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June 2025

The Future of NATO

*Uncertain leadership in turbulent times: How the
North Atlantic organization sees NATO's future*



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Introduction

Vladimir Putin's war of aggression had united and strengthened NATO. Donald Trump's re-election as US president is shaking the Alliance to its foundations. A glance at its institutional structure is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the United States to the Alliance. Formally, NATO is a state-centric alliance that operates on the principle of unanimity and in which member states insist on their sovereignty in a particular way. Typical of such organizations are path-dependent behavior and compromise-oriented decisions that reflect the lowest common denominator of the diverse interests, and only secondarily represent optimal responses to external challenges for the Alliance. Also important are centrifugal forces arising from conflicts over burden-sharing, differing threat perceptions, and concerns about not being able to count on help in an emergency (abandonment) or being drawn into the conflicts of others (entrapment). In principle, therefore, external shocks such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its open war of conquest in Ukraine beginning in 2022 could both strengthen the cohesion of such institutions or accelerate their decline.

In fact, traits of both kinds can currently be observed in the case of NATO. Putin's attack did indeed strengthen the Alliance's cohesion – after February 2022, it marched resolutely and quickly back into its own past. After years of searching and self-doubt, the new *raison d'être* or sense of purpose is once again the old one: collective defense against an aggressive and expansive Russia. So even as NATO vigorously pursues the new, the status quo persists. The policy documents and declarations adopted since the spring of 2022 read as if the return to collective defense were just another task on NATO's already extensive agenda. The new Strategic Concept of summer 2022, for example, continues the 360-degree approach of deterrence and defense against threats from all directions. It identifies terrorism as the second greatest threat to the Alliance's member states and – like its superseded predecessor document from 2010 – describes collective deterrence and defense as just one of its three core tasks, along with crisis prevention and management and cooperative security (NATO 2022).¹

So far, however, research on NATO has not deemed its path dependence and vulnerability to crises to be striking features in need of explanation, but rather its longevity, adaptability, and capacity to act. Scholars have proposed two explanations for this strength: hegemonic leadership and institutional form. From the first perspective, American hegemonic leadership is seen as a crucial pillar of NATO's success. This leadership is expressed in the institution of SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe): This supreme commander of NATO is also the supreme commander of the American armed forces in Europe, i.e., always an American general. He is responsible to both the North Atlantic Coun-

cil and the US President. American leadership is based on the indispensable American contributions to collective defense and on its cooperative leadership style. One of our interlocutors at NATO described this leadership style as follows: When a challenge arises, the members discuss a wide variety of options until Washington defines the range of possible solutions within this spectrum of opinion. Then Washington engages in work of persuasion here, offers incentives there, and, if necessary, lets itself be persuaded by the better argument until an agreement is reached. With his unilateralism and decisionism, Trump is massively challenging this pillar of NATO's ability to act.

From the second perspective, NATO appears to be an organization in which institutional mechanisms favor compromises above the lowest common denominator of national interests. NATO has a large and sophisticated international bureaucracy. This apparatus consists of a political wing, the International Staff, headed by the Secretary General, and a military wing, the International Military Staff. In 2023, the International Staff comprised 1,352 employees and the International Military Staff 500. The integrated military structure has a further 7,000 civilian and military posts (NATO 2023: 143). In addition, institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly and the NATO Defense College in Rome influence the discussion with their positions and studies. The permanent delegations of the member states, which are differentiated according to themes and are well staffed, are housed in the same complex of buildings as the offices and divisions of NATO's International Staff. NATO is thus a permanent communication and negotiation machine. The constant exchange and high density of information foster trust and knowledge of the partners' red lines and the reliability. Not least, they encourage compromise and constructive solutions.

The Secretary General and the International Staff contribute to the functioning of this machinery. As Chairman of the North Atlantic Council in its various configurations and of all other committees, the Secretary General sets the agenda, structures the discussion and supports the search for compromises. He acts autonomously and influences the direction of the Alliance through his initiatives and ideas. His room for maneuver is not least based on his expertise as Head of the International Staff. Thanks to his intimate knowledge of the member states, Jens Stoltenberg played the institutional keyboard with virtuosity. As one of our interlocutors put it, he knew exactly when to be secretary and when to play the role of general. During his tenure, he pushed two projects in particular. He advocated a more global orientation for NATO. And he put new issues on the agenda, such as climate change and the women, peace, and security agenda, to help NATO keep pace with social change in many member countries. But Stoltenberg's main concern, shared by his successor Mark Rutte, was to keep NATO interesting for its faltering leading power.

¹ The only new aspect of this nomenclature is that the 2010 Strategic Concept titled the second task basket "Security through Crisis Management," while the 2022 Concept refers to "Crisis Prevention and Management."

The International Staff and dealing with Donald Trump: Burden sharing and task sharing

Already during Donald Trump's first presidency, the United States departed far from the leadership style described above. The resulting uncertainty and lack of political consultation exacerbated internal conflicts during this phase, not least between Turkey and other Alliance members. In 2019, this led French President Macron to the diagnosis that the Alliance was "brain-dead."² In Trump's second term, concerns about the reliability of the leading power have returned, and to an incalculably greater extent.

Mark Rutte has declared that one of his main tasks is to reach an agreement with Trump. After a visit to Kyiv, his second trip abroad already took him to Florida in November 2024, where he tried to convince the future president and his security advisor of the importance of the Alliance for American security.³ During his time as Dutch Prime Minister, Rutte was said to have a good relationship with Trump. He is also considered a "Trump whisperer" within the International Staff. He is attempting to secure Trump's support with two offers.

