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Editorial

Dear Readers,

“Today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low.” These words come from the Strategic Concept of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – from 2010. This one sentence is enough to illustrate how much has changed over the past 15 years. When NATO celebrates its 75th anniversary at the Washington summit this summer, it will do so with a new Strategic Concept that reflects the massive deterioration in the security situation that we have experienced since then.

One consequence of this development is that the German public is once again talking about defence policy and significantly more people are recognising NATO for what it is: the indispensable alliance for our security. In this context, we urgently need to discuss how to keep the United States engaged in Europe, and how to strengthen German and European defence policy. Additionally, in this issue of International Reports, we are turning the spotlight on certain aspects and regional perspectives that tend to be overlooked.

“Back to the future” – this phrase has recently been used to refer to NATO on various occasions. According to this interpretation, following decades of relative calm in global politics, the Alliance basically finds itself back where it started in 1949: a bulwark against the threat from Moscow. It is indeed true that collective defence and deterring Russia have, quite rightly, become a priority again today as the German Ambassador to NATO, Géza Andreas von Geyr, explains in an interview with International Reports.

However, there are also a number of major differences compared to the Cold War era. In some ways, the situation for NATO today is even more challenging – certainly more complex and confusing – than it was back then. The tasks and problems that characterised the past three decades have not disappeared simply because of our renewed focus on Moscow. The threat posed by Islamist terrorism, unstable states in North Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East – none of this has gone away. Quite the contrary, some of those problems are even being compounded by Russia’s efforts to destabilise those regions. Despite the challenge posed by Russia in Europe, we must not forget NATO’s “southern flank”, says Lucas Lamberty in his article on the NATO advisory mission in Iraq.

Russia's role in Europe and the international system today is also different from that of the Soviet Union prior to 1991. The latter was a status quo power in Europe, while today Russia is seeking to change borders by force, using the threat of nuclear weapons as a means of exerting pressure. At the same time, in view of the rise of an increasingly aggressive China, the Kremlin is no longer the only adversary and therefore no longer the strategic priority of the United States, NATO's leading member. For the North Atlantic Alliance, and in particular for its European members, this raises the thorny question of what role it can and should play in the Indo-Pacific. After all, when the NATO Secretary General says, as he did recently in Washington, that the US should not separate the challenges posed by Russia and China in order to concentrate unilaterally on China, then the reverse is also true: we Europeans cannot leave the US to deal single-handedly with the challenge posed by China – especially politically and economically.

One effective tool in this context is NATO's partnership policy that was established in the 1990s with countries outside the geographic alliance area. This instrument has taken on new significance with today's global systemic conflict, and not only in Asia. A good example of the (mutual) benefits of these partnerships is the cooperation between NATO and Colombia, analysed in an article here by Stefan Reith. However, the partnerships with the AP4 – the Asia-Pacific Four comprising Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – are also very valuable. They send a welcome political signal to these countries, which are united by their shared concern about Beijing's pursuit of hegemony in the region. However, the articles by Stephen Nagy on the Japanese view of NATO and by Bertil Wenger and Justin Burke on the Australian perspective highlight the fact that neither Tokyo nor Canberra expect or desire an extension of NATO security guarantees to the Indo-Pacific in any form.

The rise of China is also a relevant – albeit not the only – factor explaining the most obvious and most discussed difference between the current situation and the Cold War: the role of the United States in NATO. During the Cold War and in its aftermath, there was never any doubt about whether, if worst came to the worst, the US would honour its obligations under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Considering what the likely Republican presidential candidate in the 2024 elections has repeatedly said about NATO, this is no longer a given. And yet, when discussing the future role of

the US in the Alliance, we spend too much time talking about things that we cannot influence rather than on what is within our control. Of course, we can stare spell-bound across the Atlantic until the election in November and make indignant comments about Donald Trump's regular utterances. But, at the end of the day, those of us watching the spectacle from Europe will neither be able to vote nor be part of the next US administration.

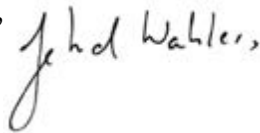
Whichever of the many potential scenarios plays out in Washington, when we ask ourselves what we can do to keep the United States in Europe and increase our own security, the answer is always the same: Germany and Europe have to do more to secure their own defence. As Peter Rough underlines in his article, Democrats and Republicans alike have been calling for fairer burden-sharing within NATO for many years now, and will continue to do so, no matter who will be the 47th US President. Should Trump win the election, concrete progress on European defence spending – not moral outrage – is likely to be the most effective way of convincing his administration to continue the United States' commitment in and for Europe. Although we Europeans may never be able to fully replace the US deterrent, strong European defence capabilities are, of course, essential; especially in the worst-case scenario of an explicit or implicit US withdrawal from NATO. However, the option that many Germans have favoured for decades – security guarantees without sufficient effort on the part of Germany itself – will no longer be available.

Against this backdrop, Christina Bellmann and Alexander Schuster ask: “Are we doing enough?” Unfortunately, the answer is no. This is also due to the fact that the debate often conducted in Germany under the heading *Zeitenwende* still fails to adequately reflect the gravity of the situation. On 27 February 2022, shortly after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: “The world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before.” This only applies to German defence policy to a limited extent. Yes, there is significantly more money in the system in the short term, and that is a good thing. But Germany is lacking more than just material resources. What is still missing – also in comparison to our allies – is the willingness and ability to conduct genuine strategic debates in politics and society about what interests we want to pursue and how, and about which partners and material resources we need to do this.

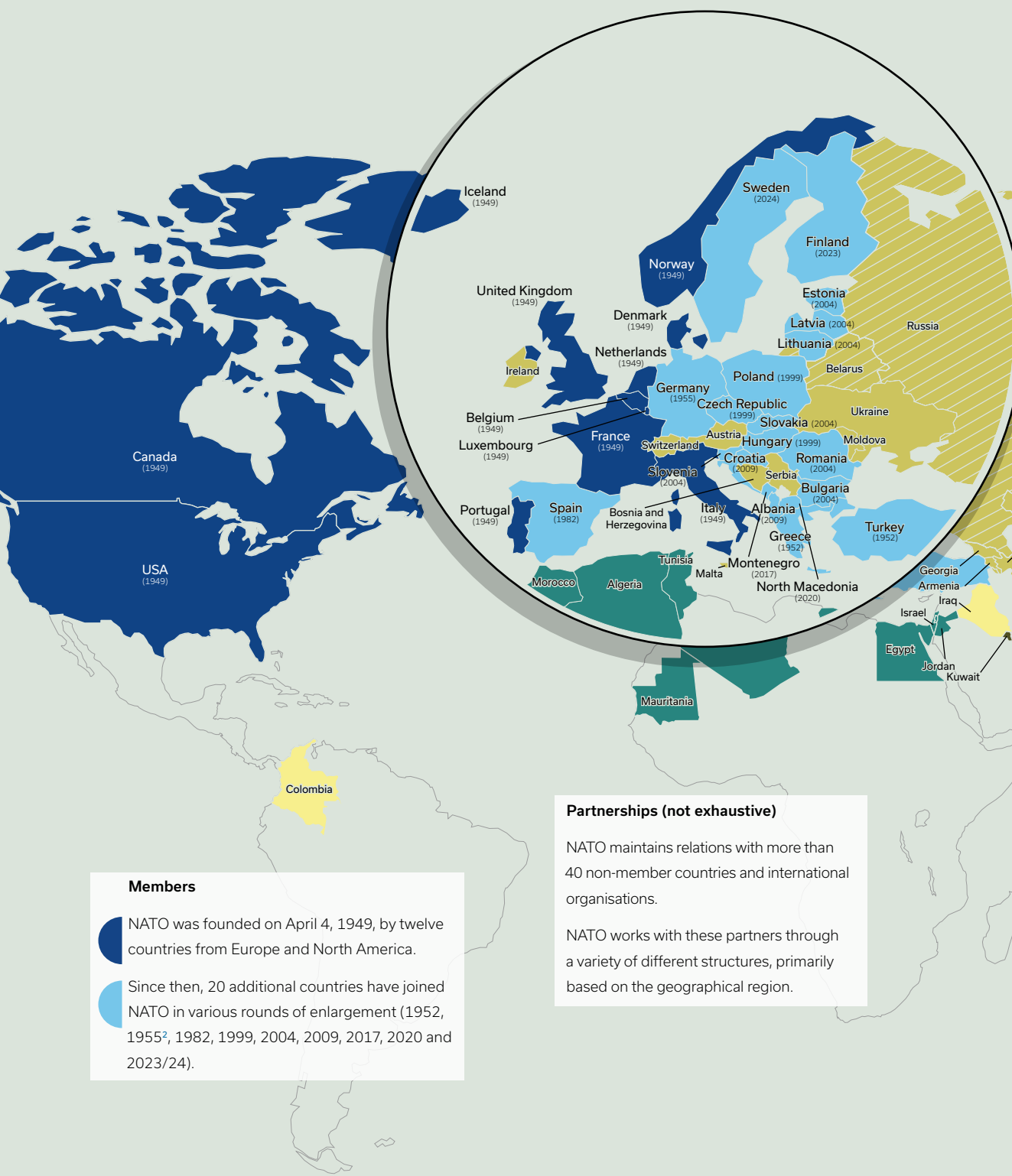
So it was not long before the traditional domestic political mechanisms kicked in again. More defence spending, yes – as long as all other political projects remain untouched, and people’s daily lives can stay the same. In the end, however, our defence policy cannot be measured by whether we have done fairly well in light of our domestic policy constraints. A single question will be decisive: will it be enough to deter Russia? The answer to this question will determine whether we can still think about other – actually much more desirable – tasks and expenses as freely and peacefully as we have been accustomed to over the last 75 years.

