whether to prioritize defeating the Kremlin or deterring Beijing. Some US voices have argued that supporting Ukraine comes at too great a cost, and that it would be better to leave European allies, notably Germany, to shoulder the cost of supporting Ukraine, while the United States should concentrate on the overwhelmingly important task of ensuring that the Chinese leadership does not reshape the world.[170]

The above logic and line of argumentation generally rest on four legs:

- China is a bigger threat than Russia. Chinese hegemony in Asia would be bad not only for the United States, but also for Europe. There is no time to lose. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership, Elbridge Colby, who played a key role in shaping the 2018 US National Defense Strategy (NDS), argues, is planning to attack Taiwan, perhaps as soon as 2027: four years is "yesterday" in defense planning terms, he notes.

- US resources are better deployed against the bigger threat. The defense equipment sent to Ukraine depletes stockpiles and thus reduces the United States' ability to respond to a military crisis in Taiwan.

- Curbing US aid to Ukraine will not hand a victory to the Kremlin if European allies fill the gap. Indeed, a profusion of US aid actually stops these allies, notably Germany, from shouldering their responsibilities. Europe is bigger in population terms and richer in economic terms than the United States. It should fix the problems in its own neighborhood.

- Constraining and defeating Russia in Ukraine will drive the Kremlin into a close alliance with Beijing.

The authors of this report disagree. To take the last point first, a full-scale Chinese-Russian military alliance would indeed represent the gravest threat in decades to US and allied security. On the surface, the rhetoric is glowing. Russia and China have for decades described each other as "strategic partners." Chinese President Xi Jinping speaks of "eternal friendship" between the two countries,[171] while Putin says ties "surpass Cold War-time military-political alliances in their quality without limitations."[172] Joint statements have resonant titles, such as "Deepening relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction entering a new era."[173] Relations are characterized not as a military-political alliance but "superior to this form of interstate interaction."[174]

Russia and China, Together and Apart

Moscow and Beijing do see the United States as their most important security challenge, and both seek to erode US power and influence.[175] To this end, they aim to exploit vulnerabilities in the US-EU relationship.[176] The dyad cooperates on common goals. Military ties, in particular, are deepening in fields such as conventional submarine design, naval gas turbines, and space technology.[177] Joint naval exercises off Japan in July 2023 marked a new level in terms of size and sensitivity.[178]

Yet the closeness between Beijing and Moscow is easily overstated. Though they share tactical objectives and a broadly anti-Western approach, they are not allies and will not become allies. Their partnership is not based on a comprehensive worldview, shared values, or deep trust. Both players are autonomous strategic actors. They compete with, and spy on, each other: China's repeated theft of Russian technology is a sore spot.[179] They lack the deep cultural and historical ties that underpin US-led alliances. The two countries do not trust each other. They do not act as a fully coordinated force in international politics, and even less seek to influence each other's decision-making. Their fundamental interests are different: Russia is a disruptor of the international world order; China seeks parity, or dominance, within

Photo: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping arrive for a signing ceremony at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia March 21, 2023. Credit: Sputnik/Grigory Sysoyev/Kremlin via DPA/Alamy Live News

it. This is an old-fashioned, unsentimental great-power relationship, clear-eyed and ruthless, based on strategic calculus and realpolitik. It is also increasingly unequal. China's support for Russia has been limited and its stance ambiguous. The so-called no limits friendship has hit some hard limits.

Beijing recognizes that China's integration into the international order is ultimately more valuable than the Sino-Russian partnership, although it naturally seeks to strengthen both.[180] In the meantime, it is constantly on the lookout for opportunities to exploit divisions within the transatlantic relationship.

The two countries do not pose the same kind of danger. Russia is an acute threat, China a longer-term one.[181] Responding to the threat presented by the Sino-Russian partnership, with its complex and unpredictable dynamics, will be a severe test of Western statecraft. Two dangers should be avoided:

- Attempts to play divide-and-rule will be obvious to both sides, at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive.
- Misplaced fear of a "Sino-Russian axis" ultimately leads to more restraint on the transatlantic alliance's side — in effect, self-deterrence — which prompts just the behavior that Russia and China find most useful.[182]

The Impact of Russia's War against Ukraine

It is important to understand the role of the war in Ukraine in the Sino-Russian relationship. China dislikes the war in Ukraine for both principled and practical reasons. It is uncomfortable with Putin's flagrant breach of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Spikes in fuel, food, and fertilizer prices are an unwelcome burden on a Chinese economy still recovering from the pandemic. Beijing's austere nuclear doctrine is the opposite of Putin's saber-rattling. The party-state fears that even limited Chinese support for Russia's war may jeopardize its cherished ties with Europe.[183] China also deplores the unifying effect of the war on the West and its alliances in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. And it resents the fact that Putin's recklessness has complicated its objective of reunifying Taiwan with the mainland.[184]

That said, China does not want Russia to be completely defeated, chiefly because this would be seen as a US victory and boost US global leadership.[185] On the contrary, China "wants to see the US fail"[186] as well as Russia "weakened but not destroyed".[187]

The war in Ukraine also highlighted the Sino-Russian dyad's fundamentally different attitudes toward global order. Russia is an anarchic power thriving on instability and seeking to upend the international system. The CCP is revisionist: it aims to change the current system from within so that it is more favorable to Chinese interests. As a "system player," it seeks to exploit and adjust the rules-based international order, but not to destroy it.[188]

Overall, the war represents a strategic setback for the Chinese party-state. Yet there have been some gains as well. Far from cementing Russia's desired status as China's equal as a global superpower, the war has highlighted Russia's increasingly subordinate relationship. As noted above, Beijing has acquired a (modest) voice in European security.[189] China's geopolitical rise undermines the Kremlin's great-power ambitions. It has little prospect of real, war-winning help from Beijing, let alone the economic and technological inputs it needs to salvage and modernize its economy. Russia faces a future in which China buys its natural resources at knockdown prices, expands its export markets, promotes its technological standards, and makes the renminbi the default currency of northern Eurasia.[190] Barring a now highly unlikely victory in Ukraine, Russia is in geopolitical terms the biggest loser of Putin's war.

Xi has offered economic, political, and moral support for Russia by:[191]

- sacrificing previously close technological, military, and economic ties with Ukraine
- softening the effects of Western economic sanctions through increased energy and grain imports, and exports of critical materials and technologies

- not condemning the invasion of Ukraine and accepting Russia's depiction of it as a military intervention, not a war

- blaming NATO expansion and the United States as instigators of the conflict

- abstaining from United Nations Security Council and General Assembly votes

The war in Ukraine has also given the CCP, for the first time, a perceived role in European security. Xi has sought to position himself as a putative peacemaker, most notably by launching a highly publicized position paper on the "Ukraine crisis."[192] But this is mainly smoke and mirrors: the primary purpose of Beijing's diplomatic efforts is to promote China as a good international citizen. Also important is constraining Putin's nuclear braggadocio.[193] Peace in Ukraine is at best tertiary.

Responding to the 'Two-Front' Issue

The authors agree that China is indeed a far bigger threat to US interests. But US support for Ukraine does not detract from its ability to constrain and compete with China. Instead, by bolstering the transatlantic alliance, support for Ukraine strengthens the US position regarding China.

The starting point for these counterarguments is that the Russian threat is not only to Ukraine. The decisive, though often overlooked, question is whether and how soon a postwar Russia could threaten US allies in Europe.