The first offer consists of a fairer burden sharing the US perspective, i.e., higher defense spending by the European members. The target of spending two percent of economic output on defense, agreed at the Wales Summit in 2014, has only been considered a floor since the Vilnius Summit in 2023.⁴ Rutte believes that higher spending is necessary.⁵ In an interview prior to the December 2024 meeting of NATO foreign ministers, he stated:

He [Trump] was the one ramping up defence spending when he was president, and I again thanked him for that, because that was crucial. But we need to do more. It will not be enough to stick at the 2% because longer term, that means that our deterrence is not strong enough⁶

After Trump, in his characteristic style, had pressed ahead with his demand for five percent, Rutte also abandoned his reluctance in January 2025 and named a new target: "it will be north of 3%." He noted that the required 3.6 or 3.7 percent could be reduced somewhat if the member states operated more efficiently.⁷ Rutte justified the new

requirement as a necessity arising from NATO's defense planning. However, this calculation was not known in advance, and according to press reports, most European NATO countries had previously expected the new target to be 2.5 percent (Gutschker 2025). However, Trump's advances toward Moscow and his demonstrative turning away from Kyiv already at the end of February 2025 have dramatically overturned these calculations by the European NATO members.

The second of Rutte's offers to Trump is to link the East Asian and European theaters of conflict – in other words, to demonstrate transatlantic solidarity in the great power conflict with China. Although the treatment of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky by Trump and Vice-President JD Vance at the White House on February 28, 2024 marked the beginning of a period of deepened mistrust and conflicts between the US and its European allies, Rutte still counts on engaging Trump. Thus, the idea of greater European autonomy – as a fallback option in the event of American disengagement or as a counterweight to Trump – is not openly discussed within NATO's headquarters. One reason for this reluctance is Rutte's awareness that the implementation of an autonomous European defense would take years and there are countless stumbling blocks to be avoided along the way.

The Russian war of aggression and the return of collective defense

The Russian war of aggression marked a radical change in NATO's threat perception and political-strategic orientation. The Alliance reacted swiftly. It stepped up its military efforts and adopted regional and domain-specific defense plans. As a result, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, NATO is fully planning for deterrence and defense, assigning missions, mobilization times, and areas of operation to specific Allied forces. Collective defense is once again the Alliance's core task.

Until February 2022, things had looked different. Despite the annexation of Crimea, the "dual-track" formula continued to define the Alliance's stance toward Russia, at least declaratively. Deterrence and defense, on the one hand, dialogue on the other.⁸ However, members of the International Staff also complained that the two tracks were blocking each other. While most of the Eastern European countries

² "NATO is becoming brain-dead," *The Economist*, November 7, 2019.

³ "NATO's Rutte talks 'global security' with Trump in Florida," *Politico*, November 24, 2024 (www.politico.eu/article/nato-mark-rutte-us-donald-trump-global-security-defense-putin-war-talks).

⁴ NATO: Vilnius Summit Communiqué, July 11, 2023, para. 28 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm).

⁵ "To Prevent War, NATO Must Spend More." Speech by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the Concert Noble, Brussels, December 12, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_231348.htm?mc_cid=16dfcfaf83andmc_eid=2db9ef5256).

⁶ Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte ahead of the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels on 3 and 4 December, Brussels, 3. December 2024 (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_230949.htm?selectedLocale=en).

⁷ Remarks by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Subcommittee on Security and Defense, January 13, 2025 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_232125.htm?selectedLocale=en).

⁸ See, for example, the conclusions of the December 2019 London Summit: "Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security ... We remain open for dialogue, and to a constructive relationship with Russia when Russia's actions make that possible." (www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm?selectedLocale=en).

rejected any dialogue with Russia, some Western European countries insisted that Russian security interests be taken into account in deterrence and defense, for example by continuing to honor the commitment in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act not to station substantial combat forces permanently in the new member states.

The operational response to Russia's covert war after 2014 was correspondingly muted. The Readiness Action Plan adopted at the 2014 Wales Summit included the rotational deployment of troops in battalion strength (enhanced Forward Presence: eFP) to the three Baltic states and Poland, and even smaller units to Bulgaria and Romania (as tailored Forward Presence: tFP). The Alliance also increased its NATO Response Force to 40,000 troops and created a rapid reaction force, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF).⁹ The United States deployed additional combat units to Europe as part of the European Reassurance Initiative. Overall, however, the strategy remained one of deterrence by punishment. The eFP units were intended to act as a tripwire, making it clear that an attack on one member would affect the entire Alliance (Hooker 2020) – the most likely scenario envisaged was a coup de main in the Baltic states. Nevertheless, even the concept of an “asymmetrical threat of escalation” (Rynning 2021: 40) could not obscure the fact that NATO and its member states – after decades of disarmament and focusing on global crisis management operations – had neither the planning nor the capabilities for military operations for successful collective defense.

NATO reacted so quickly to the shock of an open war of aggression beginning in 2022 because its military bureaucracy had already begun planning to rebuild its defenses. In 2019, the Military Committee issued a new political-military directive (MC 400/4, MC Guidance for the Military Implementation of Alliance Strategy). This subsequently served as the basis for SACEUR to develop military planning as part of the Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), which was adopted in 2020 (Hurt and Lawrence 2021).

The tension between preceding military planning and subsequent political guidelines disappeared with the onset of the war. The New Strategic Concept, adopted at the Madrid Summit in June 2022, describes Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security” (NATO 2022: para. 8). Structurally, the New Strategic Concept builds on the previous document from 2010 and adheres to the three core tasks of “deterrence and defense,” “crisis prevention and management” and “cooperative security,” as well as the 360-degree approach. On the one hand, this update is due to the fact that work on the New Strategic Concept

was already well advanced by February 2022 (Dembinski and Fehl 2021; Tardy 2022). On the other hand, NATO's Strategic Concepts are consensus documents that reflect the interests of all Alliance members. Although the focus is on the return of the old *raison d'être* of collective defense, the growing challenge posed by China, the threat of terrorism, and crisis management remain on the agenda, at least declaratively.