I hope you find this report a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

Dr Gerhard Wahlers is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).



Members

NATO was founded on April 4, 1949, by twelve countries from Europe and North America.

Since then, 20 additional countries have joined NATO in various rounds of enlargement (1952, 1955², 1982, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2017, 2020 and 2023/24).

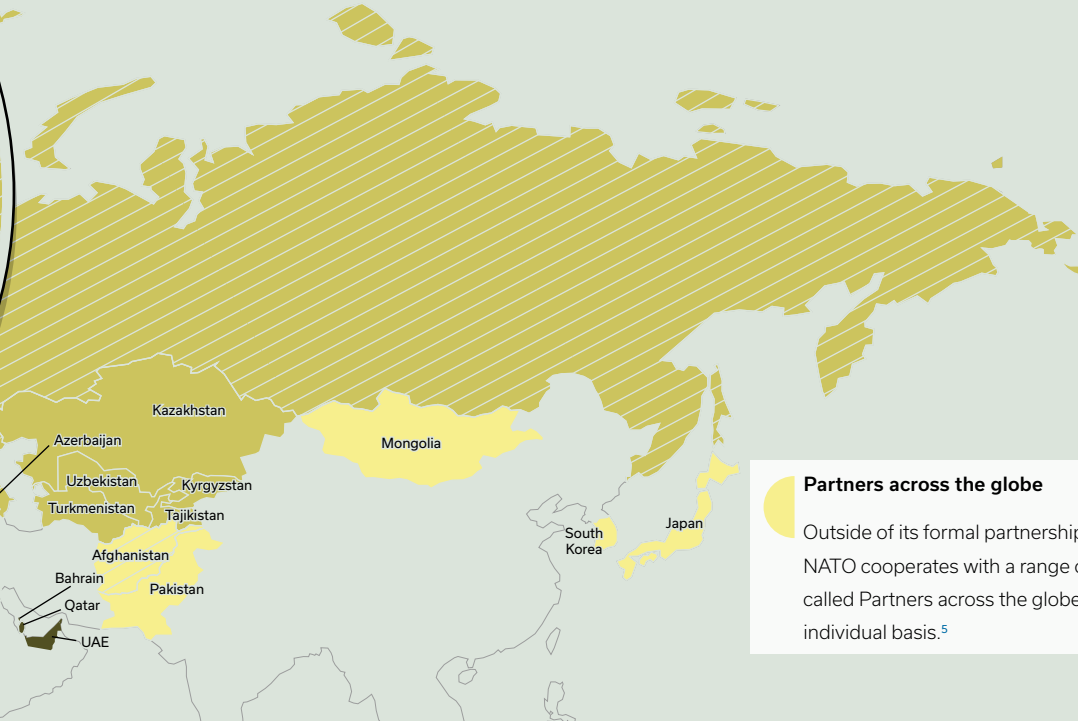
Partnerships (not exhaustive)

NATO maintains relations with more than 40 non-member countries and international organisations.

NATO works with these partners through a variety of different structures, primarily based on the geographical region.

NATO

More than (just) the North Atlantic¹



Partners across the globe

Outside of its formal partnership structures, NATO cooperates with a range of countries – called Partners across the globe – on an individual basis.⁵

Partnership for Peace (PfP, since 1994)

The Partnership for Peace is a programme of practical bilateral cooperation between NATO and partner countries in the Euro-Atlantic area.³

Mediterranean Dialogue (MD, since 1994)

The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) is a partnership forum that aims to contribute to security and stability in the wider Mediterranean region (seven partner countries in total).

Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI, since 2004)

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is a partnership forum that offers non-NATO countries in the broader Middle East region the opportunity to cooperate with NATO. To date, four countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have joined NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.⁴



1 All information is based on NATO 2024: NATO's partnerships, 7 Mar 2024, in: <https://ogy.de/yqij> [7 Mar 2024].
 2 The Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO on 6 May 1955. The GDR was a founding member of the Warsaw Pact and left shortly before reunification.
 3 NATO's partnerships with Belarus and Russia are currently suspended.
 4 Oman and Saudi Arabia also participate in selected activities within the framework of the ICI.
 5 NATO's partnership with Afghanistan is currently suspended due to decisions taken by the North Atlantic Council.



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The Indispensable Alliance

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The indispensable ally: US President Harry Truman declaring into effect the North Atlantic Treaty, in 1949. Keeping the United States committed to NATO is one of the most important tasks for Germany and Europe today. Photo: © Everett Collection, picture alliance.

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NATO. The Indispensable Alliance

“NATO’s Essential Core Is Unconditional Reliability”

An Interview with Ambassador Géza Andreas von Geyr

In International Reports, Germany's Ambassador to NATO, Géza Andreas von Geyr, talks about military deterrence against Russia, the possible return of Donald Trump, and steps towards stronger European pillars in the Alliance.

International Reports (IR): Ambassador, NATO turns 75 this year. If you were invited to speak at the 75th anniversary festivities, what key achievements would you emphasise?

Géza Andreas von Geyr: 75 years of NATO mean 75 years of peace

and freedom for the countries NATO has protected and continues to protect. That means 75 years of peace and freedom in the Atlantic region and in Europe, a continent that had witnessed wars for many centuries. This was also made possible by the US decision to remain engaged in and on behalf of Europe after the Second World War and to support European integration by providing security – in the interest of both sides.

IR: However, there are growing doubts as to whether the US will continue to thus define its interests and remain as active in Europe in future, where the prospect of a second presidential term for Donald Trump is already causing uncertainty. This uncertainty peaked a few weeks ago when Trump questioned the guarantee of assistance to “delinquent” NATO Allies. How are such statements being received at NATO?

von Geyr: NATO has an essential core, and that is unconditional reli-

ability. When push comes to shove, we all stand together: an attack on one is an attack on all. That is the internal character of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. That is solid, and it must not be frivolously questioned by anyone. Any country that does so weakens the Alliance, and thus also itself.

At the same time, everyone knows that the European NATO countries must shoulder more of the joint defence burden for the Atlantic area. Europeans have been doing this for several years, but it's a process. The NATO Summit in the summer will show that this process has gained strong momentum and substance, and it's on a good trajectory. This is the decisive message that must reach the American public: Europeans are becoming increasingly relevant within NATO and thus also as security partners for the US. The Alliance remains central for the security requirements of the foreseeable future, and this is in the fundamental interest of both sides.