As outlined in the previous chapters, the answer to this ranges from "never" (if Russia sustains a catastrophic military defeat and descends into political chaos) to an alarming three to five years. At that stage, Russia could attack Ukraine again, breaching whatever cease-fire or other agreement had ended the fighting. It could also attack other countries, perhaps in Central Asia or the Caucasus, or perhaps to the west. This raises a second, related question: Does Russia have the risk appetite for a military or other confrontation with NATO? This report argues that deep-seated drivers of Russian foreign and security policy means that it does. A third question is about escalation. If Russia has the military means and political will to attack NATO, testing the alliance's Article 5 mutual-defense clause, would it be willing to escalate?

Even framing the question in this way highlights the importance of the US commitment to European defense. The threat is not to Ukraine, but potentially to European countries which the United States is treaty-bound to defend. Failure to defeat Russia in Ukraine makes a threat to these allies more likely. In the three-to-ten-year time frame concerned, these allies, even in the best circumstances, will still lack the conventional forces needed to defend themselves, let alone build rungs on their own escalation ladder needed to deter a nuclear threat. So long as the United States wishes to remain an actor in European security, it cannot simply walk away from the war in Ukraine. To do so would be a catastrophic retreat, handing Russia a geopolitical trump card, dismaying the United States' most important allies, and setting the stage for a far more costly confrontation with the Kremlin at some future date.

Photo: Contingent of People's Liberation Army of China arrives to participate in Russia's Vostok 2022 exercise. Credit: Russian Ministry of Defense.

Abandoning Ukraine and deprioritizing Europe would also enhearten the CCP. The US-led support for Ukraine has challenged the party-state's narrative of a decadent and divided West. The willingness of European countries to break long-standing energy dependence on Russian gas heralds a deeper shift regarding supply-chain diversification and China. Contrary to deeply held beliefs in Beijing, Western countries are willing to make economic sacrifices in pursuit of political goals.

Conversely, a Russian victory against an isolated Ukraine, underlining Europe's strategic vulnerability, would reinforce the CCP's worldview. If the United States is willing to abandon its deep interests in European security, rooted in centuries of cultural and other ties, why should anyone believe that it is willing to risk nuclear war for Taiwan?

To counterbalance such points, the direct cost to US interests in the Pacific of help to Ukraine would have to be substantial. But little evidence of this exists. Put bluntly, Ukraine and Taiwan do not need the same things.[194] US forces defending Taiwan would use bombers, attack submarines, hypersonic missiles, and long-range anti-ship missiles. None of these have been provided to Ukraine. The assistance to Ukraine consists chiefly of armored vehicles, counter-artillery radar, air-to-ground rockets, and small arms, which have little relevance to the defense of Taiwan. Where overlap in needs exists — such as Patriot air-defense systems and Harpoon anti-

ship missiles — increased defense production and sensible prioritization can solve the problem. The real problems in the defense of Taiwan, such as shortcomings in the US naval posture in the Pacific, have nothing to do with assistance to Ukraine.

The cost of all US assistance to Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 as of May 2023 — $77 billion — sounds large, but it amounts to less than a tenth of the US defense budget. US military assistance totaled $46.6 billion, with just over $30 billion given as financial and humanitarian aid.[195] These funds have not only contributed to the destruction (albeit temporary) of a large part of Russia's military effectiveness, they have showcased US military technology. And they have been a source of intelligence for future research and development. The ramping up of US defense production in response to Ukrainian needs is a belated but welcome return to the days when the United States was the "arsenal of democracy" under President Roosevelt.[196]

The real question, therefore, is not whether the United States should deprioritize Europe; it is what role Europe can and should play in containing China. Here the starting point is undeniable differences in perceptions.

The Chinese party-state, in US President Joe Biden's words, "harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit." It is the only US competitor "with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world's leading power."[197]

Addressing NATO's Role in the Indo-Pacific

At NATO's Madrid Summit last year, allied leaders declared the Indo-Pacific and European theaters to be increasingly linked.[198] NATO's updated Strategic Concept states, "The People's Republic of China's stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values."[199] In the United States' NSS and NDS, China is the "pacing" threat. The NSS states the aim of "outcompeting China and constraining Russia." It is easy to see why. China publishes more highly cited scientific papers than the United States.[200] It leads in 37 of the 44 technologies tracked by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.[201] The fields include batteries, hypersonic missile systems, and 5G and 6G communications. The United States leads in seven technologies, including vaccines, quantum computing, and space launch systems. Russia, which still celebrates Soviet triumphs such as the Sputnik satellite and Yuri Gagarin, now poses no such challenge. As the RAND Corporation noted in 2019, Russia is a well-armed rogue state, not a peer competitor.[202]

Photo: (Left to right) NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with Manaia Mahuta (Minister of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand) and Do Hoon Lee (Second Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea). Credit: NATO.

China's regional hegemonic ambitions and actions in East and South-East Asia are fueling demands for closer security ties with Western countries. The AUKUS submarine deal between Australia, the UK, and the United States is the stand-out example. It attracts widespread interest in other countries too. "AUKUS is more likely to be effective in combating China than NATO".[203]

Deepening NATO's relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, including existing partners Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan, is clearly mutually beneficial.[204] Though NATO has in past decades paid little attention to China, the party-state does now feature in the alliance's strategic concept, which outlines three priorities:

- 1. Deepen understanding of the Chinese military threat

- 2. Practice cooperation on challenges posed by China, developing capabilities in resilience, cyber, and countering hybrid threats

- 3. Forge regional partnerships, particularly with Japan and Australia

By contrast, European allies have mostly not regarded the CCP as a pressing security threat.[205] Until 2019, the EU treated China simply as a trade and investment partner, with no public mention of any security worries. Thinking has evolved a

Photo: Joint press statements with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of Japan Fumio Kishida. Credit: NATO.

little: the EU's approach now is to treat China as either a competitor, partner, or rival, depending on the circumstances. Yet Europeans have failed to develop a common China strategy, either amongst themselves or with the United States.[206] The difference in perceptions of China is even greater than in regard to Russia, despite some progress since 2022.[207]

Some countries understand the China threat but regard Russia as the more immediate danger.[208] Others, such as Hungary, scarcely recognize China as any kind of threat.[209] Lithuania and Czechia, with minimal economic ties to China, have accepted chilly diplomatic relations and sanctions as the price of their stance on Taiwan and human rights. Countries such as France and Germany, which have spent decades boosting trade and investment ties with China, have far more to lose than other European countries. European countries outside NATO and the EU, such as Serbia, are increasingly vulnerable to Chinese pressure.

NATO-EU Relations in the Russia-China Context

It is important to be realistic. After years of disunity, complacency, missed opportunities, and other errors, no China policy offers easy answers. Managing the competing forces and interests affecting allies' China policies will be a central feature of US diplomacy in Europe in the coming decades.

But most European countries are at least waking up to the indirect threat posed by the Chinese party-state. Concerns have increased about cyberattacks and the theft of intellectual property and personal data; major Chinese investments in Europe and around the world in strategic infrastructure such as ports and airports, critical commodities, and supply chains; divide-and-rule tactics in Europe (chiefly the 16+1 trade and investment framework); Chinese penetration of diasporas; pressure on universities, media, and publishing; and Chinese influence operations.

