

NATO 2030: towards a new strategy

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The NATO summit held in Brussels on 14 June was intended to show a return to transatlantic unity after four years of the Trump administration. The new President Joe Biden wanted to demonstrate that the United States is resuming its leadership role in the transatlantic community; that NATO is still an important alliance for the US; and Washington is committed to the principles of Article 5. The Alliance is also adapting to changes in the security environment by adopting the NATO 2030 agenda and deciding to develop a new strategic concept. However, the parameters of this adaptation will be subject to further negotiations between the allies, particularly with regard to strengthening deterrence and defence on the eastern flank, and with regard to how and to what extent the Alliance should engage in containing China. At the same time, as NATO adjusts its course to focus on deterrence and defence, other formats for security cooperation between the US & Europe and among the European countries are being developed.

NATO 2030: what kind of Alliance?

The backdrop to the Brussels summit was the Alliance's 70th anniversary meeting in London in December 2019, which showed that the organisation was faced with a wide range of problems. In 2019, the debate was dominated by different perceptions of threats and challenges, a lack of political consultation on key issues, debate over the size of defence budgets, and the relationship with Donald Trump, which from the perspective of the Western European members was difficult. At that time, the allies decided to initiate a reflection process under the leadership of the NATO Secretary General¹ Jens Stoltenberg; he set up a group of experts who issued a report entitled *United for a New Era*² in November 2020. Taking the report's proposals as well as his own conclusions into consideration, and after consultation with the member states, Stoltenberg presented his proposals for the NATO 2030 agenda,³ which the allies accepted during the Brussels summit. This document will most likely set the direction for a new NATO Strategic Concept, to be adopted in 2022, that will replace the now outdated 2010 strategy.

¹ J. Gotkowska, 'NATO in transition', *OSW Commentary*, no. 314, 4 December 2019, osw.waw.pl.

² *NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General*, NATO, 25 November 2020, nato.int.

³ *NATO 2030. Factsheet*, NATO, June 2021, nato.int.



The starting point of the NATO 2030 agenda is the belief that the Alliance is once again at a turning point in its history where it must adapt to a changing world – not only to confront Russia’s continued aggressive policy, but also to find answers to the challenges posed by the rise of China. The allies thus agreed that they should first of all intensify their political consultations. NATO is to become a platform for extended political dialogue. In strategic terms, the organisation is primarily betting on deterrence and defence. In view of the growing uncertainty in international relations, the allies agreed to fulfil the financial commitments made in 2014 to spend 2% of their GDP on defence and 20% of their annual defence budgets on new arms and military equipment. NATO will also ideally refrain from conducting any major crisis response operations during the current decade. This is symbolised by the planned withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan and the end of the largest out-of-area ‘Resolute Support’ operation, following the US decision to withdraw its troops from that country. However, NATO will continue to engage in training and capacity building in partner countries in the wider European neighbourhood.

NATO wants to play a larger role in improving the resilience of its member states, investing in emerging and disruptive technologies in

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defence, adapting to climate change, and upholding the rules-based international order. On the first of these issues, in 2016 the allies decided to adopt seven baseline requirements for national resilience with regard to the following areas: continuity of government and critical government services; the ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movements of people; the ability to deal with mass casualties; ensuring the resilience of energy supplies; of food and water resources; of civil communications systems; and of transport systems.⁴ At the Brussels summit they made a strengthened commitment to resilience, extending the areas above to include the diversification of supply chains, as well as the resilience of critical infrastructure (on land, at sea, in space and in cyberspace) and key industries.⁵ The development of emerging and disruptive technologies is to be facilitated by the planned creation of a civil-military Defence Innovation Accelerator (DIANA) and a multinationally-funded NATO Innovation Fund to invest in start-ups working on dual-use and emerging & disruptive technologies. NATO wants to invest in the following areas: artificial intelligence, data and computing, autonomy, quantum-enabled technologies, biotechnology and human enhancements, hypersonic technologies, and space.⁶ The allies have also adopted a Climate Change and Security Action Plan. NATO wants to analyse the impact of climate change on the security environment, and on allied installations, missions and operations; adapt accordingly, and contribute to the mitigation of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the military.⁷

Russia, the eastern flank and collective defence

As NATO has agreed that Russian aggressive actions remain the most important threat to Euro-Atlantic security; they are extensively discussed in the Brussels Summit Communiqué.⁸ At the same time, the Alliance has highlighted its traditional dual-track approach towards Russia, consisting of both deterrence & defence and maintaining dialogue. Since 2014 NATO has aimed to deter Moscow from taking hostile actions against its member states and to strengthen its own ability to collectively defend endangered allies, in parallel to the US’s military activity. After 2014 the Alliance suspended practical civilian and military cooperation with Moscow, but declared itself open to political dialogue within

⁴ ‘Resilience and Article 3’, NATO, 11 June 2021, nato.int.