IR: How can you tell that the process has accelerated?

von Geyr: European defence capability is manifested in at least

three different areas: the first is the European Union. A whole lot of work has been done on structural issues and on very specific projects and initiatives, some of which are highly funded: one is PESCO, Permanent Structured Cooperation in defence policy, but there are also new, far-reaching funding instruments for armament industry policy.

The second pillar is the Europeans in the Alliance. The European NATO countries are working more and more closely together to develop, purchase and coordinate certain capabilities, and they are looking more closely at common standards and usability. A very specific example is the European Sky Shield Initiative to enhance joint air defence – urgent capability gaps are currently being filled in a joint initiative involving 21 European Allies.

The third area is the large number and the dense network of bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation among Europeans, such as German-French and German-Dutch cooperation and Benelux cooperation in security policy. Here, too, the focus is on highly specific joint planning, development and action on the part of Europeans, granting the Alliance strength and clout from which everyone benefits.



On air: Russian President Vladimir Putin shares his perspective in an interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson. Russian propaganda also serves to cover up failures in Ukraine, says German NATO Ambassador Géza Andreas von Geyr. [Photo: © Gavriil Grigorov, Russian Look, picture alliance.](#)

So Europeans are strengthening their defence capability and security policy cooperation at various levels. The increase in defence spending by virtually all European countries shows how well this is progressing. The trend is clear, and it is good and important for Europe and for the United States, since the latter also needs strong, reliable, stable security policy partners. The developments in the security area are too great for anyone to face alone – and I don't see the US finding any more stable partners than us Europeans.

IR: You have been the German Ambassador to NATO since August 2023. Based on your impressions so far, perhaps including your impressions of day-to-day business in Brussels, could you name one NATO strength and one weakness?

von Geyr: There are now 32 countries in NATO. These are all proud nation states with long, impressive histories. They have joined together because of their own security interests and are organising their defence in an efficient alliance – the strongest military alliance there is. That is a huge achievement and requires a great deal of daily coordination and focus. It is an ongoing and highly complex process, far different from a single country with a single, fixed decision-making structure. So every day NATO must take care that this complexity does not give rise to complications that overwhelm the coordination processes. Every day, we need to reconsider what is truly necessary, what can be done and what can be simplified, whether decisions need to be made faster and whether there can be working compromises. This constant joint adaptation to current events and requirements, the exploration of options and necessities among Allies, is our daily task in creating good German NATO policy at my level in the North Atlantic Council and in the many subcommittees.

IR: NATO will probably have to wait in vain for any congratulations from Moscow on its 75th anniversary. Before working for the Alliance, you were the German Ambassador to Russia. We are familiar with the Russian government's complaints about NATO's eastward "expansion" and with the idea that it is a threat to Russia and that the war in Ukraine was a sort of self-defence measure. Did you often hear these lines of argument in personal conversations during your time in Moscow?

von Geyr: I was confronted with these lines of argument from my first day in Moscow, although we need to distinguish between the time prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and afterwards. For many years, the idea was that NATO was expanding of its own accord, supposedly to encircle and weaken Russia. But, of course, the Kremlin always knew that NATO was not forcing anyone's hand; instead states were seeking the protection of NATO for their own security policy considerations. At issue was the principle of freedom to choose one's own alliances, a principle of international law that applies to everyone – even if it runs counter to Moscow's aspirations for dominance, the worst form of which we are witnessing in the war against Ukraine.

When people in Russia began to realise after the beginning of the war of aggression that Ukraine would not be quickly overrun, another justification was constructed: NATO is waging war against the Russian Federation in the hope of destroying it. Russia has to defend itself, as it did against Nazi Germany after 1941. This war is being fought in Ukraine. This propaganda variant, which has been incessantly proclaimed since the summer of 2022 and attempts a role reversal, is intended to whitewash defeats in Ukraine vis-à-vis the Russian public. The size of the supposed enemy – that is, of NATO – is to give the conflict an epochal dimension. Anti-Americanism, anti-colonialism and anti-liberalism are added to attract countries in the Global South to the Russian side.

There is no need to explain that both arguments are falsely constructed, but we must deal with them and with the great danger they pose: the Kremlin is dead set on this huge fundamental conflict with the West – and, from its perspective, the security policy component of the West is primarily NATO.

IR: Did you have the impression that those who talked to you in Russia actually considered these lines of argument to be true?

von Geyr: Do the Russians themselves believe what they are saying?

I think that those who are truly familiar with the material certainly do not. But Russia has developed into a dictatorship in recent years. It keeps the media rigorously under control, no longer tolerates attempts to establish the truth beyond the official party line, no longer accepts any diversity of opinion and thus no longer accepts the formulation of independent ideas. So I think it is almost pointless to ask whether the people there believe it or not. The power to convince is no longer relevant. The power to assert is all that matters now.

IR: There is a great deal of talk about “victory” and “defeat” in conjunction with the Russian attack on Ukraine. But it’s not always clear exactly what is meant. What do you think would constitute a Russian victory? And what would such a scenario mean for NATO?

von Geyr: There is a good reason why nobody clearly defines the

terms “victory” and “defeat”. Let me emphasise the one constant in our policy: the principle of sovereignty and integrity for Ukraine as a state. This sovereignty has been brutally violated by Russia’s war of aggression. Russia has attempted to use military means to appropriate territory. This attempt must not succeed, nor will it. This means that the Russian Federation must leave the territories that do not belong to it under international law.

Otherwise we would be allowing the Kremlin to change the fundamental principles of international law and state interactions in Europe according to its wishes – back to “might makes right”. Moscow seeks dominance over its sovereign neighbours and therefore veto rights over their foreign policy options. These principles of dominance

reflect 19th-century policy and have no place in a modern order based on peace and security. Nor do they comply with the prescriptions of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, one of the guardians of which, as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia should actually be. That is why it is also in our vital interest that Russia does not succeed. Our free way of life and the security of European countries and the Atlantic region are fundamentally based on the idea that the system of law we have agreed upon applies to everyone.

IR: How great do you think is the risk that Russian ambitions are not limited to Ukraine, but could extend to NATO members such as the Baltic states if Russia were to be successful in Ukraine?

von Geyr: The war against Ukraine that started in 2022 was not Moscow's first step. There was the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the war against Georgia in 2008 – and the result was the creation of two entities that nobody recognises except for Moscow. There was Russian support in stabilising the Lukashenko regime in Belarus, as well as attempts to influence several elections in Europe. The pattern is clear: Russia strives for control and dominance in its neighbourhood – and is prepared to use any means. The Kremlin repeatedly underscores this idea with both clear and ambiguous threats to various states, including NATO Allies. These threats must be taken seriously. Given developments within Russia since the outbreak of the war, and even before then, and its conduct towards the outer world, such as its cooperation with Iran and North Korea, it will scarcely be possible to change the course of the current Russian state power. So it is understandable that even NATO members and partners feel insecure. And it is crucial that as NATO we do all we can to prepare ourselves to use deterrence to thwart whatever someone in the Kremlin may be dreaming up and be in a position to defend ourselves at all times. And it is central that we, as states, provide as much bilateral support to Ukraine as we can over the long term so that it can wage its legitimate defensive war and so that we do not see more of this type of aggression on the part of Russia.

IR: At the beginning you pointed out that defence spending has gone up for European NATO states. But there are still those who say that we currently do not have the capabilities we would need to counter a Russian threat. Where do you think armament cooperation could be improved – not so much financially, but in terms of how it is organised?

von Geyr: Armament doesn't work without money. In Germany, we have the 100-billion-euro special fund for the Bundeswehr. We must use it well. And we need sufficient resources for the period afterwards. That's one thing. The other is the question of how Europe will organise itself in the field of armaments. Much has already been done. Five or six years ago, nobody would have thought that the European Union would have been where it now is in the areas of defence capabilities and of specific member state contributions to armaments-related measures. These efforts



International exercise led by the Finnish Navy: Finland's accession to NATO strengthens the Alliance. The same applies to Sweden. Photo: © Vesa Moilanen, Lehtikuva, picture alliance.

can and must intensify, but the road is clearly marked and it is a good one in my view. Europeans in NATO are also doing a great deal – I have already mentioned the European Sky Shield Initiative. The next step will depend on combining the productivity-promoting capabilities of NATO and the EU in an optimal way, especially when it comes to supporting the armaments industry, and maximising cooperation and coordination. That's where I see the most potential for optimisation. We have European armaments industries that are structured very differently. In some countries, they have a strong market economy focus, while in others the state owns large shares in armament companies. But they all need planning certainty and support. The ultimate concern is identifying gaps and investing accordingly. The path is clearly mapped out.