More broadly, European countries and institutions worry about the CCP's growing political and economic clout in countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia; about its capture of key positions and bodies in international institutions; and lately and with greater concern, about its dominance of global supply chains. In other words, "China understands that being a great power is about having a presence all over the world".[210] Europe has begun to take its own initiatives in response to perceived threats from the party-state in Beijing. These include development of trade-defense instruments like the Anti-Coercion Instrument,[211] industrial policy tools such as the Critical Raw Materials Act,[212] or connectivity initiatives under the Global Gateway umbrella.[213] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave a keynote speech on China in March, arguing in unusually forthright terms for "economic de-risking." [214]

This stance, coupled with the EU's geo-economic weight and growing diplomatic heft, make it an indispensable ally in countering China and in promoting Western strategic goals in the Indo-Pacific region. These include rule-setting and economic governance on issues such as data and AI, and work (including in NATO) on resilience, access to critical materials, and establishing secure supply chains. Combined, US and EU GDP ($26.85 trillion and $17.82 trillion, respectively) outstrips China's ($19.37 trillion).[215]

The EU has strong bilateral and multilateral relationships in the Indo-Pacific region, both with close US allies such as Japan, and with nonaligned countries such as Indonesia. European allies, notably France and the UK, have a naval presence in the region,[216] while the EU has become increasingly proactive with its naval diplomacy toward Indo-Pacific countries. Instances include coordinated port calls, expanding its Coordinated Maritime Presence concept to the Northwest Indian Ocean, and joint exercises (such as the March exercise with the United States, Indonesia, India,
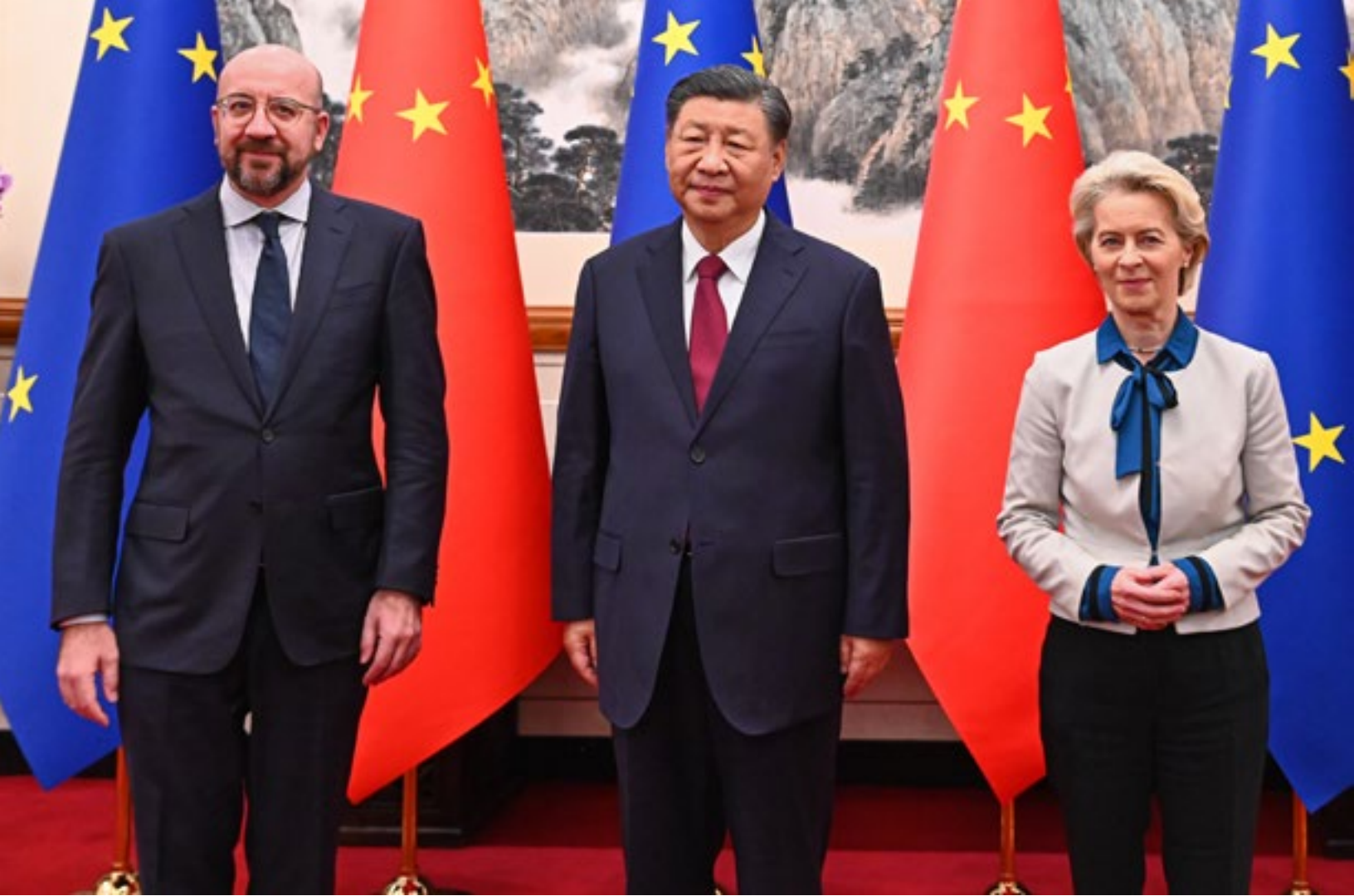
Photo: Charles Michel, President of the European Council (left), and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (right), meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

and South Korea).[217] The EU may also use its economic and public-diplomacy capabilities to support broader Western interests in regions where China has geo-economic and soft-power leverage, and to protect shared security interests in the Indo-Pacific region.[218]

European allies may not share US goals in all respects but are open to the argument that a US-led world that respects liberal values and democratic tenets is preferable to a Chinese-led one. From a practical point of view, they will also appreciate that efforts to reduce the risk of supply-chain dependence on China will be more productive if pursued jointly. Still missing from the China policies of many European countries, however, is an appreciation of the strain that growing tensions in the eastern Pacific place on US capabilities and decision-making bandwidth in Europe. A Chinese-instigated conflict over Taiwan, or a flare-up on the Korean peninsula, could exacerbate US worries about overstretch in Europe, and still-insufficient burden-sharing by European allies. The best way to avoid this is to help.

The red line for European decision-makers is that solidarity with the United States over China should not come "at the cost of European security."[219] The price of an effective European contribution may be that the United States must be more mindful of alliance cohesion and avoid maximalist positions.[220] French, German, and other decision-makers share a perception that US administrations criticize nearly every aspect of Chinese domestic and foreign policy, while giving minimal credit for anything positive Beijing might have done. They do not excuse the CCP's frequently gratuitous and overblown criticism of the West. But failing to recognize Chinese achievements on climate policy or their important role in the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement is unhelpful.

Similarly, if the United States wants "military-to-military" relations with China, either bilaterally or via NATO, it does not help that Defense Minister Li Shangfu is on the sanctions list. A further problem is that the United States and European countries are commercial competitors as well as political allies.[221] Demands by the United States that allies decouple or de-risk their trade and investment ties with China are often interpreted as US mercantilism, aimed at blunting the competitive threat posed by European economies.

In short, the United States will not readily gain European support on a policy toward China that is seen as self-interested, monolithically hardline, and constructed more with a domestic audience in mind than in pursuit of results. European leaders have their domestic audiences and interests too.

Assuming that US-European strategic convergence on China is possible, difficulties are evident. First, the more that NATO focuses on China, the greater attention it will attract from Beijing, and the greater problems it will encounter, not least in its internal cohesion. China strongly resents any NATO presence in the Indo-Pacific region.[222] A second, paradoxical problem is that an increasing focus on China risks distracting NATO from the core task of European territorial defense. But if NATO fails to engage with China-related challenges, it undermines transatlantic solidarity, leaving Europe potentially vulnerable.[223] Third, greater Western unity will be seen by the Chinese leadership as a threat whereas division presents opportunity. The CCP has tried, with some success, to divide the United States from Europe, depicting the United States as "bad," determined to maintain its hegemonic status, and Europeans as "good",[224] interested chiefly in economic and other cooperation. It will play that card harder if necessary.