⁵ ‘Strengthened Resilience Commitment’, NATO, 14 June 2021, nato.int.

⁶ ‘Emerging and disruptive technologies’, NATO, 18 June 2021, nato.int.

⁷ ‘NATO Climate Change and Security Action Plan’, NATO, 14 June 2021, nato.int.

⁸ ‘Brussels Summit Communiqué’, NATO, 14 June 2021, nato.int.

the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). In recent years the NRC meetings have taken place only sporadically due to a lack of interest and goodwill on the Kremlin's part. Nowadays NATO is sending signals that it wishes to reactivate the dialogue in the NRC after a hiatus of more than a year and a half. This is also linked to the Biden administration's agenda aimed at stabilising relations with Russia and making them more predictable. This means that arms control may assume greater prominence as a topic in NATO.

The Brussels summit underlined that collective defence remains the Alliance's main mission. NATO will maintain and rationalise its current

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strategy of maintaining a limited military presence in the Baltic Sea (four battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states, strengthened air policing) and the Black Sea region (periodic rotations of land forces and strengthened air policing), combined with improved reinforcement of these forces in times of crisis or conflict. These measures include: a reform of the NATO Response Force; increasing the readiness of national armed forces; creating new and adapting existing NATO headquarters to collective defence needs; expanding multinational headquarters at the corps and division levels on the eastern flank; improving military mobility; conducting rapid reinforcement exercises; and enhancing the ability to secure sea lanes of communication between America and Europe.

New elements with regard to deterrence and defence were also put forward at the Brussels summit. NATO will implement the classified military strategy adopted in 2019 and the two military concepts based on it: the deterrence and defence concept, and the warfighting concept. It also intends to develop strategic, domain-specific and regional military plans, so it can respond more quickly to any contingencies. The member states have also agreed to strengthen and modernise the NATO Force Structure, i.e. the national or multinational military headquarters to be made available for the Alliance, and to continue work on the fuel supply distribution (implicitly on the eastern flank), although in both cases no further details were forthcoming. In 2022, a decision will be taken on increasing common funding; this is an important issue from the perspective of the eastern flank, as the NATO Security Investment Programme co-finances the development of military infrastructure in the region. Before the summit, Stoltenberg also proposed that the common funding could partially cover the allied military presence and exercises on the eastern flank. Due to opposition from France, this issue has not yet been finalised, and will be subject to further negotiations. In terms of collective defence, the message from NATO on hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, and attacks to, from or within space is clear – on a case-by-case basis, they could lead to the invocation of Article 5.

The emphasise on collective defence, together with the continuation and improvement of the deterrence and defence posture, is good news for the eastern flank. However, the greatest challenge in the years to come will lie in the European allies maintaining adequate defence spending and fulfilling their commitments to enhance their conventional military capabilities. Their increased involvement in deterrence and defence efforts in NATO will be all the more important as the US becomes more militarily engaged in the Asia-Pacific region.

NATO and China

For several years, the Alliance has been discussing whether and how to address the threats and challenges to the international security posed by China. At the 2019 London summit, NATO recognised that “China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance”.⁹ This formulation represented a compromise between Washington, which is interested in greater NATO involvement in containing Beijing's influence globally,

⁹ 'London Declaration', NATO, 4 December 2019, nato.int.

and Paris & Berlin, which do not want to take the US strategy towards China into the Euro-Atlantic organisations. However, NATO cannot ignore the political, economic, and military rise of China and its implications for European, transatlantic and international security, as well as Russian-Chinese co-operation against the West. Nor can it disregard the US's perception of these threats, as this could lead to the gradual marginalisation of NATO in Washington's eyes.

At the Brussels summit, the Allies took a measured approach towards Beijing, although they toughened their earlier stance: "China's growing influence and

international policies can present challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance".¹⁰ According to NATO, China's ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order. The Brussels Summit Communiqué mentions China's expansion of its nuclear arsenal, its opacity in military modernisation, and its military-civil fusion strategy, on which basis new Chinese civilian innovations serve both economic and military development, with the goal of making the People's Liberation Army a world-class armed force by 2049. It seems that as in the case of Russia, NATO intends to develop a dual-track approach in its relations with China. However, NATO policy towards Beijing will be based on different elements than its strategy towards Moscow.