IR: Speaking of cooperation and a joint approach, we don't always get the impression that NATO members are forging ahead together on central questions. In the process of accepting Finland and Sweden, Hungary and Turkey hesitated for a long time, for instance. There are other questions in which these countries seem to be "problematic" Allies, and not just from a German perspective. Can you explain why they are still important Allies?

von Geyr: Let me first address the issue of Finland and Sweden that you mentioned. In essence, we are concerned with one single question: are Finland and Sweden an asset to NATO security? The answer is absolutely clear, and everyone in the Alliance would give you the same answer: yes, both enhance the Alliance's

security. Some partners have boosted the Alliance in other ways. But, as is so often the case, you have to focus on the core issue. No one is naive. Naturally, each country has its own domestic policy – including Germany. But that should not be a reason to delay fundamental decisions that affect our joint security.

Now to your main question: the Alliance is made up of members who come together to jointly ensure our security. Each member contributes to the security of the entire Alliance. You explicitly mentioned Turkey and Hungary: Turkey occupies a geographical position that is incredibly important for NATO. It plays a central role on the Black Sea. For this reason, and for others, Turkey has been a vital partner in the Alliance for decades and conversely NATO is doubtlessly equally important for Ankara.

It's similar for Hungary. And I am certain that Hungary has no doubt that its security is best guaranteed under the collective protection of NATO, which demands reliability. I see no alternative, especially given the country's history. Incidentally, Hungary's behaviour as a partner in security policy in the Alliance is very different from its conduct in the EU. We see Hungary as a solid Ally in the many matters of daily interaction – and there are countless issues besides Sweden's accession to NATO. This makes Hungary's occasional marked differences of opinion on some key political assessments and issues all the more difficult to understand.

IR: In its 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO affirms that it will protect the Alliance, prevent and combat crises, and pursue cooperative security by working with partner states that are not part of NATO. That's quite a number of tasks. Do NATO and its members have the resources to implement this approach?

von Geyr: The issue of Russia is certainly the dominant one at the

moment, and it is likely to remain so in the coming years. That is where the Alliance is orienting itself. At the same time, all the tasks you have mentioned have their importance. NATO cannot afford to abandon what has been called the 360-degree approach to security.

You mentioned NATO's partnership policy, which is a very important component of establishing and deepening the Alliance's connections in its neighbourhood and far beyond – and, incidentally, of convincing other states of our position with respect to Ukraine and countering the Kremlin's attempts to promote Russian arguments among the people in these states. Here, NATO's partnership policy also complements its deterrence policy toward Russia.

The volatile events in Kosovo last year reminded us that stability in the Western Balkans has not yet reached a level at which we can stop worrying – on the contrary, NATO is currently increasing its presence there. The focus on the major threat from Russia has priority. But that doesn't mean that other issues are entirely subordinate.

IR: You mentioned Russia as the dominant topic at the moment. What other challenges do you see for the immediate and mid-term future that have not yet received the attention they deserve in public discourse?

von Geyr: I see three main challenges: the first is the question of

tempo – the time factor. Will we be able to introduce the necessary tempo to the Alliance’s adaptation of defence and deterrence capabilities? That will require enormous effort.

The second is the challenge of convincing people of the necessity of our security policy. This will require effort on the part of everyone. This applies to Germany just as much as to the other NATO countries. The changes engendered by the *Zeitenwende* and its far-reaching implementation must be supported by the conviction of the people. To this end, they must be able to understand that the global situation and the situation in the Euro-Atlantic area unfortunately call for the necessary investments in security-related areas and thus cutbacks in others. This will take a lot of persuasion.

The third issue is the spectrum of dangers emanating from the information area related to the manipulation of truth: what if disinformation develops and is technically perfected in such a way that the truthfulness of a statement or an image cannot be ascertained with certainty? I believe that this could be the decisive question that will affect us, and our security, in the future.

The interview was conducted by Sören Soika and Fabian Wagener – translated from German.

Dr Géza Andreas von Geyr has served as Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to NATO since August 2023. His previous positions include Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Russian Federation; Political Director for Security and Defence Policy, Federal Ministry of Defence; Vice President of the Federal Intelligence Service; and Head of Division in the Foreign, Security and Development Policy Directorate-General at the Federal Chancellery.



Photo: © Geert Vanden Wijnngaert, AP, picture alliance.

[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

Gradually, Then Suddenly

Assessing Washington's Commitments to Europe in a Pre-war World

Peter Rough

The international security setting has changed dramatically in recent decades. So has American politics. From isolationists to progressives, foreign policy ideologues are offering old wine in new bottles to an American people on the search for answers. It is an open question if these ideas will triumph. Specifically, the sharpest test for US policy toward Europe will be in defining Ukraine's relationship with NATO.

Twenty-five years ago, US President Bill Clinton invited NATO leaders to Washington to celebrate half a century of the alliance. The current occupant of the Oval Office, Joe Biden, has issued his own invitations for this summer's celebration of the organization's 75th anniversary. That both events will involve some sort of commemoration is where the similarities between the two gatherings end.

What accounts for this gulf? How can two celebrations of the same alliance only a quarter of a century apart seem even to the casual observer of global affairs to be occurring in different worlds altogether? There is no doubt that the international security setting has fundamentally changed in those brief 25 years. As Grant Shapps, the Defense Minister of the United Kingdom, put it in January, "We've come full circle, moving from a post-war to a pre-war world."¹

In the aftermath of American victory in the Cold War, the United States was captivated by the Pollyannish conviction that free markets and globalization would tame Moscow's rivalry with Washington – or even, if the cards fell right, polinate liberal democracy in Russia. This idea was as fashionable and widely held as it was dismissive of history.

But the illusion of maintaining a post-Cold War idyll was easy to cling to as long as reality did not intrude too sharply. The relative placidity in world-historical terms of the decade immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union allowed those of us who wished to remain in denial to do so relatively plausibly. The

events of September 11, 2001, were so violent, so ghastly that many analysts could reasonably argue they had occurred outside of history altogether.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dealt a coup de grace to these quixotic views. It has pulled back the curtain for all but the most committed denialists, revealing that the deterioration of the international order, which will chill the mood at this summer's NATO festivities, has occurred as Hemingway once characterized bankruptcy – something that occurs "gradually, and then suddenly." Wartime, not peacetime, is the new default setting.

This gradual-then-sudden collapse of illusions has left American policymakers playing catch-up. The number of Sovietologists and Kremlinologists in the United States has steadily declined over the last 30 years as Arab-speaking counter-insurgency specialists replaced Cold War-era graybeards who made their bones studying Russia. If the nature of Russia is "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma,"² as Churchill described it at the outset of World War II, that enigma appears even more incomprehensible to those studying it today behind a veil of relative ignorance. This is a real problem, as Russia's challenge to the international order constructed by the United States in the aftermath of the Second World War has been laid bare.

And that challenge is here to stay. It is plain to see that Russia's hardline policies do not merely reflect the idiosyncratic worldview of its president, Vladimir Putin. Instead, they are

deep-seated drivers of Russian political life, having been refined over the years by men such as Nikolai Patrushev and Alexander Bortnikov – leading figures among the Siloviki elite who control the security services and run contemporary Russia. If Putin were to leave the scene today, the policies emanating from the Kremlin would look no rosier tomorrow.