There is widespread agreement at NATO Headquarters and among NATO countries that the Russian threat is systemic. Stoltenberg repeatedly spoke of a Russian “pattern of increasingly reckless behavior.” He saw at the root of the conflict Putin's claim to a vast zone of privileged influence and his view that freedom and democracy threaten his regime. Stoltenberg concluded that this threat is permanent: “Even if the war were to end tomorrow, there is no sign that Putin's broader ambitions have changed” (Stoltenberg 2023). His successor Mark Rutte added: “He [Putin] is trying to fundamentally change the security architecture that has kept Europe safe for decades.” Russia spends seven to eight percent of its gross domestic product on its military and “is preparing for long-term confrontation.”¹⁰ There is no longer any talk of dialogue in a time of war. At the 2024 Washington Summit, NATO stated only that it wanted to maintain channels of communication with Moscow to reduce risk and prevent escalation.¹¹ But even limited offers of talks were blocked on the NATO side until the end of 2024 – due to fears, especially from Eastern and Northern European countries, that other members might want to use them as a door opener for a broader agenda for talks.

From NATO's perspective, the military threat posed by Russia is and remains serious. NATO defense planners assume that the Russian rearmament program will continue unabated and – if unchecked – might enable Russia to successfully attack an NATO country within a time horizon of five to seven years. This raises the question of how NATO can provide the military means to defend “every inch of Allied territory” (NATO 2022: para. 20) (deterrence by denial).

As noted above, NATO had already launched the Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA) before the war. Since then, it has been given substance. On the one hand, the DDA concept describes peacetime deterrence measures. These include so-called vigilance activities such as reconnaissance and exercises. In addition, NATO placed its approximately 40,000 strong NATO Response Force (NRF) under the direct command of SACEUR (Monaghan et al. 2024), giving him the authority to mobilize elements of the NRF in a crisis even without explicit authorization from the North Atlantic Council.

⁹ NATO Response Force (2002–2024), www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm.

¹⁰ NATO: “To Prevent War, NATO Must Spend More.” Speech by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at the Concert Noble, Brussels, December 12, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_231348.htm?mc_cid=16dfcfaf83&mc_eid=2db9ef5256).

¹¹ Washington Summit Declaration, July 10, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/cn/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm).

On the other hand, the concept includes a “family of plans” (DDA family of plans) for defense and deterrence in the event of war. The most important of these are the aforementioned regional defense plans for the three regions North Atlantic and Northern Europe, Central Europe, and Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, which were adopted at the Vilnius Summit in July 2023. The Joint Force Commands in Norfolk, Brunssum and Naples are responsible for these plans.¹² They determine which forces will be deployed in which theaters, thus planning for the first time the defense of the entire NATO area (Covington 2023; Deni 2024). At the same time, the DDA concept dissolves the clear distinction between war and peace and also develops possible responses to Russian hybrid attacks below the threshold of open warfare (Covington 2023).

The pool of forces available for these plans is set out in the New Force Model adopted by the Alliance at the Madrid Summit in 2022. The NATO model provides for a total of 800,000 troops with different levels of readiness. “Tier 1” and “Tier 2” consist of 100,000 and 200,000 rapidly deployable troops, respectively (ready to deploy within 10 to 30 days). An additional 500,000 troops are to be ready to deploy within 180 days. The Alliance also decided to expand the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) into “multi-domain-capable” brigades (of about 5,000 troops each), to increase the number of personnel in the tailored Forward Presence (tFP), and to deploy additional smaller Allied units in Slovakia and Hungary. “Multi-domain-capable” means that these units are more heavily armed and can operate in multiple domains (land, air, sea, space and cyberspace). NATO is also creating a new and significantly larger Allied Reaction Force (ARF) of up to 40,000 troops to replace the existing NRF and VJTF. This new multi-domain-capable reaction force, with a mobile brigade at its core, will be led by the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Italy (NRDC-ITA) in Solbiate Olona for the first three years from July 1, 2024. Like the former NRF, the force is to be deployed not only for collective defense on the eastern flank, but also for crisis management operations.¹³

From NATO’s perspective, the accession of Finland and Sweden brings a number of significant advantages. It is true that the defense of the considerably extended border with Russia will also tie up the resources of other Allies. For example, the Alliance will establish a headquarters for land forces in Finland and other countries will station troops in northern Finland. In September 2024, Sweden declared its willingness to serve as framework nation for NATO’s

forward presence in the North. But Finland and Sweden bring considerable military capabilities of their own to the table. And the geographic location of the new members significantly enhances the Alliance’s ability to defend the Baltic states, control the Baltic Sea, and project power in the Arctic. These plans represent a shift toward a strategy of deterrence by denial. The ability to mount an assertive defense close to the border is the new key concept.

Plans are one thing, their implementation is quite another. In the coming years, NATO bodies will be concerned with getting member states to provide the necessary forces of the required quality and with the necessary equipment (Moller 2023/24: 101). The NATO countries have pledged sufficient troops for the first one-year rotation phase of the Allied Reaction Force (ARF) and appear to be on track to meet the numerical requirements of the New Force Model.¹⁴ However, it remains to be seen whether the pledged forces will also meet the qualitative requirements of the regional plans (Monaghan et al. 2024; Moller 2023/24).