The key to countering the Sino-Russian partnership is better coordination and unity between the United States and its allies. This will boost efforts to counter divide-and-rule tactics from Moscow and Beijing, and also enable a more effective proactive policy.[225] The report elaborates this further in its recommendations section in chapter five.

Chapter Five: Recommendations

Ukraine and 'Gray Zones'

Ukraine's promise of NATO membership must be honored speedily and effectively. Talk of "Israel-style" security guarantees miss an important point. NATO membership is a two-way street, in which collective security is both offered and honored by adherence to NATO's standards and norms. Postwar Ukraine will be in dire need of the institutional and normative support that full membership of the alliance will bring.

NATO and the EU should **eliminate the "gray zone" of instability around Russia**. This will involve renewed strategic outreach to countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, NATO and EU accession for Georgia, and speedy EU accession for Moldova (and NATO accession for Moldova if it becomes an aspirant country in the future), consolidating Moldova's renewed pro-Western leadership. In countries where the leadership is autocratic or just plain venal, this outreach will involve hard-headed competition with the Kremlin. A buffer zone, or an area of geopolitical competition, creates opportunities for hostile actors. Enlargement has helped bring countries into the alliance and away from Russian influence.

NATO and European Security

The top priority for the alliance is **conventional deterrence against Russia**, which requires investing in military capabilities that are able to contest, disrupt, and disable Russian asymmetric advantages — its long-range missile systems, integrated air defense systems, EW capabilities, offensive cyber capabilities, and space-based systems. Improving technological capabilities will be key.

Conventional Deterrence and Defense

The full implementation of the Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area is paramount. This involves executable regional plans, domain plans, and the AOR-wide plan, with a full assessment of gaps, and a clear strategy to fill those gaps.[226] The alliance must examine how to assign or allocate forces to the plans and turn the strategy into fully executable deterrence and defense plans. These plans necessitate at least 2.0% of GDP defense spending by member countries.

In support of these plans, a combat-credible **Allied Response Force (ARF)**, rapidly deployable and employable with the right enablers and capabilities, organized, trained, equipped, and sustained is required to deter and defend in the 21st century security environment. It would be under SACEUR's authority (or delegated to him based on appropriate indicators and warnings).

Photo: A French Army soldier provides security in the turret of his Panhard Light Armoured Vehicle during Exercise Saber Junction 23 in Hohenfels, Germany. Credit: NATO.

SACEUR's AOR needs to be properly supported, including with logistics; a robust and resilient system of identified, prepared, and defended reinforcement hubs and forward bases; and pre-prepositioned stocks for rapid and enduring troop reinforcement. Very significant investment will be required to turn this much-discussed concept into reality. Logistics in warfare underpin all other domains.

Real readiness measures and accountability over a five-year timeframe are necessary to strengthen defense and deterrence across the alliance. SACEUR still needs much better visibility of the readiness of forces in the NFM and needs to have the ability to inspect them, including calling them out at very short notice. Given the new security environment in Europe, NATO needs to ensure that its force structure is no longer "hollow."

Achieving **readiness by preparation versus readiness by reputation** demands that the alliance examines the full range of its capabilities (in readiness, deployment, sustainment, logistics, military mobility, etc.). A thorough examination is needed to fully grasp how under-resourced the alliance is and what gaps should be prioritized

to resource and resolve. A major weakness is the lack of multi-domain, high-precision offensive capabilities. Precision munitions that can strike any target, often on very short timelines, are critical.

A **modern IAMD capacity and capability** with networked sensors to counter modern threat systems at all altitudes and in multi-domain operations is critical. The focus on out-of-area operations led the alliance to neglect these capabilities, whose value has been highlighted by the war in Ukraine.[227] While NATO is procuring the Air Command and Control System (ACCS) meant to integrate all of the alliance's missile detection systems, this system is not yet operational. The alliance must build on the already robust plans and capabilities (fifth generation fighters and improved air defense) in a holistic strategy that weaves in offense, defense, and passive measures, as well as civilian resilience. IAMD will bolster not only defense but also serve as a strong deterrent to Russia and future emerging challenges and threats.

Strengthening **the defensive architecture** across all elements of national power is key, from critical infrastructure resilience to effective IAMD throughout allied territory neighboring Russia. Identifying **vulnerabilities in fuel supply** across the alliance and taking urgent action to mitigate critical shortfalls will help strengthen this defensive architecture.[228] This is vital to support the deployment and sustainment of allied forces into, across, and from the entire alliance territory, as agreed at NATO's 2021 Brussels Summit.[229]

The true glue of 21st century deterrence is building an **interoperable digital backbone**. NATO's current C2 arrangements are not designed for high-intensity conflict with Russia. A single integrated, interoperable, and resilient C2 system should encompass all applicable NATO Command Structure and NATO Force Structure elements. It would be a modern open-system architecture with continuous spiral upgrades, including multilayer security for seamless data transfer among national systems and sensors. Digital transformation is key and a "C2 system across the alliance that is digitized will be essential for integrated deterrence and defense of the Euro-Atlantic area."[230] While Allied Command Transformation (ACT) must be maintained as part of this revised C2, we also recommend building stronger bridges between ACT and the other commands.

Prune the command and force structures. The number of Multinational Corps (MNC) and Multinational Divisions (MND) headquarters (HQ) should be cut, and the chosen ones manned and trained with true warfighting HQ capabilities in mind. The nine three-star corps-level HQs in NATO's command structure are hollow, unequal, and a holdover from the era of out-of-area operations. Over the coming five years, these HQs should be tried, exercised, and tested, and winnowed down or ramped up.

Build a **robust indicators and warnings system**. In the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre (NIFC), the NATO Command Structure, and in national agencies, additional resources should be specifically allocated to develop indicators and warnings capabilities.

Force Deployment and Forward Presence

Greater clarity, both at a classified level within the alliance and in public, about what **additional forces** the United States would deploy to Europe in a crisis would bolster reassurance and deter adversaries. Since February 2022, the United States has deployed or extended the deployment of over 20,000 additional forces to Europe in response to the war in Ukraine, bringing the current total to more than 100,000.[231] That level needs to be sustained and, potentially, increased for the long term. It should encourage other allies, the UK, France, Canada, Italy, and Spain, for example, to base forces further forward too.

The current construct of a US military presence totaling more than 100,000 troops and personnel balanced between permanent and rotational forces provides key dual objectives. **Permanent presence provides a constant deterrence value, and persistent, rotational forces provide for readiness and lethality**, if needed. Striking that balance is vital to achieving NATO and its partners' mission approach to deterrence by denial.

That being said, **increased forward defense** is also necessary, notably through a further strengthening of forward presence battle groups and air forces, improved IAMD, pre-positioning of equipment, full implementation of NATO's new set of plans and the promised new NFM of 300,000 plus high-readiness forces, and a return to more forward-based forces in Europe.

European allies and partners with large and capable militaries need to consider contributing additional **forward force deployments on Europe's eastern flank**. With the announcement of a German brigade permanently stationed in Lithuania, other nations also need to consider increasing their posture in Europe to enhance deterrence and collective defense on a persistent basis.

To that end, the United States and its allies, in the course of forward force deployment evaluations and decisions, **must reengage in partnership and advising in Ukraine**. Prior to February 24, 2022, the United States and Ukraine's other partners maintained a consistent presence in Ukraine, training and partnering with the Ukrainian armed forces at the Combat Training Center in Yavoriv, Lviv, and other military installations. Transitioning from a training mission to an advisory mission in Ukraine would be beneficial to the Ukrainian military as it continues to evolve its warfighting missions and objectives.