Russia has only raised the ante since its invasion of Ukraine. Its leaders station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus and deploy the Wagner Group alongside the Suwałki Gap.³ Putin himself has issued one rhetorical broadside after another,

most recently raising alarm bells by accusing the Baltic states of “throwing Russian people across the border,”⁴ a charge that echoes his previous pretexts for war.

Competing Approaches to Europe

In previous eras, US leaders have risen to the occasion and rebuffed serious challenges to global stability. Yet after two decades of underwhelming military campaigns in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, and unsatisfactory operations in Niger, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere, the American public is less confident in



Twenty-five years and a world apart: Since Bill Clinton invited NATO leaders to the alliance’s 50th anniversary in 1999, the international security setting has deteriorated – first gradually, then suddenly. Photo: © Timothy A. Clary, dpa, picture alliance.

the United States' ability to achieve decisive outcomes abroad. These shortcomings have bred strong skepticism of America's foreign policy professionals and of their ability to manage the international order.

It has also provided an opening for alternative visions long in disrepute. In recent years, we have witnessed a proliferation of different approaches to Europe and the world, many of which are currently jockeying for influence in Washington. This blossoming of ideas can be seen as both a reflection and a catalyst of the deterioration in world order.

Traditional hawks and classical liberals see the challenges posed by Russia and China as interlinked.

It has also allowed those holding more overtly ideological approaches to foreign policymaking to move closer to the corridors of power. Today, neo-isolationists and traditional hawks are competing for the heart and soul of the Republican Party, just as left-wing progressives are challenging centrists for the reins of the Democrats. As the late Charles Krauthammer put it, neither the isolationist belief that America is too good for the world nor the progressive sense that the world is too good for America lends itself to a robust American foreign policy that defends the national interest.⁵ Yet both perspectives enjoy more influence today than they have at any time in recent memory.

To complicate matters further, US leaders today are grappling with changes to the international order that go beyond Russian revanchism. President Xi Jinping's decision to drop Deng Xiaoping's guiding strategy of "hide your strength and bide your time" before China could supplant the United States may go down as the greatest geopolitical misstep of our time.⁶ By erasing Hong Kong's freedoms, covering up the coronavirus pandemic it unleashed upon the world,

lashing out in the South China Sea, targeting US allies through tariffs and sanctions and militarily threatening Taiwan, the Chinese leadership has awoken the American people to the dangers posed by the Chinese Communist Party.

Russia and/or China?

This awakening has led to important repercussions on how Americans look at Europe. While US isolationists oppose large-scale engagement abroad on principle, a new generation of so-called prioritizers has emerged, invoking the specter of China to argue that the US should pivot from Europe to Asia. These prioritizers argue that the US should continue to provide NATO with an extended deterrent. However, they believe American officials should ask Europe to carry the lion's share of the burden in supporting Ukraine and deterring Russia.

Both isolationists and prioritizers are engaged in a pitched battle with traditional hawks and classical liberals, who see the challenges posed by Russia and China as interlinked and part of the same whole. Whatever hopes the US once had of separating China from Russia, these conservatives and liberals argue, has now given way to a tacit recognition of Sino-Russian alignment. The only answer to this threat, they say, is a comprehensive plan to counter both challengers.

For its part, the Biden administration has too often succumbed to the progressive tendency to compartmentalize issues and crises in order to pursue avenues of cooperation with, among others, Russia and China.⁷ But the Biden team has also acknowledged that evidence of a new, hostile bloc is mounting, even if they have not yet taken enough measures to counter them. Xi's remarks to Putin in Moscow last year that they were "witnessing changes the likes of which we haven't seen in 100 years, and we are the ones driving these changes together",⁸ were widely discussed in the United States, and broadly interpreted as yet another expression of alliance between the erstwhile rivals. North Korean and Iranian military support for Russia has merely



Two parts of the same problem: In the US, traditional hawks and classical liberals see the challenges posed by Russia and China as interlinked, for which a comprehensive plan is required in order to counter both. [Photo: © Graeme Sloan, Sipa USA, picture alliance.](#)

reinforced the idea of an anti-American revisionist bloc that cannot be separated into its constituent parts.

Burden-sharing Will Continue to Be an Issue

NATO is changing too, of course. The accession of Finland and Sweden to the alliance flips the script on Russia, and counters many of its pre-war presumptions. Although the Baltic states remain vulnerable to attack, especially as Russia colonizes Belarus, NATO's ability to defend those countries and hold the exclave of Kaliningrad at risk will improve dramatically with the accession of Finland and Sweden to the alliance. When the US Senate voted on Sweden and Finland's membership, the vote was 95-1 in favor

of ratification. This puts into perspective the caricature of Washington as inevitably turning inward.

There will be sustained US pressure on European allies to fulfill their Wales Pledges and more.

There is also bipartisan alignment on the importance of burden-sharing within NATO. There have been two NATO Summits since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In Madrid, the alliance adopted a new Strategic Concept; at



Vilnius, it ratified a new generation of regional military plans. Going forward, Washington will be focused on implementing those political and military decisions and on maintaining the momentum they have generated.

Propitiously for those efforts, it is increasingly evident that Europe has come some ways in recent years, a fact which even Republicans skeptical of Europe have begun to appreciate. Europe spent nearly six per cent more on defense in 2022 than it spent in the year before, with frontline allies leading the way.⁹ Nearly every NATO nation is increasing its defense budget, and as of this writing, Europe has contributed more than double the amount of overall US assistance to Ukraine.

Still, Europeans continue to suffer from major gaps in air enablers, naval forces, munitions and other key capabilities. In the meantime, Putin has shifted Russia's economy to a wartime footing and pushed defense spending to six per cent of GDP. No matter who occupies the White House next year, the US will be focused on turning pledges into commitments and commitments into capabilities. This will take the form of high-level, sustained US pressure on European allies to fulfill their Wales Pledge and more.

Biden views Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty as a tripwire obligating war.

Similarly, whomever American voters send to the Oval Office next November will be racing to absorb the battlefield lessons of Ukraine. The war is transforming the world's understanding of the modern battlefield. Thanks to Ukrainian ingenuity and a multiplicity of emergent and disruptive technologies, such as FPV drones,¹⁰ our conception of what is and is not possible in modern warfare is undergoing re-examination. Amidst these currents of change, perhaps the biggest question facing the next US president is not what lessons to learn from the war, but how to approach Ukraine altogether.

Ukraine: Embrace or Keep at Arm's Length?

At one extreme, President Biden has kept Ukraine outside of the defensive perimeter of NATO, lest its obligations lead the alliance into an open war with Russia that his administration does not want. Time and again, he has made it clear that he views Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which obligates the alliance to take "such action as it deems necessary" in response to aggression,¹¹ as a tripwire obligating war. Anything less, Biden worries, may tempt Russia to move against NATO.

This has led Putin to conclude that while attacks on a NATO state will trigger a response, military action against nations outside the alliance may be fair game. It is thus easy to understand why Putin has stationed troops in or used force against Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, with disastrous consequences for the West, while so far hesitating to move onto the Baltic states.

Some critics of the Biden administration argue that its approach to Ukraine falters in regarding war as an old-fashioned light switch that can only be flipped on and off, rather than as a dimmer switch with intensity levels that can be adjusted. Analysts like former US Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker argue that the competition between the US and Russia is better understood as a continuum of offensive and defensive actions: a NATO air defense mission over Ukraine's major cities or a demining campaign in the Black Sea, he argues, is a far cry from sending combat troops into the Russian Federation.¹² Instead of delaying Ukraine's accession, some of these critics would even bring Ukraine into NATO now and erase all doubts about the West's commitment to Ukraine's survival. Of course, the potential downside of immediately admitting Ukraine is that it could force the president to choose between diluting Article 5 or risking escalating conflict with Russia.

Keeping Ukraine at arm's length or fully embracing it as one of the West's own: it is between these two poles where the real struggle in Washington's debate over the future of Europe lies.