Relations with Ukraine: Solidarity with limits

Relations between NATO and Ukraine have deepened steadily since the signing of the joint charter in 1997, but the end point of this development is far from clear, including in the assessment of the International Staff, despite Russia’s full-scale invasion and massive Western support for Ukraine. Staff members share the view that Ukraine is also fighting for NATO’s security, so Ukraine’s security is of paramount importance to the Alliance.¹⁵ However, NATO is proceeding cautiously when it comes to providing material assistance to Ukraine. Member states provide the bulk of military assistance while the Alliance itself is supporting Ukraine as part of a Comprehensive Assistance Package with non-lethal items such as fuel and communications systems.¹⁶ It was only at the Washington Summit in 2024 that NATO decided to transfer the task of coordinating military assistance for Ukraine, which until then had been the responsibility of the ad hoc Ramstein Format, to a newly created command based in Wiesbaden, Germany, called NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU). Also agreed in Washington was the Pledge of Long-Term Security Assistance for Ukraine. Under this agreement, members pledge to contribute their fair share (essentially calculated according to their gross domestic product) of the promised 40 billion euros a year in security assistance.¹⁷

¹² The demarcation of responsibilities between Norfolk in the United States and Brunssum in the Netherlands is controversial. The Scandinavian countries insisted on being assigned to the same command, the one in Norfolk. With Sweden’s accession, NATO grounded this wish. As a result, however, the close military ties between Finland and Sweden, on the one hand, and the Baltic states on the other are not reflected in NATO’s command structure (Moller 2023/24: 99).

¹³ See <https://nrdc-ita.nato.int/operations/allied-reaction-force>.

¹⁴ In 2024, Stoltenberg had stated that member states had reported around 500,000 rapidly deployable troops, which is more than the number envisaged in the New Force Model. See Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the second day of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers, June 14, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_226425.htm).

¹⁵ Vilnius Summit Communiqué, July 11, 2023 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm).

¹⁶ NATO Allies continue Ukraine support through Comprehensive Assistance Package at Washington Summit, July 17, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_228110.htm).

¹⁷ See the Annex to the Washington Summit Declaration of July 10, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/ar/natohq/official_texts_227678.htm).

Before the re-election of Donald Trump, the prospect of accession was pithy in its choice of words but remained vague in its substance. In the run-up to the Vilnius Summit in July 2023, President Zelensky, supported by a number of Eastern European member states, had urged rapid accession. However, the commitments fell far short of this demand. The Summit reaffirmed that Ukraine's future lies in NATO.¹⁸ Ukraine has already advanced so far along this path that a Membership Action Plan – which usually precedes accession – is not deemed necessary. However, the summit also qualified this concession by stipulating that democratic reforms must be regularly assessed by NATO foreign ministers as part of an Annual National Programme. One concession that did not go very far in operational terms was the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Council, which gives the country a voice within the Alliance.

In substance, NATO did not go beyond the ill-fated resolution of the 2008 Bucharest Summit. At the time, it confirmed that Ukraine (like Georgia) would join NATO, without specifying a date. This contradiction continues to shape the discussions of the International Staff to this day. Although Stoltenberg was trying to pave the way for accession, he and our interlocutors on his staff were aware of continued and in some cases even growing opposition.

Although foreseeable since Trump's re-election, the announcement by the new US Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, on February 12, 2025, that Ukraine's membership in NATO was out of the question and that the US would not participate in the international peacekeeping force then under discussion to secure a possible ceasefire, came as a bombshell in this situation.¹⁹ This ruled out one of the models for guaranteeing Ukraine's security under discussion until then, namely the admission of Ukraine according to the so-called Germany model, i.e., without the territories occupied by Russia. As an alternative, the Secretary General's staff is discussing the South Korea model. According to this model, a ceasefire would be secured by a heavily armed force. Following Hegseth's refusal, this force would have to be provided by European states. Among military experts, different estimates are circulating – for example, that five brigades would be needed (Tenenbaum and Litra 2024). On the Ukrainian side, figures of up to 200,000 troops have been cited. However, where and how this force is to be stationed and who would contribute to it is completely up in the air. Apart from the scarce capacities, under this construction – without the US and its nuclear protection – the troop-contributing countries would be undergoing very considerable risks. Moreover, Russia has not indicated that it would agree to such a variant. This ultimately leaves the model of strengthening Ukraine militarily and safeguarding its security with the promise of support in the event of re-

newed aggression. However, this would leave Ukraine in a gray area, and the risk of the ceasefire line being violated by force would remain high. After three years of war, fought in part also over the issue of free choice of alliances, such an outcome would be nothing short of devastating.

The relationship with China: defying the challenge

The rise of China and its security policy implications are increasingly prominent on NATO's agenda. At the behest of then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the North Atlantic Council formally discussed the issue for the first time at the 2019 London Summit, declaring: "We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance."²⁰

US President Joseph Biden and the overwhelming majority of the American foreign policy elite also saw the rise of China and its behavior as the most important threat to American security. Biden's call for a joint response met with some resonance in Europe. For even before the war in Ukraine, a more critical attitude toward China had already prevailed in most European countries. Against this backdrop, NATO declared as early as the summer of 2021: "China's stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security."²¹ With a view to closing ranks with the leading power, since the London Summit, Secretary General Stoltenberg had been driving the debate by arguing that China was moving ever closer to NATO in Europe: militarily, through its presence in critical areas of infrastructure, and through its hybrid activities. He also argued that China's rise was accelerating the globalization of dangers and threats. To counter this, he proposed two courses of action: NATO needed to become more resilient at home, and it needed to adopt a "more global approach" externally.

The war and the increasingly close Sino-Russian quasi-alliance (officially "no limits friendship") further exacerbated NATO's threat perception and tone toward China. The 2022 Strategic Concept stated: "the People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values" (NATO 2022: para. 13). The allegation is that China is using an entire toolbox of political, economic, and military means to expand its global power position and gain influence in Europe. The list of alleged Chinese activities is extensive. It ranges from attempts to divide the Alliance, cyber espionage, hybrid actions, China's quest for dominance over critical supply chains, and the possible restriction of the Alliance's freedom of movement

18 See Vilnius Summit Communiqué, July 11, 2023. The Washington Summit Declaration of July 2024 grandiosely declares: "Ukraine's future is in NATO" (para. 16).

19 Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth at Ukraine Defense Contact Group, February 12, 2025 (www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact).

20 London Declaration, December 4, 2019, para. 6 (www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm?selectedLocale=en).