There will be no direct military engagement by NATO in the Asia-Pacific aimed at counteracting China's aggressive actions towards its neighbours. The Brussels Summit Communiqué does not even mention the freedom of navigation operations conducted in the South China Sea by several allies outside the NATO framework. There is, however, a consensus among the member states for greater engagement in political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners like Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea in the Asia-Pacific region to "promote cooperative security and support the rules-based international order". The Alliance primarily wants to focus on reducing malign Chinese influence in Europe by strengthening resilience in critical and transport infrastructure, telecommunications, supply chains and information policy. NATO's message on hybrid warfare, cyberattacks, and attacks to, from or within space that could invoke Article 5 seems to apply not only to Russia, but also to China. Moreover, the NATO 2030 agenda's emphasis on investing in emerging and disruptive technologies is also aimed at Beijing. The second pillar of the Alliance's policy towards China is to be the offer of dialogue. Climate change is mentioned as a common challenge, but NATO will primarily be interested in confidence-building and transparency measures regarding China's military potential, nuclear capabilities and doctrine.

The discussion on NATO's strategy on China is not over yet. It is to be expected that the Alliance will adapt its policy towards Beijing's increasing aggressiveness, as it has been doing in the case of Russia in recent years. However, further steps will depend on the policies of the major European allies, mainly France and Germany. In the current decade, Russia will remain the greatest direct threat to the Alliance.

European security: NATO, the US, the EU and coalitions of the willing

NATO's adaptation is taking place in an increasingly complex European and transatlantic security environment, in which the Alliance remains responsible for collective defence in Europe, complemented by the US's parallel military posture. At the same time, other formats of cooperation between the US & Europe and among European states related to broader security policy issues are being developed.

The dialogue between the United States and the European Union on economic, trade, climate and security policy, in which the current US administration has decided to engage in, is becoming

¹⁰ 'Brussels Summit Communiqué', op. cit.

increasingly important. The US-EU summit took place the day after the NATO leaders' meeting in Brussels.¹¹ It is within the US-EU dialogue, and to a lesser extent within the Alliance itself, that the consultations on key issues related to China in the technological and economic areas will take place. Moreover, the high-level US-EU dialogue has been extended to include policy coordination towards Russia. A dedicated dialogue on security and defence has also been established, albeit on a more limited scale than that envisaged by the European Commission in December 2020.¹² The US wants to participate in selected PESCO projects of military cooperation (including on military mobility) and industrial defence cooperation co-financed by the European Defence Fund. Whether US firms will be admitted to the latter depends largely on whether Paris alters its negative stance.

The European Union has been enhancing its activities in security policy since 2016. It is currently working on the so-called Strategic

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Compass, the first security strategy to be approved in the first half of 2022 during the French presidency of the Council of the EU. The Compass is intended to set goals in four areas: crisis management, capabilities, resilience and partnerships. There are different opinions among the member states as to what kind of an actor in security policy the EU should become. One group, led by France, wants an ambitious policy wherein the EU can conduct large-scale crisis management operations and develop military capabilities & command structures that are autonomous from those of the US and NATO. According to Paris, the EU should also have its own agenda when it comes to strengthening the resilience of its member states and shaping relations with NATO. The transatlantic-oriented member states, for whom the Alliance remains the main organisation ensuring security in Europe, are in favour of limiting any politically and militarily ambitions deemed as unrealistic. They are also in favour of linking the EU's support for developing military capabilities more closely with the priorities and processes in NATO. From the perspective of the eastern flank, it is crucial to maximise coordination between the EU and NATO in all the areas mentioned. Whether this will happen, and what goals the EU will set for itself, will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the member states, as well as on how the implementation of the Strategic Compass will actually proceed.¹³

Irrespective of the security policy developments in the EU, there is a trend to build European 'coalitions of the willing', mainly under French leadership, to conduct crisis management operations in Europe's southern neighbourhood – with or without partial US military support. Several European countries participate in the French Takuba special task force, which supports the G5 armed forces in combating extremists in the Sahel: Estonia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, the Netherlands and Romania. The French-led EMASOH maritime awareness mission in the Strait of Hormuz involves Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands. Such European coalitions of the willing may be more likely in the future, not least as NATO signals a desire to withdraw from conducting crisis management operations. Such European coalitions of the willing might be formed largely outside the EU, which does not have an appetite for big crisis management operations, but could perhaps also be created within the Union by using the instruments at the EU's disposal. During the Strategic Compass's development phase, the invocation of Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union has been one of the topics in the discussions.¹⁴

¹¹ *EU-US Summit Statement. Towards a renewed Transatlantic partnership*, 15 June 2021, consilium.europa.eu.

¹² *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council. A new EU-US agenda for global change*, European Commission, 2 December 2020, ec.europa.eu.

¹³ M. Terlikowski, 'In Search of Direction: EU Strategic Compass', *PISM Policy Paper*, no. 9 (195), 24 May 2021, pism.pl.

¹⁴ "Within the framework of the decisions adopted in accordance with Article 43, the Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task. Those Member States, in association with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall agree among themselves on the management of the task". *Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union*, Official Journal C 326, 26 October 2012, eur-lex.europa.eu.