Deterrence and Escalation

NATO lacks credible answers to Russia's potential **escalation**.[232] It must move from a reactive to a proactive approach and be ready to seize the initiative by posing multiple simultaneous or near-simultaneous dilemmas in different domains and different geographies. It must have and demonstrate the ability to outplan, outthink, out-decide, and outmaneuver Russia, with the capability to exploit and destroy key Russian strategic assets (such as Kaliningrad and Russia's Baltic and Black Sea fleets) and threaten and destroy targets in Russia itself.

A conventional military attack may be backed by threats of nuclear escalation.[233] This requires a **more developed playbook** of expansive and detailed response options (both reactive and proactive). [234] NATO's military and political authorities would need to be able to apply maximum speed and agility in response to a wide range of attack scenarios, and to decide and act faster and more decisively than an adversary and, therefore, to be able to seize and maintain the initiative, including by posing multiple dilemmas and threats to the adversary.

Irrespective of the location of an attack, NATO should be able to hold at-risk targets in Russia, in Europe, from north to south, and, if needed, in Asia. NATO allies, therefore, need the capabilities, infrastructure, forward pre-positioning, and stockpiles to be able to pose **massive challenges and dilemmas** to any adversary across all domains and geographies, potentially in a different domain or geography from the location of any attack. This includes the need for greater long-range strike capabilities and stockpiles to ensure that an adversary knows that, from the outset in the event of an attack on one or more allies, it will prospectively be subject to debilitating and sustained strikes on, for example, key supporting forces and infrastructure, and C2 facilities. Rebuilding offensive capabilities and weapon stockpiles will ensure that no adversary judges that it could outattack or outlast NATO.

The lack of military-to-military communication channels and hot lines, compounded by a potential Russian shift to launch-on-warning, increases the risks of the possibility that an adversary can out-attack or outlast NATO. Nuclear weapons are rarely talked about in public in NATO countries. But they are frequently discussed in Russia, not least as it deploys nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Belarus.[235] Particular Russian sensitivities include the collapse or destruction of its multilayered air defense network.[236]

In order to successfully increase the deterrence value and viability, the alliance and member nations must develop p**ackages of escalation/de-escalation deterrence options**, calibrating and integrating all elements of alliance/national power, including the NATO nuclear enterprise. To institutionalize this practice, NATO can use the current crisis response measures and then modify these as the alliance's

Photo: A soldier from the Spanish Army yelling and running across the field during exercise Crystal Arrow 2023 in Latvia. Credit: NATO

practices improve. These deterrence option packages will exercise the alliance's deterrent effects, utilizing all levels of alliance leadership, including the NAC, the Military Committee, and the member nations, exposing the entirety of the alliance to the nuclear enterprise and potential deterrent options.

NATO Nuclear Posture and Policy

Critical to addressing the changing European security landscape with a continually aggressive Russia and the emergence of new platforms and capabilities, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, is the necessity for the alliance to undertake a formal review of capabilities, required readiness levels, allied capacity, nuclear-sharing agreements, and exercise frequency and objectives. To that end, NATO needs to conduct a **study of all nuclear-sharing sites**, locations, required modernization of infrastructure and command control, and allied contributions.

In parallel to a NATO whole-of-alliance study of nuclear-sharing sites and capabilities, NATO must conduct a **holistic review of the nuclear-sharing policies**, examining opportunities for all 31 NATO allies to participate in the nuclear enterprise. As NATO requires all allies to participate in the NATO Defence Planning Process, integrating all allies under the protection of the NATO nuclear mission is critical for cohesion.

As part of this allied-wide integration into the NATO nuclear mission, **all nations should participate in the alliance's yearly nuclear-focused exercise, Steadfast Noon, and other nuclear-focused exercises**. More critically, the alliance needs to combine the nuclear and conventional elements in integrated exercises. NATO must eliminate the stovepiping of exercises, allowing the alliance to coordinate, exercise, and learn exercises covering all NATO mission sets.

The alliance, to increase readiness, capability, and deterrence, should plan an integrated nuclear and conventional **series of snap exercises**, ready to be executed and strategically communicated to an adversary.

In addition to exercises, the alliance must **cease the bifurcation of nuclear deterrence elements and other elements of power**; all need to be urgently integrated and synchronized.

Defense Industrial Modernization

The United States needs to push its European allies to continue to spend on defense capabilities, recognizing that a strong European defense industry is vital for the alliance. However, this can only happen if the United States maintains a leadership role on the European continent. If the United States were to change course and withdraw from Europe, defense budgets in some European countries would shrink, threatening alliance cohesion, increasing vulnerabilities, and eroding Europe's value as a US ally.[237]

As a first step, **NATO's Committee for Standardization should prioritize specific standards** and publicize these priorities to nations. Second, to hold nations accountable for priority standards, defense ministers, reporting to their countries' elected leaders, should be responsible for providing national reports on standards compliance. This will ensure that taskings come from the highest level, prompting national agencies to act and correct any outstanding issues.[238] Moreover, private industry should be incentivized to develop equipment that is interoperable and potentially interchangeable. This may cause initial disruption but will reap benefits, with weapons that can be used across multiple platforms.

Governments will also need to work with defense companies to acquire ammunition as soon as possible (versus waiting to negotiate 10-year contracts, which most defense companies request before beginning production), to address supply chain

Photo: Airman 1st Class Stephen Knotts, 436th Aerial Port Squadron ramp services apprentice, positions a cargo loader to an aircraft during a foreign military sales mission with Ukraine at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, Feb. 10, 2022. Credit: Mauricio Campino/US Air Force

vulnerabilities, and to shift from a nine-to-five, peacetime work schedule to a 24/7 wartime-footing within the defense industry. Inside the alliance, **there needs to be a recognition of the increase in battle-use technology, creation of a new tech culture, and a decrease in risk aversion to experimentation**. Institutionalizing relations with tech companies is critical; this will entail amending the procurement process and investing in longer, consistent procurement contracts.

NATO can **learn from Ukrainian innovation**. The NATO-Ukraine High-Level Innovation Dialogue enables a regular exchange on the development of innovation ecosystems for both commercial and defense needs, and a platform for discussion of lessons learned. NATO can support the dual-use Ukrainian innovation ecosystem by providing experts to help evaluate technologies, and exploring financing pathways that enhance the reach of Ukrainian innovation.[239] DIANA should empower Ukrainian start-ups with appropriate resources so that Ukrainians can innovate as they fight and continue to advance their capabilities after the war.[240]

Photo: A US Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) technician prepares a Mk. II Talon bomb disposal robot for work during exercise Northern Challenge. Credit: NATO

Innovation and Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

NATO allies should work to better align their visions and policies to EDTs by establishing shared definitions of EDTs, coordinate national EDT policies according to collective decisions and strategies, and encourage the necessary organizational changes and reforms to integrate EDTs.

As technological evolution becomes more fluid and its impact increasingly difficult to predict across time and space, NATO should adopt a flexible approach to assess the alliance's innovation levels in EDTs. This approach should **establish clear, yet adjustable, goals and indicators to measure innovation**, but avoid compartmentalizing the assessment based on individual innovations or technology areas. Instead, the alliance should make this approach comprehensive in order to capture the convergence between different EDTs — including AI, autonomy, nanomaterials, biotechnologies, and others; precisely determine their impact; and harness their military applications to greater effects. Established innovation benchmarks should be continuously assessed and refined through joint operational experimentation, realistic exercises with allies and partners, wargaming, and red-teaming.

