

75 Years of NATO: Is the Strongest Alliance in History Fit Enough to Defend All European Member States Against Any Security Threats and Deter All Potential Aggressors?

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Since its founding in 1949 as an act of defiance and hope to combat the spread of the Soviet Union, NATO has played an essential role in providing a collective sense of security not only for its member states but also for other nations that are thinking about joining. It is a vital organ; if NATO had not been formed, the nation's themselves would have devised another variation of the alliance that would connect them all in military support to guard against major powers.

Ever since its first-ever leading peace-support operation in the Balkans in the early 1990s, the momentum and diversity of its operations have increased.¹ Regardless of the many challenges that get thrown at NATO, the organization has been engaging in many missions covering the full spectrum of crisis management operations that range from, combat and peacekeeping to training and logistic support, to surveillance and humanitarian relief and it is therefore a vital organ of the European body and international relations.

Furthermore, NATO operations are not necessarily limited to zones of conflict but also zones of great geographical importance.

In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, NATO immediately responded by taking measures to expand the options available to counter the threat of other possibilities of international terrorism; this was done by launching the maritime surveillance operation, also known as "Active Endeavour"² in October 2001, which automatically added a new and uncharted dimension to the global fight against widespread terrorism.

Led by NATO naval forces operation "Active Endeavour" has been placed as an active shield for the Mediterranean Sea for detecting and deterring any terroristic activities. The Mediterranean Sea³ could be indicated as one of the world's most culturally important bodies of water, for centuries it has been the primary vein of food supply for millions of people and therefore has established itself as a primary trade route between Africa, Asia, and Europe – we know that NATO is an effective means of guardianship due to the facts that the increased presence of their naval forces in the waters have benefited all shipping travels through the Straits of Gibraltar by improving perceptions of security.

In general terms, the operations have proved to be an effective tool in both safeguarding a strategic maritime region and in countering terrorism on and from the high seas; this has also increased member state respect for NATO as well as increased their popularity between non-member states which has also led to various acknowledgments of its importance to such global actors.

¹ Blease, Dennis. "Lessons from NATO's Military Missions in the Western Balkans." *Connections* nine, no. 3 (2010): 3–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326211>.

² European Parliament: NATO operations and missions
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³ <https://europe.oceana.org/mediterranean/#:~:text=Overview-.The%20Mediterranean%20Sea%20is%20one%20of%20the%20world's%20most%20culturally,is%20a%20primary%20trade%20route>

Nonetheless, as much respect as we may hold, the negatives from various failed operations and modern challenges are many, one of the major negatives would be the military interventions in the Western Balkans⁴, wherein the initial stages of NATO's military involvement during the early 1990s did not augur well for the mission's success. Regardless of an already obscure UN mandate, several European NATO members decided to send ground troops to support the UN peacekeeping mission; however, domestic, and economic difficulties among many NATO members, as well as worries regarding potential casualties, indicated that the support would be less than enthusiastic.

In concerns of NATO aid to Bosnia, it was only after three whole years of political prevarication that the NATO allies faced up to the existing dangers of the Balkan wars. A prompt to act and therefore tackle the humanitarian and security crisis of 1995 was a combination of the genocide at Srebrenica and the mortar attack on shoppers in the Markale Market in Sarajevo. The Dayton Peace Accords provided for the deployment of a NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) in December 1995. Nevertheless, some European member nations opposed keeping foot forces in Bosnia without the backing of the US. It would be unduly simple to claim that NATO's reluctance to directly participate in ground combat operations between 1992 and 1995 was due to the ambiguities of US commitment, but it was a factor.

It was a hard lesson of reality acquired from practical situations, defending Bosnia should've held priority given that the region holds significant importance to both NATO and the European Union, the country's geographical position⁵ - not accounting for traded routes – alone makes it a crucial area for maintaining stability in the Southeastern parts of Europe in addition to controlling the influence of external factors such as Russia and China; the possible impact on external actors that it may possess would be mutually beneficial for NATO and the European Union (EU) as both are concerned with the rapid pace of Russia's and China's growing influence in the Western Balkans which, if a bigger amount of investment were to be put forth into Bosnia, it could act as a counter-balance for such growing powers.