21 Brussels Summit Communiqué, June 14, 2021 (www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/news_185000.htm).

through control of important infrastructure facilities such as ports and quays, to the dangers posed by the Chinese presence in telecommunications networks and space as well as emerging disruptive technologies (Stoltenberg 2020). The possibly deliberate and repeated destruction of undersea cables by Chinese cargo ships in the Baltic Sea in 2024 is also seen as a wake-up call within the International Staff. China's dramatically accelerated military buildup in recent years, particularly in the nuclear and maritime domains, is creating new military realities that NATO must take into account. While the Strategic Concept keeps the door open to constructive dialogue with China, the Alliance is focused on a unified response to China's systemic challenges. This set the tone that has been repeated almost verbatim in official summit documents ever since.

More controversial than the risk analysis, among the International Staff as well, is the question of how NATO should deal with the Chinese challenge in and around Europe. There is no disagreement that disinformation should be rejected and that risk profiles should be jointly developed. Beyond that, however, NATO's role and comparative advantage in this area are disputed. The primary responsibility for cyber security, for example, lies with the states. NATO can only play a coordinating role, which it shares with the EU. Responsibility for supply chain resilience and critical infrastructure and telecommunications security also rests with the member states and the EU. When it comes to coordinating national policies and setting standards in these areas, the much better-resourced EU claims the lead. Even political and economic coordination with the United States within the framework of NATO, for example on export controls, is not a foregone conclusion. The interests and views of NATO's European partners are too divergent in this respect. While the United States is pushing for coordination within NATO, and some Eastern and Northern European countries – hoping for something in return – are at least not opposed to this position, Germany, for example, wants to protect its significant economic relations with China, and France insists on coordinating China policy within the framework of the EU.

The extent to which NATO can and should assume competencies, given its slender comparative advantages and the heterogeneous interests of its members, is also controversial within the International Staff. Even the willingness to engage in policy coordination within NATO is controversial, given the potential for serious consequences, for example with regard to Taiwan. Nevertheless, our interlocutors cited two reasons why NATO should pursue an active China policy: First, it brings together the key Western players and provides an appropriate forum for sharing and for assessing the situation. And second, should Chinese activities make a military response appear appropriate, an ongoing joint analysis of the danger posed would be helpful.

The second strand of the China strategy – the offers of talks – is similarly vague. In 2023, exchanges with China also took place largely ad hoc.²² The Secretary General's report for the year mentions only one conversation between the Chairman of the Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, and Chinese officials on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore (NATO 2023: 21). At least there is a regular exchange at the level of the military staffs, with the eighth meeting in this series taking place in March 2024.²³

Acting globally, countering China: NATO's partnerships

Even before the war in Ukraine, former Secretary General Stoltenberg stressed the increasingly global nature of security policy risks and military threats. Since the outbreak of the war, this dissolution of boundaries has played an even greater role in NATO's discourse and the statements of its spokespeople. "In today's world, security is not a regional matter but a global one" (Stoltenberg 2024).

Accordingly, the new Secretary General Rutte also wants to make the Alliance more global. *Going global* does not mean that NATO will relax the geographic limitation of Article 5 and collective defense to the Euro-Atlantic region. What is meant is a more global perspective. However, like his predecessor Stoltenberg, Rutte is constantly trying to expand the boundaries and operational significance of this more global perspective.

The institutionalized partnerships subsumed under the core task of "cooperative security" in the Strategic Concept are one instrument for focusing on conflicts beyond NATO territory that could have an impact on Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has established such partnerships with 35 countries and various international organizations. In addition to cooperation with the OSCE and the UN, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Dialogue are among the oldest of these formats (see the section on the southern neighborhood below).

Since the London Summit in 2019, the rapidly deepening partnerships with the Pacific democracies known as the AP4 – Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – have attracted particular interest. The war in Ukraine, the Russian-Chinese no-limits friendship, and North Korean support for the Russian war machine with material and troops, have once again highlighted the interconnectedness of the European and Indo-Pacific conflict situations.

All Pacific partners support the sanctions regime against Russia. Japan is supporting Ukraine with financial aid and supplies of humanitarian and other goods. In addition to

²² Center for Strategic Decision Research and China Institute for International Strategic Studies 2021: NATO – China Relations. Charting the Way Forward (www.ceris.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NATO-China-Relations-01032021.pdf).

²³ 8th NATO military staff talks with China, March 15, 2024, (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_223651.htm?selectedLocale=en).

such goods, Australia is also supplying weapons to Ukraine (Grgić 2024). South Korea is likewise providing humanitarian and non-lethal military supplies, and it is also indirectly involved militarily through a ring exchange with the US of 600,000 artillery shells for Ukraine. New Zealand is also supporting Ukraine with military equipment. The AP4 regularly participate in a number of NATO meetings and programs. Their leaders have attended the summits in Madrid, Vilnius, and Washington. All four have what are known as Individually Tailored Partnership Programs (ITPP) with NATO. The relationship with Japan is the most developed and even includes cooperation in space. It also covers maritime security, non-proliferation, and cyber security. South Korea is the first of the AP4 countries to participate in a NATO centre of excellence, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn.