Based on the lessons emerging from Russia's war in Ukraine, NATO should **rethink its approach to dual-use technologies and the role of the private sector**, devise a more robust and comprehensive evaluation framework to exploit dual-use technologies, and boost adaptability and innovation across the alliance. This

initiative should build upon existing efforts by NATO ACT and other allied agencies, while engaging with academia, the private sector, and the military to identify critical technological advancements and assess their potential utility as well as associated risks in a timely manner. Such an initiative should also work in coordination with the EU to ensure more effective information sharing and cooperation in the defense technology sphere.

NATO member nations should prioritize investments and technology collaboration in EDTs to bridge defense innovation gaps. Given varying resources, expertise, and interests, allies should establish mechanisms to facilitate technology sharing and foster a more homogeneous emergence of innovation clusters and specific EDT Centers of Excellence (COEs) across the alliance, including in smaller nations. This approach will help prevent the emergence of new technological and capability disparities among NATO member states and strengthen collective defense capabilities.

Data is the new currency of warfare, and digitalization is key to managing and exploiting huge quantities of data at the speed of relevance across all military levels. For this reason, **NATO and the EU should accelerate digital transformation efforts in defense** by establishing clear time lines and road maps for implementation, addressing procurement delays, and increasing investment in digital capabilities. They should prioritize standardization of data management architectures and cloud services, enhance data-sharing policies, and incentivize the use of European cloud service providers to ensure data sovereignty.[241] Furthermore, both NATO and the EU should focus on bridging the gap between defense and civilian industries in leveraging data as a strategic asset, while expediting the integration of new defense technologies to enhance military readiness and preserve their competitive edge.

Despite repeated pledges and commitments, the current NATO-EU cooperation in the EDT sphere lacks a clear road map and time frame. **NATO and the EU should expand and enhance their cooperation on EDTs** by prioritizing three main policy areas: first, both organizations should establish a common definition of EDTs and the specific metrics and parameters needed to do so. Second, NATO and the EU should align their investment strategies for EDTs, leveraging both NATO's DIANA and the NATO Innovation Fund (INF) and the EU's financial capacity and joint procurement schemes to encourage sustained and long-term investments in EDTs and joint capability programs. This includes the definition of shared road maps to integrate these capabilities in a timely manner. Third, NATO and the EU should work together to adopt a shared approach to address the legal and ethical implications associated with the adoption of EDTs and their military use. Finally, these three efforts should be coordinated through a dedicated NATO-EU office.

NATO-European Union Relations

The way forward in the **NATO-EU relationship requires a clearer division of labor**, one where the EU can "plug its comparative advantages into NATO's framework."[242] For instance, the EU could lead on nonmilitary aspects of defense and security cooperation as well as on dual-use infrastructure.[243]

Avoiding duplication of efforts and structures is of paramount importance for a better division of labor. In other words, NATO-EU relations are not about "more institutions, but political valiance to overcome these obstacles."[244] Limiting over-politicizing and over-institutionalizing the relationship is also key — better synergy needs to translate into more EU bureaucratic capacity on the one hand or an extensive "road map" for NATO-EU cooperation on the other.

With the understanding that NATO is the European security architecture, continued US leadership remains crucial. The caveat is that considering the weight of the US leadership, the health of the relationship is strongly dependent on US electoral cycles, especially at the presidential level, and the level of willingness from future US administrations to invest in NATO-EU cooperation.

Economic Agenda

Since 2022, the economic security agenda has attracted growing attention.[245] Defense industrial base, resilience, NATO-EU cooperation, sanctions, and non-conventional military threats are some of the key issues for the alliance that have direct implications for economic security. There are many other elements, including the weaponization of energy, security of supply chains, and food security. The alliance should consider revising the economic security pillar/agenda in line with the NATO 2030 recommendations, making sure not to duplicate efforts by the EU in this regard.

Resilience

Resilience must become a leitmotif of NATO at the domestic and alliance levels. NATO cannot do everything. But where it does get involved in national and domestic resilience, it must do this well, using threat intelligence and other unique or scarce capabilities. NATO countries should be able to absorb external and internal shocks and recover quickly from them. In other words, NATO societies should become resilient by design.

As well as investment in physical infrastructure and institutions, **resilience must involve thorough, patient, effective, and transparent communication with the public** about the threat environment, about the vulnerabilities that may be exploited

by hostile state actors, and about the resilience and other measures needed in response.

In most NATO countries, and within the NATO bureaucracy, these assessments, if they exist at all, are classified. The result may be some marginal gain in protecting sources and methods, and in providing room for political and diplomatic maneuver. But it comes at a high cost. Many voters in many countries are unaware of the dangers they face, and the **need to improve security not just in military terms, but across all of government and society**. Attempts to deal with specific threats are ineffective in essence, and may seem like overreactions to an ill-informed public.

This approach has clearly failed. It is time to change it by following the examples of countries that have prioritized the response to subthreshold threats. This concept is already outlined in the United States' 2022 NDS as part of the broader integrated deterrence approach. **Deterrence by resilience** is the "ability to operate in the face of multi-domain attacks on a growing surface of vital networks and critical infrastructure."[246]

Lessons learned from Ukraine include its ability to complement societal resilience with resilience of strategic communications, information operations, infrastructure, and energy, among others. The alliance needs to **reevaluate how individuals, allies, and the organization as a whole come to terms with "whole of (government, alliance, society)" requirements;** improve the resilience of infrastructure, logistics, economics; and look at maximizing security synergies (e.g., in hardening C2). Currently, there is too much compartmentalization between sectors.

The star performers in NATO are in the Baltic Sea region. Estonia's internal security service has since 1998 published reports annually on Russian and other threats, highlighting hostile intelligence activity as well as subversion, extremism, and terrorism.[247] This approach was frowned on at the time by Estonia's friends and mentors. It was considered too provocative, and liable to give too many clues to adversary states. However, the Estonian experiment has been vindicated. Many agencies in neighboring countries, dealing with internal security and foreign intelligence, now follow suit.

Integrated Deterrence

The approach by the alliance and its member states toward threat assessments (especially those available to the public) has implications for NATO's move toward integrated deterrence. A recent CEPA report on the Baltic Sea region recommended that **regional threat assessments** should be a central part of building awareness among the public, among opinion-formers, and among decision-makers of the subthreshold threats from hostile states.[248] These assessments should come in

Photo: Senior Resilience NATO Officials' Meeting. Credit: NATO

classified and unclassified (published) forms. They should highlight the sources of domestic and external threats. Chief among these will be Russia, but they should also include China's aggressive "wolf warrior" diplomacy and coercive economic pressure,[249] and Iranian operations against dissident émigrés.[250] Such threat assessments should of course also consider endogenous threats such as violent extremism based on far-right or far-left ideologies, and on ethnic and religious fanaticism.

These assessments should also highlight the cross-border nature of the threats. For example, a TV station based in Sweden can be mounting a disinformation campaign in Latvia. An embassy official in Warsaw can be menacing a diaspora in Stockholm. A company registered in Estonia can be conducting money laundering on behalf of a Kremlin crony in Finland. In the manner pioneered by Estonia's security service, these reports should name names and give specific examples.

The unclassified publications would have several important benefits. They would:

- Raise awareness among national populations of the threats they face.

- Hold decision-makers to account. If a threat is highlighted, it would increase expectations that it will be dealt with.

- Reduce the likelihood of espionage, sabotage, bribery, and other subthreshold activities being covered up for reasons of political convenience or cowardice.

- Show allies and partners that the region is taking its own security seriously.

- Signal to Russia and other threat actors that their activities are at risk of public exposure.

- Provide a template for similar efforts in other regions.

The classified versions would inform decision-makers across governments about the cross-border threats that may be missing from more nationally focused assessments.