Beyond that, Tuschhoff argues that the North Atlantic Treaty, even with the challenges it has faced can still be useful in the sense of providing the member states and others with security.⁶

Following 9/11, the alliance was politically and militarily prepared for terrorist attacks, and it is still adjusting to new security threats. Continuing, Tuschhoff contends that NATO produced two significant 'second image reversed' effects. First, its defence planning system coordinated, implemented shared military objectives, and provided interoperability across national forces. Second, its choices influenced the political debate in member nations. Using Germany as an example, the discourse switched back to self-interest on the topic of war

⁴ Blease, Dennis. "Lessons from NATO's Military Missions in the Western Balkans." *Connections* nine, no. 3 (2010): 3–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326211>

⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina economic trends, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bih>

⁶ Tuschhoff, C. Why NATO is Still Relevant. *Int Polit* 40, 101–120 (2003). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800007>

with Iraq when the Bush administration elected to circumvent NATO to assure partner support.

In support of Tuschhoff's writings, we may also pay attention to the writings of Glaser and Charles L. as a means of evaluating just how much exactly the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is effective especially when it comes to matters in dealing with various wars and conflicts.

One of the major points that Glaser and Charles L. point out is the resurgence of Russia and the need for a Western alliance⁷, in their work, they point out that NATO is an essential part of maintaining stability in the West as well as the Baltic regions, and if not for NATO the states themselves would have come up with an alliance to stave off Russia's domineering presence; this was NATO's mission in the past, and if the only direct threat to the west region and others were a direct attack from the East, an alliance of Western nations and nations of other regions would still be the best form of protection from conquering said nations

"When the root of danger is known, balancing is the proper response." - Glaser and Charles.

A balanced alliance would ensure that the West has the military capabilities required to repel massive force while spreading the expenses of hedging across Western and Baltic countries.

The decision for states to join an alliance, hinges on evaluating both the severity of the threat and the economic costs associated with sustaining the alliance. Even if the threat from the Soviet Union or Russia has significantly diminished but remains a potential concern, there remains a compelling argument for the continuation of a Western alliance. This serves as a prudent insurance policy, provided that the financial burden is manageable.

NATO has the ability to considerably reduce the emergence of security competition in Western Europe, but this policy is primarily reliant on the American component. This strategy would entail a visible display of US political strength, establishing America as the principal defence balancer. As a result, the US government would have a significant degree of duty, raising member nations' expectations for prompt protection during times of crisis. While the principle appears to be sound, historical history demonstrates that the United States has frequently prioritised its interests, preferring to play a defensive role and transferring frontline tasks to other countries rather than exposing American soldiers to direct battle.

Not only as a massive territory but also as a politically and militarily advanced nation Russia poses a threat not only to Eastern Europe but also to Western points⁸, as well as some selective American points. Russia has significantly increased its military presence near its western borders, including troop deployment and "military exercises" with their invasion of

⁷ Glaser, Charles L. "Why NATO Is Still Best: Future Security Arrangements for Europe." *International Security* 18, no. 1 (1993): 5–50.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2539031>, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539031?seq=25>

⁸ Leonid Ragozin Aljazeera "What is behind Russia's nuclear escalation threat?" 14th May 2024 <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/14/what-is-behind-russias-nuclear-escalation-threat>

Ukraine other nations, such as the Baltic states, Belarus, and possibly Finland (shared border with Russia); and although NATO has bolstered its eastern flank with multinational battalions and increased air policing missions to deter Russian aggression⁹. Nonetheless, concerns remain about the alliance's ability to respond effectively to a large-scale Russian incursion, particularly in the Baltic region due to geographical closeness, where Russia is known to use a combination of conventional military force as well as hybrid tactics such as cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and political subversion, which are intended to destabilise enemies without eliciting a traditional military response, challenging Eastern and Western territories.

It is my belief that a careful assessment of the threats and obligations confronting the Baltic states and the West, along with an examination of the capacity of different security frameworks to manage these difficulties, provides a compelling case for NATO's ongoing relevance. This viewpoint is consistent with the results reached by Glaser and Charles L. in their separate studies, emphasising the multifarious necessity of preserving the alliance.