A re-elected Biden administration may opt for a version of the former – a so-called Israel option. Washington would provide Kyiv with security assistance but only loose security assurances that kick NATO membership down the road. There are glaring pitfalls to such an approach, as the analyst Peter Feaver has pointed out: Not only does Israel possess nuclear weapons, but the US provides Jerusalem with a qualitative military edge over its regional counterparts. It is not in the American interest for Kyiv to pursue nuclear weapons, and it would be enormously expensive to equip Ukraine with sufficient capabilities to bring it to military parity with Russia. It would also likely require the West to provide Ukraine with weapons that could strike deep into the Russian Federation, turning the dimmer switch up to a level higher than it has ever been.¹³

And those loose security assurances? After the Potemkin commitments of the Budapest Memorandum, Kyiv can be forgiven for expressing skepticism about such promises. Ukraine would certainly welcome a bilateral, ironclad US security guarantee. But such a guarantee would render for naught America's efforts to share Europe's security responsibilities with its European allies. The second option of fully and immediately embracing Ukraine within NATO's blanket of security guarantees – call it the Baltic option – carries its own potential for Pyrrhic outcomes if it is accompanied by a minimalist reading of Article 5. Instead of preventing conflict, such a posture could entice Putin to try his luck.

That leaves NATO membership *after the war has ended* as the possible outcome discussed most often by US analysts. As Ukraine has demonstrated over the past two years to its enthusiasts and skeptics alike, it is a net security provider, and will emerge from the war as the most battle-tested military Europe has seen in over three-quarters of a century. It would prove an enormous asset to NATO. If the alliance decides to issue an invitation for Kyiv to join the alliance, security conditions permitting, it would send a strong signal to Putin that the West is committed

to a viable Ukraine – and is prepared to support it indefinitely and at higher levels of commitment regardless of Putin's intentions.¹⁴

Even if Putin attempts to forestall such a scenario by prolonging the fight until Russia's prisons have run out of conscripts, it is unlikely that he could sustain today's operational tempo in perpetuity. If the West gives Ukraine the weapons and the support it needs, Ukraine may very well win this war, paving its most viable path to NATO membership in the process. But even if Ukraine does not regain all its territories and decides to pursue peace talks with Russia, NATO's security umbrella could still be applied to the areas under the control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces when major operations cease, with the alliance extracting a pledge from Kyiv to abstain from the use of force against the occupied territories as a condition of membership. This would apply a concept first proposed for Georgia to Ukraine.¹⁵

How this will play out if a Republican wins the White House is anyone's guess. Former President Donald Trump, the current frontrunner for the Republican nomination for president, has swung like a pendulum between hawkish internationalism and modern isolationism. At one time or another, he has embodied each of the intellectual traditions jousting for supremacy in the party today. Where he would come down on Ukraine's membership in NATO if elected is difficult to predict, although his most recent comments suggest a basic skepticism of the war and Ukraine's prospects.

Regardless of who is at its helm, it will be up to the next US administration to manage the voices in their domestic coalitions, and to prove to Putin that he cannot win in Ukraine. If it does not, there may not be any invitations to NATO's centennial celebration.

Peter Rough (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, MALD) is Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Europe and Eurasia at Hudson Institute.

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[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

Are We Doing Enough?

German and European Contributions to NATO

Christina Bellmann / Alexander Schuster

2024 has the potential to go down in history as a fateful year for European defence. The election of the 47th US President could have a major impact on the future of NATO. However, Germany and Europe are not simply at the mercy of their fate – they have potential courses of action at their disposal. What specific steps should they take at this point?

The 75-Year-Old Alliance Is at a Crossroads

In its 75th year of existence, NATO faces some major challenges. With its war against Ukraine, Russia is threatening the European security order in a revisionist way that was thought to be consigned to the past. The defence alliance has returned to its core mission: deterrence and the defence of NATO territory against an aggressor state. This has led to a fundamental rethink of German defence policy, as reflected in new strategy documents and in extensive levels of support for Ukraine in its fight against the Russian aggressor.

Continuing to provide this military, financial and humanitarian support is posing increasing challenges for the European and transatlantic partners as Russia's illegal invasion moves into its third year. The US perceives the growing threat from a nuclear and conventionally armed China to be even greater than that posed by the belligerent Russia. That is why the US presidential election later this year and the possibility of an isolationist president hangs like a sword of Damocles over the future of the European security architecture.

In his article in this issue of *International Reports*, Peter Rough describes the domestic political debate in the US on the American commitment to NATO and the potential consequences of a Democratic or Republican presidency. In light of potential shifts in US transatlantic policy, this article poses the question: What do Germans and Europeans need to do in order to keep the US in NATO? And to what extent is this

fundamental rethink actually reflected in consistent security policy action?

The Contribution of the US to European Security

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the armies of individual NATO countries shrank, in some cases drastically, as part of the peace dividend. US troops had been permanently stationed in Europe in varying numbers since the Second World War, but these numbers also decreased, reaching a low point of some 65,000 soldiers in 2018.¹ At its peak in 1957, the figure was 450,000.

With the Russian attack on Ukraine and the activation of NATO defence plans, the mark of 100,000 US soldiers on European soil was exceeded again for the first time in 2022. The largest contingents of this US military presence are located in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Poland.² Since 2017, the US has played a special role in Polish security policy in its function as the eFP³ framework nation of a multinational combat unit.

Not only Poland, but all countries on NATO's eastern flank have received US troop reinforcements. General Christopher G. Cavoli, commander of the US European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) of NATO, justified this step by citing the need to deter Russian aggression. In Russia's western military district bordering Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine, Moscow's ground forces would continue to have an advantage over the regional armed forces and NATO forces on the eastern flank.⁴ The Baltic states, in particular, lack strategic depth

for defence, which is why time would be of the essence for NATO reinforcements in the event of a Russian attack.

By way of comparison, reference is often made here to the area of Ukraine currently occupied by Russia – the Baltic region as a whole is the same size as the areas currently being contested. NATO had already adapted its defence strategy accordingly after 2016 and has since secured its eastern flank by increasing its presence in the region. Russia has switched to a war economy. As a result, the defence industry produces far more ammunition than Western supporters can supply to Ukraine. Within NATO, it is assumed that the country would be in a position to launch an attack on a member state in five to eight years; the Baltic states are considered to be one of the most likely targets.

In addition to conventional deterrence, the US acts as a security guarantor by providing nuclear weapons to deter Russia. These and other key military capabilities currently guarantee the security of the European NATO states.

There is consensus that Europeans should finally take care of their own security.

Will the US Scale Back Its Commitment in Europe?

At the beginning of 2024, opinions on the future presence of US troops and US deployment within NATO are wide-ranging. Security experts agree that Donald Trump's election would not bode well for the US commitment to NATO. During his last term of office (2017 to 2021), Trump expressed sceptical or derogatory remarks about European countries free-riding in the defence sector at the expense of the US, and he repeatedly threatened to pull out of NATO if the allies failed to quickly reach the agreed target of two per cent of GDP for defence spending.⁵

In addition to a complete withdrawal from NATO, the concept of a dormant NATO has attracted a great deal of attention. Sumantra Maitra, a British researcher and current editor of *The American Conservative* magazine, describes this in an article for the Center for Renewing America: the US should primarily focus on the international freedom of maritime and trade routes and scale back its air force and naval presence in Europe to a minimum. NATO enlargement must be stopped and all activities that do not fall within the strictly military sphere suspended. This proposal also provides for a substantial withdrawal of military personnel from NATO structures.⁶

Other commentators believe a more moderate scaling back of this US commitment would be possible in the following areas: financial and military support for Ukraine; crisis response capacities for Europe and neighbouring regions (Middle East, Africa); commitments to the countries on NATO's eastern flank; and training and exercises with NATO allies.⁷ There is consensus that China will pose a greater threat to the US in the medium and long term, which is why US forces should be organised accordingly and Europeans should finally take care of their own security.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to note a report published in mid-November 2023 on the strategic nuclear orientation of the US, according to which China has increased its nuclear arsenal at an unprecedented and astonishing pace. It stated that the United States would have to prepare for the threat scenario of a tri-polar nuclear world order (US, China, Russia) by 2030, for which it is currently ill-prepared. The report explicitly warns against withdrawing from existing security alliances, as this would directly benefit adversaries and could jeopardise the security and economic prosperity of both the US and its partners.⁸ It remains to be seen whether this warning will be heeded.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Withdrawal from Europe

A look at the troop units stationed in Europe shows that a short-term withdrawal would



Unclear picture: Whether Donald Trump will once again be elected US President in November is just as open as the question of his specific policy towards NATO. What is clear, however, is what Germany and Europe can do: invest more in their own defence. Photo: © Matt Rourke, AP, picture alliance.

scarcely increase security in the Indo-Pacific. The light infantry and armoured units deployed in Europe would be of little use in a conflict with China. The US Navy and Air Force would have to shoulder the main burden in an assumed conflict scenario with China.