If the rhetorical signals from both sides are anything to go by, these partnerships could develop much further in the future. The AP4 see the war in Ukraine as a harbinger of what could happen in East Asia. Stoltenberg shares this assessment. At the 2023 Munich Security Conference, he warned with regard to China's claims to Taiwan: "What is happening in Europe today could happen in Asia tomorrow."²⁴ China, he noted, is watching closely to see what price Russia pays for its aggression and what benefits it derives from that aggression. NATO must therefore position itself in the Indo-Pacific region as well. "In a more dangerous world, where security is not regional anymore but truly global, and China and Russia are coming closer, it is even more important that we work closely with our partners all around the world."²⁵ The Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, made another element of the underlying logic clear during a visit to Korea: "NATO and South Korea are all working to serve a greater good: the protection of freedom and democracy."²⁶ The 2023 Vilnius Summit Communiqué struck a similar note: "We will stand up for our shared values and the rules-based international order, including freedom of navigation."²⁷

What NATO should do operationally to live up to these expectations and its own rhetoric, however, is unclear. So-called freedom of navigation operations, specifically the passage of naval units through the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, are conducted by some European states, albeit under national responsibility. And NATO's European members would not be able to provide more than a symbolic presence in the Eastern Pacific in any case. The Secretary General is also aware of the fears of some European members that NATO could become a party to the conflict in East Asia alongside the United States. The Secretary General's staff had a painful experience of the strength of

these reservations when the project to open a NATO office in Tokyo, which it had pursued with great energy, was blocked by France.²⁸

The southern neighborhood remains a hot topic

While NATO, as a collective defense organization, has looked eastward since its inception, crises in the South have repeatedly threatened the security of its citizens – and the political coherence of the Alliance – throughout its history. It invoked Article 5 for the first and to date only time in its history in response to the al-Qaeda attack of September 11, 2001. The Alliance's initiatives and structured formats toward the southern neighborhood therefore have a dual function. On the one hand, with their help, the Alliance seeks to export stability, to identify and manage conflict situations with potential repercussions for the transatlantic region at an early stage, and to promote the Alliance's values. On the other hand, it seeks to strengthen its coherence through an active southern neighborhood policy and to prevent potential conflicts among members over how to deal with crises in the southern region.

The geographic definition of what NATO considers its southern neighborhood is somewhat fuzzy. In Vilnius, it included under this rubric the entire arc from the Middle East to the western end of North Africa, including the Sahel. It maintains institutionalized partnerships with a smaller group of countries: in the context of the Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994, with seven Mediterranean partners, including Israel and Jordan, and in the context of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, launched in 2004, with four Gulf states. Under the umbrella of these formats, it primarily implements bilateral cooperation programs tailored to the needs and wishes of the partners. These cover a wide range of topics, from climate and security to good governance, women and peace. Operationally, the focus is on military training and security sector reform. The most important training mission at the moment – albeit outside the institutionalized formats – is taking place in Iraq. Launched in 2018 at the invitation of the Iraqi government, it advises Iraqi ministries on issues such as resource management, security sector reform, the role of women in peace and security, and good governance (NATO 2023: 100).

In NATO, the development of this dimension has traditionally been driven by the southern member states, particularly Italy and Spain. According to their analysis, the conflict situations that manifest themselves in civil wars and terrorism are primarily rooted in climatic, economic and social crises, as well as in the fragility of state institutions. NATO's Hub

²⁴ NATO chief to Europe: Time to talk China, Politico, February 18, 2023 (www.politico.eu/article/nato-jens-stoltenberg-europe-china/).

²⁵ Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 2023 NATO Youth Summit, June 5, 2023 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_215363.htm).

²⁶ NATO, Chair of military committee visits the Republic of Korea, April 13, 2022 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_194729.htm).

²⁷ Vilnius Summit Communiqué, July 13, 2023 (www.nato.int/cps/pt/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm).

²⁸ Macron blocks NATO outpost in Japan amid Chinese complaints, Politico, July 7, 2023 (www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-block-nato-outpost-japan-china-complaints/).

for the South is a good example of how the countries on NATO's southern flank assess the situation in their southern neighborhood and what role they believe NATO should play there. Established in 2017 and based at the Allied Joint Force Command Naples, the Hub is a cross between a think tank and a political-diplomatic center. Its activities are divided into an "understanding pillar" and an "engagement pillar." In the first pillar, the Hub interacts with think tanks and NGOs; in the second, it develops a network with representatives of states and other regional organizations. However, observers say of the Hub that it is not sufficiently integrated into NATO's structures and the work in Brussels.

The war in Ukraine and the return to collective defense were not accompanied by a declared devaluation of the southern dimension. On the contrary, the renaissance of collective defense even triggered a counter-movement, which was supported by the International Staff. In the communiqué of the Vilnius Summit in 2023, the southern dimension is once again given a broader scope. On the one hand, the declaration repeats the traditional conflict analysis: Demographic, economic, and political crises, aggravated by climate change, fragile institutions, and food insecurity, are the drivers of violent conflict. On the other hand, it points out that external actors such as Russia are exacerbating these conflicts (para. 22). Against this backdrop, the heads of state and government mandated a comprehensive and in-depth reflection on existing and emerging threats and opportunities for engagement with partners in the southern region.

In response, the Secretary General established a reflection group of independent experts. Their report, presented in May 2024, also mentions the intertwining of the Russian threat with the southern dimension, but then follows the traditional conflict analysis for much of its length.²⁹ The report concludes that NATO, in cooperation with other partners, should focus on addressing the root causes of conflict and contribute its capabilities in training and capacity-building for local security actors. It should place its values at the center of these training programs, "including non-traditional security challenges such as resilience, climate security, Women, Peace and Security, and human security." Specifically, the report recommended the appointment of a Special Envoy for the Southern Neighbourhoods. The Secretary General complied with this recommendation by appointing Javier Colomina on July 23, 2024.³⁰

The International Staff also sees two conceptual weaknesses in this approach. The first criticism is more long-standing and questions whether NATO, as a military organization, is

at all suited to dealing with the causes of conflict that it has diagnosed (see Dembinski and Fehl 2021). The second asks how NATO can resolve the conflict it describes with Russia and China. Mark Rutte explicitly placed the opening of a NATO office in Amman in this context: "As you also know, we are opening an office in Jordan, and we are very active on this, because we cannot have a situation in which ... we have the Chinese and the Russians being involved in Africa and other parts of the region, and the West not being involved there."³¹ However, NATO has yet to respond to Russia's support for coup regimes in the Sahel in the form of unconditional arms supplies and support by the "Africa Corps" – formerly the Wagner Group.