This perspective asserts that NATO can be instrumental in mitigating the threat of a resurgent Russia. If aligned with Western interests, NATO can efficiently provide security assurances to Central European nations and engage in humanitarian interventions. Moreover, by maintaining an American presence in Europe, NATO can prevent security concerns from fracturing the unity among Western Europe's major powers. Given that a resurgent Russia may act out of insecurity, the West should refrain from adopting policies that could be perceived as provocative, thereby avoiding potential misinterpretations of its intentions. NATO can fulfil this role effectively without needing to incorporate Russia into a continent-wide security organization.

It is the mindset of new interventions and change that may create a better world of security and stability, it was this same mindset that was displayed in the Washington Summit Declaration: issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington DC, 10th July 2024.¹⁰

Part of the speech went as follows:

"NATO is a defensive Alliance. Our commitment to defend one another and every inch of Allied territory at all times, as enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, is ironclad. We will continue to ensure our collective defence against all threats and from all directions, based on a 360-degree approach, to fulfil NATO's three core tasks of deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security."

"We have undertaken the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence in a generation. We are delivering on the Madrid and Vilnius Summit decisions to modernize NATO for a new era of collective defence. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against the Allies'

⁹ "NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance", latest update: July 8th, 2024 09:14, NATO OTAN, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

¹⁰ Washington Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government, 10th July 2024 https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm?selectedLocale=en#:~:text=NATO%20is%20a%20defensive%20Alliance,Treaty%2C%20is%20iron%2Dclad

sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have strengthened our deterrence and defence posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression. We continue to enhance NATO's deterrence and defence against all threats and challenges, in all domains, and multiple strategic directions across the Euro-Atlantic area. We have deployed in-place combat-ready forces on NATO's Eastern Flank, strengthened forward defences, and enhanced the Alliance's ability to rapidly reinforce any Ally that comes under threat. We have a new generation of NATO defence plans in place that make the Alliance stronger and more able to deter and, if necessary, defend against any potential adversary, including at short or no notice. We are committed to delivering the required high readiness forces across all domains, including for a robust and agile Allied Reaction Force."

Furthermore, NATO in name alone can deter possible threats; when discussing matters of deterrence we are referring to the ability of an actor to discourage another from taking specific actions by either denying them of the benefits of the action or by instilling in them the fear of the consequences of taking such actions – for deterrence to be effective, it must have credibility and for it to have credibility the deterrence strategy must have the means to back up said strategy, in other words, for NATO to be successful in the means of deterring any possible future acts of violence it must have the means to prove that they can accomplish such actions meaning that their talks of defence strategies must be credible.

If we were to look at NATO's deterrence posture in the post-cold War era spanning from 1992 to today as reported in the NATO in 2024 report by Rober Peters¹¹, we understand the almost immediate actions that the U.S. and Europe took as they began to disarm since the de facto dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1989, followed by its de jure dissolution in 1991, and combined with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late 1991 meant that the chances of an invasion of North America or Western Europe were minimal.

To the dismay of many, during the post-Cold War era, NATO lacked a cohesive deterrence strategy, effectively "coasting" on the investments and capabilities developed during the late Cold War. This deficiency in strategic planning and the failure to capitalize on its victory allowed for the gradual and potentially unnoticed resurgence of Russian military power. Concurrently, while NATO forces in Europe underwent significant demilitarization, Russia was steadily rearming. This concerning trend was further underscored by Vladimir Putin's speech in 2007, which highlighted Russia's renewed military ambitions.

It can be argued that this naive perspective, coupled with America's extensive military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, created the conditions that enabled Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent annexation of Crimea. For many, particularly European nations, this event should have served as a significant wake-up call to the rising threat posed by Russia. Additionally, it can be posited that the United States failed to meet

¹¹ The Heritage Foundation, special report No.285, 2nd July 2024, Robert Peters, NATO in 2024 – can its European members deter further Russian aggression?
[//efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/SR285.pdf](https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/SR285.pdf)

the expectations as a major NATO member, particularly in its inability to re-arm Europe and provide sufficient incentives to address these security concerns.¹²

Another critical issue is the rise of China¹³, which is a significant challenge to the global arena that has yet to be fully overseen. China has the unique power to destabilise the free and open international system that has lifted billions of people out of poverty and promoted global freedom.