On the other hand, one argument of those who advocate a pivot away from Europe cannot be dismissed: financial resources are required to develop the capabilities needed in the Indo-Pacific and money could be saved in the longer term by withdrawing from Europe.

What is more, some weapon systems are needed in both regions and this leads to bottlenecks in production. While previous arms deliveries

to Ukraine have largely come from US stocks, future procurement will depend on the ability of US arms manufacturers to deliver orders at speed. The Air Force in particular could be overstretched by the increasing demand in both regions for air refuelling and transport, along with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. In the long term, this would give rise to a conflict between Asian and European requirements.⁹

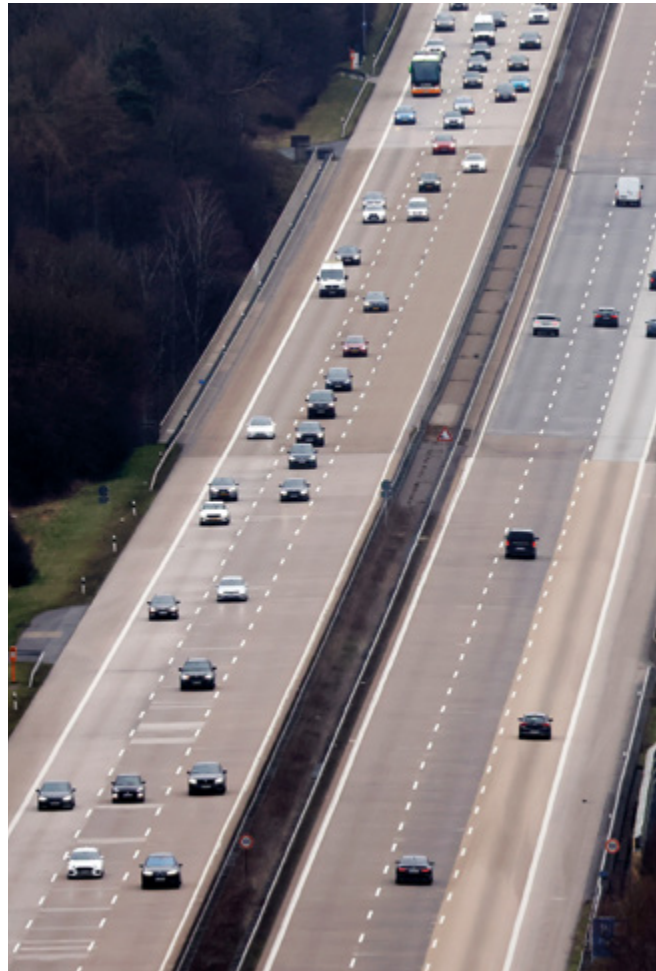
Tasks for Germany and Europe

The 2016 US presidential election, which resulted in a shock win by Donald Trump contrary to the predictions of key commentators, has led many political analysts to be cautious with their

forecasts. The race is still open, and the poll results are merely snapshots. The complex geopolitical situation makes it equally impossible to predict what foreign policy a Republican president would pursue with regard to Europe, which is partly due to the concept of strategic ambiguity. This does not mean that Germany and Europe are unable to do anything on the security front that could have a positive impact on future transatlantic relations. It is no secret that the US expects Europe to do more for its own security: this has been clearly communicated time and again by both Democrats and Republicans alike. It is important to bear in mind that US domestic policy will ultimately have the greatest influence on foreign policy decisions, even with a less isolationist president than Donald Trump.

The top priority must be to ensure sustainable funding for the armed forces.

In March 2023, Germany decided to purchase 35 American F-35s to replace its ageing Tornado fighter jets, in this way underscoring its commitment to the nuclear sharing programme. According to Torben Arnold from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), this will “bring us in line with the cutting edge of capabilities in the NATO alliance”¹⁰ and thus strengthen Germany’s relationship with the US. This is particularly true if the US does indeed decide to focus on the simultaneous nuclear deterrence of China and Russia. It is also important to assuage the concerns of the European partners in the joint Future Combat Air System (FCAS) project – France and Spain – that the purchase of the F-35s will divert financial resources away from the fighter jet component that is to be developed within the air defence system FCAS. Since the question of the delivery system for French nuclear weapons in connection with FCAS has yet to be resolved (let alone a possible German participation in French nuclear capabilities) and certification of aircraft for both American and French nuclear weapons appears even



more uncertain,¹¹ this long-deferred decision to strengthen NATO integration should be welcomed from the German perspective.

Unlike in the English-speaking nations, Germany still lacks a broad-based strategic debate. It is time to connect security and defence issues that have previously been tackled in isolation. Germany has a prominent role to play in European security due to its geographical location, economic strength and population size. The decision to purchase individual modern weapons systems so as to close longstanding capability gaps in the Bundeswehr, is therefore just one element in achieving the goal of a substantial German contribution to European security. The top priority must be to ensure sustainable funding for the armed forces.



Potentially war-deciding: In the event of *casus foederis* under NATO Article 5, the landing troops would have to be transported from the harbours of Western Europe to the east via the German rail and motorway network. Photo: © Christoph Hardt, Panama Pictures, picture alliance.

The special fund actually worsens the regular budget situation of the Bundeswehr.

The Bundeswehr: Tackling Financial and Personnel Shortages

Back in 2014, Berlin promised its NATO allies that it would fulfil the two per cent target from 2024.¹² In view of the security situation, the two per cent mark is a minimum requirement rather than a target. However, Germany is still a long way from achieving this goal. Quite the opposite: the current German government plans to steadily reduce the country's defence budget until 2027. The two per cent target will

only temporarily be achieved with the help of the Bundeswehr special fund.¹³ Yet, the budget problem is not adequately reflected in the political debate. When the special fund expires, Section 14 of the federal budget will have a permanent funding gap of some 40 billion euros when it comes to meeting the two per cent target.¹⁴

Some political parties are calling for the debt brake to be suspended once again as a solution to this budget crisis.¹⁵ This would allow the German government to take on new debt in order to substantially increase the defence budget. However, this remedy should be treated with the utmost caution, as it would severely compromise the government's room for manoeuvre in future budgets. At the same time, expenditure on social security is set to increase. It should also be noted that the first repayments on the crisis loans of 2020 to 2022 will have to be paid from 2028.¹⁶ Additional debt would place a heavy burden on the overall budget in the medium and long term.

The situation looks similar when it comes to the introduction of the special fund for the Bundeswehr. This special fund, which is actually a loan facility, is intended to accelerate the most urgent new acquisitions for the Bundeswehr. However, this will not solve the Gordian knot of the Bundeswehr's underfunding. On the contrary, the special fund actually worsens the regular budget situation of the armed forces. In military terms, the above-mentioned procurement of the F-35 is vital if Germany is to continue fulfilling its obligations under the NATO nuclear sharing programme. However, using the special fund to procure these fighter jets will place a heavy strain on the regular defence budget, as the enormous

cost of maintaining and accommodating this new equipment will have to be met from Section 14 of the federal budget. If the regular defence budget is not substantially increased, procurements made using the special fund will in fact increase rather than relieve the burden on the armed forces over the medium term.

The Bundeswehr's lack of funding thus continues to pose the biggest obstacle to Germany making a substantial contribution to European security. There is an urgent need for a political debate in Germany on how the regular defence budget can be substantially increased in order to meet the target of spending two per cent of GDP on defence. In view of difficulties that are likely to beset the federal budget over the next few years, there is no getting around a clear prioritisation of defence spending at the expense of other policy areas.