Published annually these have the merit of setting developments, positive and negative, in a historical context. If a threat is mentioned in one year, then readers will expect to see more news of its rise, decline, or evolution in subsequent years. This makes it less likely that threats fall off the radar because of the pressure of time, events, or political expediency.

A second innovation would be **annual regional reports** dealing with civilian resilience to subthreshold threats, ranging from infrastructure and information security to counterintelligence and counterterrorism. Benefits would include:

Benchmarking

- No country's solution is perfect. Every partner and ally in the region has at least something to offer. A clear-eyed, objective assessment of strengths and weaknesses across the region would be of great help in highlighting areas that need improvement, and in tracking progress year-on-year. Potential categories for benchmarking might include:

  - investment in stockpiles and physical resilience (details of actual achievements in these respects may be confined to classified annexes)

  - the nature and extent of training programs, both for specialists and generalists

  - public messaging campaigns

  - local, regional, and national exercises

  - numbers of available, trained personnel for crisis response

  - public awareness, broken down by demographic, socioeconomic, and other categories

Exchange of Expertise

- Embassies should include a "resilience liaison" officer at the first-secretary level or equivalent tasked with building institutional and personal ties with host-country decision-makers.

- Regional and subregional exercises against the full range of hazards and threats, with cross-posting of specialists between different locations.

- Training courses with multinational participation. Finland's core competence in this could have regional significance.

Cross-Border Redundancy

- Countries should identify and create capabilities that meet not only their own needs but also those of their neighbors.

- Operators of infrastructure links (road, rail, oil and gas pipelines, power networks, telecoms) should be tasked with maintaining not only national but cross-border resilience.

The combination of a formal regional framework, specific budget-line support for resilience from national governments, and published assessments of threats and countermeasures will entrench resilience at the heart of NATO deterrence. It will encourage allies to plan their own contributions to regional defense with confidence and also serve as a template for other regions and subregions in NATO (and beyond) which need to boost their defense against subthreshold attacks.

Alliance Cohesion

Better internal messaging would also address a major concern for the future cohesion of NATO, discussed below.[251] In some ways, the war in Ukraine has sharpened European countries' understanding of the privilege, rather than the burden, of the alliance.[252] Still, NATO itself has no collective identity; rather, it is the individual states that define what the alliance is.[253]

The current efforts to support Ukraine in the war waged by Russia and strengthen European defenses need extensive and sustained explanation and advocacy to domestic populations, particularly in the face of potential "war fatigue" and competing demands. Increased inflation, supply shocks, global warming, energy insecurity, and increased migration threaten to distract leaders and domestic populations. Member states will need to ramp up efforts to **convince domestic populations of the need to invest in security**. European countries are not evenly affected by the economic impact of this new threat environment, which may lead to increased frictions in the coming years.[254]

Photo: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government at the 2023 Vilnius Summit. Left to right: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, US President Joe Biden with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, and NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană. Credit: NATO.

Boosting domestic support for efforts to adapt to this new threat environment may also help mitigate the unpredictability of the elections taking place in 2024 in European countries and in the United States and increase domestic resilience.[255]

Russia and China

The United States and its allies should undertake a **strategic assessment of the challenge presented by the relationship between Russia and China**, of its possible trajectories, and of the scope for joint and separate policy approaches to them. For now, the best way of dealing with the threat Russia and China pose is to treat them individually. The United States, NATO, and the EU should, therefore, base their approaches on these assumptions:

• Any gambit based on driving "wedges" between Russia and China risks the opposite result.[256] It will stoke suspicion and intensify cooperation, which is not in alliance interests. Indeed, there are no good options to pull them apart without appeasing or making concessions to the other.[257]

• Nor is there any realistic chance of luring Russian President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin away from its partnership with China. The West's main policy lever is China's fear of international isolation and economic disruption, which would result, for example, from the imposition of secondary sanctions on Chinese commercial entities doing business with Russia.

- The best way of dealing with the threat Russia and China pose is to treat them separately and sequentially.

Russia's perception that it is becoming a vassal state to China, or China's encroachment into Russia's perceived "sphere of influence" in Central Asia, may also present opportunities in the future. Responses to Sino-Russian gambits should be concrete and issue-specific, commensurate with the level of threat. They do not need to generate an overarching strategic response; nor should the alliance indulge in knee-jerk reactions every time a problem arises.

Countering Russian and Chinese malign influence will involve better defense (resilience) and offense. In the short term, nothing NATO and European allies do will have a greater effect in constraining China in the Indo-Pacific than helping Ukraine defeat Russia. "Defeating Russia is the best way to deter China."[258] A Russian defeat in Ukraine, for example, will likely affect the Chinese decision-making process regarding a potential invasion of Taiwan.[259] Put bluntly, if the West shows itself to be effective in Europe, the deterrent effect against military adventurism elsewhere is strong. Conversely, failure in Ukraine will signify division and weakness, strengthening the temptation for decision-makers in Beijing (and Pyongyang and Tehran) to seize the opportunities that present themselves.

The Global South

The United States, NATO, and the EU should launch a **coordinated diplomatic and soft-power offensive in the Global South**, identifying the sources of Russian and Chinese popularity and leverage, and seeing how its members can compete in countering them. The Black Sea grain deal,[260] which allowed Ukrainian exports to transit to world markets, was an indicator of how quickly NATO, despite its primary defense and security focus, can impact global development and economic concerns. NATO could have done more to promote its role in securing this deal, and to highlight Russia's responsibility for the hunger emergency.

In the longer term, countering Russian and Chinese malign influence will require better defense (resilience) and offense. The greatest danger to US leadership is the perception in much of the world that the Western model is failing, and that China (and to a much lesser extent Russia) is more effective at meeting the challenges of the 21st century. China's stunning economic record over the past 30 years bestows legitimacy on its domestic and foreign policy agenda. The West's legitimacy is undermined by perceptions of failed wars, the 2008 global financial crisis, and a botched pandemic response, coupled with debilitating domestic polarization.

Photo: President Joe Biden observes a moment of silence with other G20 leaders during a visit to the memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, Sunday, September 10, 2023 at the Raj Ghat Memorial in Delhi. (Left to right) Indonesian President Joko Widodo, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, US President Joe Biden, and UK Prime MInister Rishi Sunak. Credit: Adam Schultz/White House.

The West's best chance of winning hearts and minds in the Global South is to **provide the best overall offering in terms of partnership and prosperity**, and to outcompete China and Russia.[261] This will require much greater engagement, investment, and imagination by the United States, Europe, and other key Western allies and partners than has yet been shown, and a vision of the West which fully includes key leaders in the 21st century, such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia.

The United States and its allies should **concentrate on improving and promoting democratic governance within the West**, increasing support to partners, and collectively meeting universal challenges such as accelerating climate change, food insecurity, public health, and managing migration. Demonstrating the effectiveness of liberal democracies by strengthening overall Western societies, institutions,

and resilience, and by engaging productively with the Global South is the best approach to countering aggressive authoritarianism. Abstract phrases such as "defending the rules-based international order" or "championing democracy against authoritarianism" miss the mark.

For its part, NATO will never have the historical, geographical, and military clout or responsibility in the Indo-Pacific theater that it does in its home region.[262] But that does not mean it should do nothing. **Developments outside of NATO's AOR impact NATO's security.** If it fails to contribute to the solution of perceived distant problems, it risks having to cope with their consequences closer to home. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's recent visit to Asia and the latest AUKUS summit signal the increasing amount of recognition and attention given to the China challenge.

Strengthening links between US-led alliances in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific in operational planning, for example, would give allies insight into the military-strategic picture in each other's region and the implications for real-time US and allied planning.[263] **NATO should also develop a multi-domain and cross-functional agreed upon indicators and warnings program** across the Diplomatic, Intelligence, Military, and Economic realms to support a future strategy and plans for defense and deterrence. All NATO members with requisite capabilities should contribute to this.