A sizeable portion of the recent discourse on NATO's future has been centred on enhancing its military capabilities, implementing new regional strategies, and incorporating new members into the alliance's military and political frameworks.

Furthermore, the absence of a NATO-like alliance framework in the Western Pacific places an even greater burden on the U.S., extending beyond the persistent threat posed by Russia.

Assuming that Europeans wish to remain secure under the American nuclear umbrella. In that case, the national security priorities of the United States' allies in Europe must extend to the Pacific, necessitating their readiness to contribute to stability in that region. This belief stems not just from an acute geopolitical necessity, but also from self-interest, especially as the U.S. increasingly expects Europe to contribute more to the common good.

Furthermore, given the consecutive concerns of Russian aggression and China's growing influence, NATO in its current state may very well be unable to meet these issues effectively or achieve victory. Therefore, Europe must assume primary responsibility for its conventional defence, encompassing the majority of the conventional forces required to deter both present and future aggressors.

In general, NATO has been an indispensable element of international peace and the cornerstone of U.S. national security since its establishment in 1949. It serves as a crucial entity within the global framework, particularly for the security of less powerful and influential nations that seek stability and peace. However, if its current issues are not addressed, NATO risks losing the influence it has accumulated over the years, which would also negatively impact the United States, its primary driving force. The alliance presently lacks the necessary capabilities to effectively address the security and defence challenges of the 21st century.¹⁴

Successful adaptation of the Alliance requires addressing new geostrategic and transatlantic realities. This includes the necessity of deterring a revisionist and militarily advanced Russia, projecting stability towards NATO's southern regions, and managing threats from states such

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/25/us/politics/us-russia-nuclear.html> David Sanger and Jim Tankersley, "U.S. Warns Russia of 'Catastrophic Consequences' If It Uses Nuclear Weapons," The New York Times, September 25, 2022, and W. J. Hennigan, "Nuclear War: The Rising Risk and How We Stop It," The New York Times, March 7, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/03/07/opinion/nuclear-war-prevention.html>.

¹³ Chels Michta, "NATO wakes up to the Chinese threat", by CEPA, July 25th, 2024, <https://cepa.org/article/nato-wakes-up-to-the-chinese-threat/>

¹⁴ Julian Lindley-French, "Adapting NATO to an unpredictable and fast-changing world", the NATO Review, February 19th, 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/02/19/adapting-nato-to-an-unpredictable-and-fast-changing-world/index.html>

as North Korea – for adaptability to have the quality it is also important to abandon democratic thinking and start recognising circumstances via realistic actions based on logical calculations and possible overestimation of enemy forces.

Burden-sharing between the U.S. and its allies is essential, as outlined in the Defence Investment Pledge made at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales.¹⁵ Allied leaders agreed to halt the decline in defence expenditure, aiming to allocate 2% of GDP to defence and 20% of national defence budgets to major equipment and related research and development within a decade. This agreement must be rigorously upheld, ensuring that fresh monies are appropriately used. If the Alliance wants to safeguard people while also projecting influence and strength, NATO should better integrate its various centres of excellence into a network of excellence, as well as build new centres to meet emerging concerns. Such a Centre would have to teach and educate NATO's civilian and military leadership, as well as offer staff training to the North Atlantic Council, NATO personnel, and citizens from member nations.

NATO is in need of a comprehensive future strategy that incorporates hybrid warfare, cyber warfare, counterterrorism, and other tools and methods of modern warfare to ensure a smooth transition across these areas, it must capitalise on the revolutionary influence of modern technology in both security and warfare contexts. This entails mastering and using innovative information technology in addition to a solid partnership between national intelligence gathering personnel, in addition to methodically harnessing artificial intelligence to maximise the use of large data. As a result, NATO should consider establishing an organisation similar to the US Defence Advanced Research Projects organisation (DARPA) to lead these initiatives.

Furthermore, NATO leaders should initiate a strategic review, potentially culminating in a new Strategic Concept. This forward-looking strategy must delineate how the Alliance will address the challenges posed by an unpredictable and rapidly evolving global landscape.

¹⁵ Rudzīte-Stejskala, Kristīne. "Addressing the Burden-Sharing Challenge." International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS), 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep54295>.