The likelihood that threats requiring a response in the form of military intervention will emanate from the southern neighborhood is also treated as an open question within the Secretary General's staff.³² From 2008 to 2016, the Alliance maintained Operation Open Shield, a naval counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. The Sea Guardian naval mission in the Mediterranean continues to this day.

Core documents still describe out-of-area crisis interventions as a core task of the Alliance. The New Strategic Concept emphasizes prevention and promises that human security, the protection of civilians, and cooperation with the United Nations in conflict management operations are key concerns (NATO 2022). However, the International Staff is also aware that there is a lack of political support for this task in key countries. In its official statements, NATO largely conceals the humiliating failure of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Yet, this experience undermines the political support for large-scale, multilateral interventions. Another consideration speaks against entrusting organizations like NATO with military out-of-area interventions. Due to their consensus-based decision-making, such organizations are regarded as too cumbersome and slow. Thus, since the war in Kosovo, states have conducted more robust out-of-area operations either under national responsibility or as part of so-called coalitions of the willing.

Even more striking is the gap between rhetoric and practice in the fight against terrorism. NATO documents consistently describe this fight as a central task of the Alliance. The 2023 Vilnius Summit Communiqué states: "Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity."³³ In fact, NATO has no responsibility for countering internal terrorist threats and, as we

29 Independent Expert Group Supporting NATO's Comprehensive and Deep Reflection Process on the Southern Neighborhood Final Report, Brussels, May 2024 (www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/5/pdf/240507-NATO-South-Report.pdf).

30 NATO Secretary General announces the appointment of new Special Representative for the Southern Neighborhood, July 23, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_228160.htm?selectedLocale=en).

31 Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte ahead of the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Brussels on 3 and 4 December (www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_230949.htm?selectedLocale=en).

32 Ian Lesser advocates a more active military role for the Alliance, for example in surveillance and intelligence and defense against a conceivable future threat from missiles or drones (Lesser 2024). The NATO Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Force (NISRF) could be used for intelligence gathering. See www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48892.htm.

33 Vilnius Summit Communiqué, July 11, 2023.

have seen, plays only a limited role in countering potential terrorist threats outside the Alliance's territory. The statements of our interlocutors suggest that Turkey, in particular, is insisting that the fight against terrorism be included in summit documents, but without itself specifying what NATO's operational contribution might be.

Turkey also symbolizes NATO's difficulties in pursuing a common approach in its southern neighborhood. In the Armenian-Azerbaijani war, in Libya, and in Syria, Turkey acts without consulting its official allies. Beyond the consensus that it is better to have Turkey as a member than to lose it, the Secretary General's staff has no strategy for engaging Ankara.

Hybrid threats: acute

Even before the annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO was concerned with defending against hybrid threats, including cyberattacks (Lasconjarias and Larsen 2014). Since then, the issue has become much more prominent. In 2015, the defense ministers adopted a strategy to counter hybrid threats. In 2016, the Alliance declared for the first time that a hybrid attack on a member could trigger Article 5. With the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022 and the increase in hybrid attacks attributed primarily to Russia and secondarily to China, this threat has received renewed attention.

In NATO's understanding, hybrid threats combine military and non-military means. They can be covert or overt and range from disinformation and cyberattacks to serious acts of sabotage and attacks by irregular forces before and during an open military conflict. A scenario at the higher end of the escalation ladder, which has recently been the focus of more intensive discussion, is destabilization and covert occupation of Svalbard by Russia in the first phase of a war (Wither 2023).

NATO is currently paying particular attention to the vulnerability of critical maritime infrastructure, including undersea cables. In response to Russian espionage and apparent acts of sabotage of this infrastructure, NATO has established a Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell to share information with public and private actors and a Maritime Center for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure at its headquarters in Northwood (NATO 2023: 58). In addition to providing a picture of the undersea environment, this center is intended to strengthen cooperation with private actors. In mid-January, NATO also launched the Baltic Sentry mission, along with a mandate for the NATO Standing Naval Force to increase surveillance of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea.

Strengthening resilience is seen as key to defending against hybrid threats, especially in the lower and middle

ranges of the escalation spectrum. In this area, NATO provides for shared responsibility in accordance with Article 3 of the NATO Treaty.³⁴ While operational responsibility rests with the member states, the Alliance plays a coordinating role. It sets standards, gathers information, produces situation reports, and shares them with the member states and other organizations such as the EU. In addition to NATO's centres of excellence – such as the Cyber Defense Centre in Tallinn – the Joint Intelligence and Security Division at NATO Headquarters shares this responsibility. NATO could also deter hybrid threats by deploying forces such as those trained in the 2023 Crisis Management Exercise involving the civilian and military staffs. However, whether NATO can actually achieve a deterrent effect is also a matter of debate among the Secretary General's staff. Finally, NATO could initiate defensive measures in the event of hybrid attacks at the upper end of the escalation spectrum.

Nuclear deterrence

The war in Ukraine has also fundamentally changed the debate within NATO and among its members about nuclear deterrence and arms control. Although nuclear arms control is the responsibility of the United States and, in the future, the other two Western nuclear powers, France and the UK, the Alliance has claimed competence in this field since the Harmel Report in 1967. It acts as a forum for consultation and communicates common positions to the outside world and to the societies of the member countries. European NATO members also have a say in nuclear arms control and deterrence through their involvement in nuclear planning through the Nuclear Planning Group and their participation in nuclear sharing. Prior to 2022, some member states, such as Germany, debated whether and under what conditions they should give up their active participation in nuclear sharing and support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Russia's war of aggression and its threatening nuclear gestures have silenced this discussion. NATO's nuclear role is no longer in question. And the chances of arms control negotiations are currently seen as slim, even by members of the Secretary General's staff. Scope for unilateral steps to limit the use of nuclear weapons is regarded as more likely. In the course of the war in Ukraine, the US did not respond to Russia's nuclear threats with similar threats of its own. This restraint meets with broad approval within NATO and among the Secretary General's staff. Discussion of the extent to which nuclear threats could be further delegitimized, for example through a no-first-use declaration, has stalled in the face of the war. Nonetheless, members of the International Staff see opportunities for such initiatives in the future, since NATO is no longer dependent on the threat of first use of nuclear weapons due to the changed military balance of power compared to the Cold War. On

34 NATO: Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3, November 13, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/topics_132722.htm).

the other hand, however, the massive loss of confidence in the security guarantees of the United States – and in particular in the reliability of its nuclear umbrella – has rekindled the debate on the Europeanization of nuclear deterrence. The outcome of this debate, however, will remain open for the foreseeable future.