More broadly, **investment in security cooperation across the globe creates secure and resilient partners that help make allies more secure and resilient.** As noted earlier in this report, Russia and China have few strong and enduring partnerships across the globe, instead relying on transactional relationships. NATO pursues dialogue and practical cooperation with a range of partner nations and organizations on a range of political and military issues. These are based on reciprocity, mutual benefit, and respect and contribute to improved security for the broader international community.[264] Over two decades, NATO developed partnerships with over 40 countries, grouped in different regional frameworks.[265] These partnerships help countries with security, defense reforms, and to participate in international missions.

These partnerships offer potential for greater security ties in countries threatened by China. The Achilles heel of the party-state's ambitions is the People's Liberation Army's lack of overseas logistical infrastructure, such as access to bases and other facilities. NATO can play a crucial role in ensuring China does not further develop its critical logistics infrastructure in Europe and elsewhere.[266] **Establishing mechanisms to avoid further dependencies** is a top priority, as is establishing a formal defense partnership between NATO and Indo-Pacific countries. A multilayered approach is likely to work best, ranging from intense military-technical cooperation (AUKUS) and formal alliances (United States/Japan, United States/South Korea) to looser ties akin

Photo: President Joe Biden greets British Prime Minister Rishi Surnak and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese the AUKUS trilateral meeting in San Diego, Calif, March 13, 2023. Credit: Chad J. McNeeley/US Department of Defense.

to the Partnerships for Peace established with non-NATO European countries in the 1990s. "AUKUS is more likely to be effective in combating China than NATO."[267]

The alliance's **burgeoning ties with India and Japan will play an important role in countering Chinese and Russian influence. Outreach to Asia must be bespoke.** India's history of nonalignment underpins its desire for balance between the West and Russia.[268] NATO's relations with Pakistan may impact NATO-India cooperation. But Indian worries about China offer the opportunity to create closer cooperation in the form of a high-level partnership.[269] India would also gain from the technological capabilities of NATO allies, and such a partnership would help modernize the Indian military.[270] Information-sharing with allies such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea offers potential benefits. NATO's 28 COEs, with their specialisms ranging from counterintelligence to strategic communications,[271] could offer expanded cooperation to these and other allies in the Indo-Pacific region; so too could their EU counterparts, such as the Helsinki center specializing in hybrid threats.[272]

For NATO's part, its **message must focus on being a provider of global security**, based on a firm, coherent, and strategic commitment to the rule of law and rules-based multilateral trade and investment. Narratives of a Cold War-style confrontation with China will not help. Nor will perceptions that NATO is an instrument of Western regime change. A constructive approach should prioritize countries where engagement will have the most immediate and critical impact, while recognizing that NATO "is not the best brand in this region."[273] In parts of the world where anti-Western and anti-US sentiment is strong, NATO is unlikely to be the most suitable vehicle for advancing transatlantic security interests.[274] Engagement with some countries may be best left to the EU, or to individual member states with the appropriate cultural, historical, or geographic ties. [275]

NATO should **engage priority countries with clear objectives and endgames in mind** — while recognizing these countries face trade-offs, which most are less able to mitigate than richer countries. The leitmotif should be to "strengthen 'northern' security in a way that doesn't alienate the 'south.'"[276] Multilateral regional engagement is key too: for instance, NATO may consider an increased role with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum for instance.

To avoid allegations of Western hypocrisy, such dialogue should be based on mutual respect: Global South countries should have an incentive to engage with NATO based on their own priorities.

The most important feature of this approach is that instead of preaching the abstract "rules-based international order" in conceptual terms, **the United States and its allies should ensure that their values are visibly practiced**, demonstrating and offering a convincing global vision of governance. Addressing pressing, topical global issues such as climate change and the regulation of AI will help educate skeptics that the liberal vision is not just a vehicle to advance Western interests at the expense of others.

Finally, NATO should, in principle, demonstrate it is open to dialogue with Beijing.[277] This depends on whether Beijing would be willing to engage constructively and should not be a mere box-ticking exercise. It should complement, not supplant, existing bilateral and multilateral endeavors (such as US-China and EU-China dialogues), addressing regional military security issues, for instance European NATO allies' participation in Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in Pacific waters. It should not carry an implicit assumption that China has a guaranteed say in European security issues.[278] Decision-makers should be careful to ensure that NATO discussions with China do not amplify existing disagreements within the alliance.

Conclusion

Following Russia's war in Ukraine, the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II, the United States and Europe face difficult choices in the coming decade and beyond. A clear, cohesive, long-term vision for the transatlantic alliance will be paramount to securing a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future. As outlined in this report, there are several key takeaways that must drive this new vision:

- Ukraine is the start — not the finish — in the rebirth of the West. Bringing an independent and democratic Ukraine into NATO and European institutions will strengthen the transatlantic alliance and the values it espouses.

- While the United States can no longer be a global hegemon, it can — and must — lead a coalition of democracies. Establishing long-term US commitments will prove to allies its intention to lead both now and in the future, irrespective of political winds. If the United States does not maintain its place at the helm, it will be sidelined at best and defeated at worst.

- Allies must view economic, digital, energy, and other issues through a national-security lens. The concept of a "peace dividend" is over. Instead, the transatlantic alliance must pay a security premium — in cash, risk appetite, inconvenience, and unpopularity.

- Russia must be seen for what it truly is: an imperialistic, authoritarian regime that aims to destroy the international order and establish a sphere of influence. It must be contained.

- Geopolitical "gray zones", as hotbeds for hostile influence and brutal conflict, should be eliminated. Enlargement should again be a priority for NATO and European institutions.

This new, transformative vision for the transatlantic alliance is possible. But it will require political imagination and will on a scale matching those of the alliance's founding fathers. Now, as it did then, the alliance finds itself in uncharted territory with enormous stakes — but it can, and it must, get this right.

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Acknowledgments

Glossary

ACCS	Air Command and Control System
ACT	Allied Command Transformation
AI	artificial intelligence
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ARF	Allied Response Force
C2	command and control
CAR	Central African Republic
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEPA	Center for European Policy Analysis
COEs	Centers of Excellence
DIANA	Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic
EDTs	emerging and disruptive technologies
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EU	European Union
EW	electronic warfare
FONOPS	Freedom of Navigation Operations
GDP	gross domestic product
HQ	headquarters
IAMD	Integrated Air and Missile Defence
IFVs	Infantry Fighting Vehicles
MBTs	Main Battle Tanks
MNC	Multinational Corps
MND	Multinational Divisions
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDS	US National Defense Strategy
NFM	NATO Force Model
NIF	NATO Innovation Fund
NIFC	NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre
NRF	NATO Response Force
NRFA	NATO-Russia Founding Act
NSS	US National Security Strategy
PISM	Polish Institute of International Affairs (Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych)
PMC	private military company
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
tFP	tailored Forward Presence
UAS	uncrewed aerial systems
UK	United Kingdom
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

Endnotes

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2   The West in this report means, broadly, the countries of NATO and the European Union, the "Five Eyes" (UK, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and US allies in Asia, notably Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

3   This unsatisfactory term refers to low- and middle-income countries of Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Indian subcontinent, south-west and east Asia and other regions. The authors are aware that these countries differ sharply in size, prosperity, geopolitical outlook, and other respects. They share some common factors though. They are under-represented in terms of voting rights in many multilateral organizations. They did not contribute to global warming through past carbon-heavy industrialisation. They have not benefited proportionately from the international system's provision of public goods.

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