Beyond deterrence and defense: NATO as a community of values

Since its inception, the Alliance has seen itself as a values-based community, but has repeatedly compromised this ideal when deterrence and defense capabilities got in the way. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has placed greater emphasis on its character as a community of values. The Secretary General, in particular, together with his staff have contributed to this development. The Alliance has declared its willingness to provide disaster relief and to provide security for humanitarian assistance through its missions; it has developed a Human Security Agenda as a guiding principle for (currently unlikely) crisis management missions; and it emphasizes the leading role of the United Nations and a UN mandate as a condition for its out-of-area missions. More recently, the Alliance has sought to raise its profile as a community of values through three initiatives. The Secretary General and his staff play a driving role in this.

First, NATO claims a leading role on climate change (NATO 2022: para. 46). On the one hand, it is interested in gaining a better understanding of how climate change acts as a driver of conflict. At the Vilnius Summit in 2023, the Alliance reaffirmed the need to consider climate change as a cross-cutting issue that affects the three core tasks. Thus, the Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment aims to raise awareness within the Alliance and its member states of the link between climate change and security. On the other hand, it is also concerned with reducing its own ecological footprint (NATO 2023).

Second, since 2007, NATO has been working intensively on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, in response to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The ISAF mission and the promotion of women's rights in Afghanistan were one driver in this regard, and the Nordic countries' pioneering role in this area was another (O'Sullivan 2024). In 2012, the Secretary General appointed a Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security for the first time. Since then, a corresponding structure of offices and responsibilities has been established within NATO (NATO 2024). At the Washington Summit in 2024, the Alliance adopted a broader agenda on women's rights and the protection of women in conflict situations.³⁵ The Secretary General has

two concerns in this regard: Internally, it is a question of equal rights for women in the armed forces and of recognizing their specific contribution to the resilience of armed forces. Outside the Alliance, the focus is on gaining a better understanding of women's contribution to the de-escalation and pacification of violent conflicts and of the protection of women in conflict situations.

The third initiative revolves around strengthening democracy within the Alliance's own ranks and improving political consultation. However, this is the area where the Secretary General has made the least progress. A reflection group led by Thomas de Maizière and A. Wess Mitchell had put forward proposals for strengthening political consultation and cautiously reforming consensus-oriented decision-making procedures.³⁶ That this remains a difficult area was demonstrated not least by Turkey's (temporary but insistent) blockade of Sweden's accession.

Since the re-election of Donald Trump, a new value gap has opened up between the United States on the one hand and Canada and virtually all European members on the other. Statements by US government officials at the Munich Security Conference 2025 highlighted this divide. Whether common interests rather than common values can serve as the glue in the future is an open question. This is all the more true as Trump's foreign and foreign economic policy practices make no distinction between allies and adversaries when it comes to his core concerns under the banner of "Make America Great Again." Moreover, his persistent fantasies of annexing Canada, and even more so Greenland, are firmly directed against NATO allies.

After years of self-doubt and the beginning of the Russian war of aggression, NATO, strengthened by new members and new unity, seemed to have acquired an unquestionable sense of purpose: collective defense against what was perceived as a perpetually aggressive Russia. This flight of fancy was brought crashing down to earth by Trump's re-election. NATO's own view of how to deal with this challenge, and thus of its future, is currently blurred at best. On the European side, the loss of confidence is leading to a growing conviction that it must rely on its own strengths and build them up massively. The Secretary General, on the other hand, hopes to keep the United States involved in Europe by offering fair burden-sharing and the prospect of lucrative arms deals. Even if this succeeds, it remains unclear how the defense of the Alliance's territory and, moreover, the security of Ukraine can be credibly guaranteed as American interest wanes – in a situation where war is once again being waged in Europe and NATO is not only indirectly but potentially directly affected. The geographic and functional boundaries of the Alliance also remain unclear. The Secretary General advocates both a globalization of NATO's security policy

³⁵ Allies endorse a new NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security at the Summit in Washington, Brussels, July 10, 2024 (www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/news_227243.htm).

³⁶ NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, Brussels, November 25, 2020 (www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf).

responsibilities and the assumption of additional tasks ranging from defense against hybrid threats to energy security and climate change. However, the extent to which a consensus-based organization and geographically defined military alliance can contribute to crisis management, counter-terrorism, and addressing global threats in distant regions is controversial not only among the member states but also within the International Staff.

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The Future of NATO – Inside NATO

NATO has been a key security pillar of German and European defence policy from the very outset. Since the end of the Cold War, however, it has undergone a series of international transformations and realignments, driven by developments in the global security environment and pressure from its own member states.

While the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has strengthened NATO's self-perception as a key guarantor of collective security, the change in US administration at the beginning of 2025 raises fundamental questions once again. What role will the US play in Europe's future security, and how might European nations respond to the situation?

This publication is part of a Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung study entitled "The Future of NATO", which summarises and analyses the ongoing debates on the Alliance and current security challenges in 11 member and 4 non-member states. These country studies form the basis of an overarching publication which seeks to provide possible answers to the unresolved questions and propose potential scenarios for the future of NATO.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

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