The Bundeswehr is desperately searching for ways to attract new recruits.

In addition to the growing funding gap in Section 14 of the federal budget, another issue concerning the armed forces is causing headaches: the shortage of military personnel. The Bundeswehr is currently 20,000 soldiers short of its military staffing target. For years, the Bundeswehr has been desperately searching for ways to attract new recruits. The debate is gathering momentum about whether non-citizens should be recruited and integrated into the Bundeswehr, illustrating the need for the armed forces to quickly find new ways of remedying the personnel shortage.

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that personnel planning, which specifies a target strength of around 200,000 soldiers for the Bundeswehr, dates back to times when the main deployment scenario envisaged missions in international crisis management operations. Since the Russian attack on Ukraine, NATO

(and therefore also the Bundeswehr) has mainly been preparing for national and collective defence. These personnel plans are far from adequate for successful deployment in high-intensity combat.

More than Just Material Resources

However, Germany has to go beyond the financial in order to make a substantial contribution to European security within NATO. Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 or even earlier, the Eastern European NATO allies have felt directly threatened by Moscow. Russia's aggressive behaviour must be countered by reinforcing the credibility of the promise of protection for all NATO allies. The decision to permanently station a heavy combat brigade of the Bundeswehr in Lithuania is thus very welcome. It sends the right signal to counter the security concerns of our Baltic allies and to underpin Germany's intention of assuming more direct responsibility for European security within the NATO framework. Having said that, the deployment of this brigade presents the Bundeswehr with numerous challenges due to major shortages of personnel and equipment. Nevertheless, with the deployment of the brigade, Berlin is clearly demonstrating that it is prepared to share the burden more fairly within NATO, especially vis-à-vis the United States.

As a NATO framework nation, Germany is also required to provide support for smaller European allies; so it must aim to make the Bundeswehr the backbone of conventional defence in Europe.¹⁷ This is a highly ambitious goal in light of the German armed forces' precarious budgetary situation and the hitherto rather half-hearted efforts to fill gaps left by the transfer of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine. Moreover, Warsaw is currently preparing to fulfil this role in the medium term by announcing a major rearmament programme. Germany must, therefore, join forces with Poland and the other allies in Europe to promote smart, complementary capability planning in order to gain a clear picture of what is required to fulfil its role as a NATO framework nation in Europe.

However, for a meaningful strategic debate, it is important to consider and bring together the areas that have only been touched on so far. The work to be done to enhance our security goes beyond the Bundeswehr. We also have to recognise the huge importance of the German infrastructure. Germany acts as a logistics hub in NATO planning. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that one of Germany's main contributions to the defence of Europe rests on the shoulders of the Deutsche Bahn. In the event of *casus foederis* under NATO Article 5, one of Berlin's key tasks would be to transport our allies' landing troops (especially US troops) from the harbours of Western Europe to the east. Transport would not be carried out exclusively via the rail network; the German motorway network would be required to a similar extent.

The immediate threat from Russia has barely reached Germany.

Credible deterrence against Moscow and other aggressors can only succeed if the resilience of the central infrastructure is secured. This means that, for security policy reasons alone, enormous sums should be spent on expanding and modernising railway lines, bridges and roads in the coming years. Not only to enhance the efficiency of the rail and road network, but also to create urgently needed redundancies in the network so that we are less vulnerable to attacks on our infrastructure in the event of a conflict.

The success of such an enormous national effort relies on broad public support, but this support will only be forthcoming if the public recognises the urgent need to take these steps. The key here is how the German public perceives the threat. Compared to our neighbours in northern and eastern Europe, the immediate threat from Russia has barely reached Germany. This would require much clearer communication about the security situation in Europe on the part of

the German government and an overhaul of its communication with the German public. Since the onset of Moscow's war of aggression against Ukraine, the aim of the current German government has been to shield the population from the political and, above all, economic repercussions by means of various aid packages. But money for this will soon dry up, and it is also not the task of a forward-looking, responsible government. Rather, the task is to make the right, albeit painful, decisions to set the course for a prosperous and, above all, secure future for Germany and Europe.

Europe in NATO

The challenges are similarly great at European level. To strengthen the European pillar within NATO, it is necessary to urgently address the huge shortfalls in equipment and ammunition affecting armies in Europe. Essential for this is jointly coordinated defence planning to enable European capacity building. Here, the role of the EU lies primarily in defence coordination and cooperation. The European allies' individual national budgets for defence, research and development will no longer suffice for going it alone when it comes to arms procurement.

The cost of procuring new weapons systems will continue to rise, while the development cycles in the defence technology sector will become ever shorter. This means that major investments have to be made at ever shorter intervals in order to keep defence technology up to date. The European NATO allies can improve interoperability between the armies of the transatlantic alliance by intensifying cooperation in the defence sector. This is the key to a credible deterrent capability vis-à-vis Moscow and other threats. What is more, improving the interoperability of the armed forces within NATO would significantly reduce the burden on the United States.

The most pressing task at European level is to replenish the material sent to Ukraine, and particularly the dwindling stocks of ammunition. The EU has already taken important steps in this

direction with the two initiatives ASAP (Act in Support for Ammunition Production) and EDIRPA (European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act). The European Peace Facility, which can be used to refinance support deliveries from European countries to Ukraine, is an important and effective instrument, too. It is only through this financing that many of the support services to Ukraine are possible in the first place.

The initiatives at European level are a valuable contribution to fairer burden-sharing with the US. Nevertheless, the programmes and initiatives should be given considerably more financial backing. Despite the enormous financial challenges, providing the funds will be the easier task. The political costs of achieving a coherent Europe-wide stance in the face of the current security challenges will be many times higher.

Five Minutes to Twelve

From a European perspective, it must be clear that the US will be less rather than more involved in European defence in the context of NATO in the future. This seems to be a realistic scenario, regardless of the outcome of the US presidential election.

From today's perspective, it is impossible to predict exactly how the US-NATO commitment would be adapted by a future president and whether the Europeans would have any influence at all. But at least a unilateral withdrawal seems to have been prevented by a corresponding amendment to the law by the US Congress in 2023. However, there is much to suggest that Europeans, and Germany, too, will have to follow through on their decade-long pledge to spend at least two per cent of their GDP on defence. This means that, in future, burden-sharing in the continent's defence must be substantially and sustainably guaranteed; this means an increase in defence budgets on the part of those European countries that are currently falling short.

First and foremost, it is Europe's nation states that must deliver, and above all Germany. The

good news is that despite the at times considerable differences in tone, neither the French call for greater European sovereignty nor the *Zeitenwende* proclaimed by Chancellor Scholz are in conflict with the American call for greater burden-sharing. On the contrary, Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine seems to have paved the way for a new reality in transatlantic defence where the NATO Secretary General is not a lone voice in the wilderness with his two per cent mantra. Germany and the EU still have time to set the course for a situation that could even dissuade a Republican President Trump in 2025 from abandoning NATO. But it's five minutes to twelve.

- translated from German -

Christina Bellmann is Policy Advisor for Transatlantic Relations at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Analysis and Consulting Department.

Alexander Schuster is Policy Advisor for European Security at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Analysis and Consulting Department.

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[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

Japan-NATO Alignment

Fostering Cooperation and Strategic Synergies

Stephen Nagy

Japan's relationship with NATO continues to evolve as part of a trajectory that connects synergies and shared concerns about how authoritarian states, specifically China and Russia, are aligning to weaken the international rules-based order, an order that has been beneficial to both Japan and all NATO members.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, has demonstrated that a might-is-right, Machiavellian approach to foreign affairs is still seen as a legitimate way to engage in international relations by authoritarian states. The downstream effects of the invasion have included higher energy prices and a disruption in supply chains, which has contributed to global inflation, food insecurity problems as well as increased instability in the Global South.

Most recently, Hamas' brutal terrorist attack on Israel, on 7 October 2023, and the subsequent defensive, yet sustained attack on Gaza to root out Hamas have created more instability and disruption with the deaths of tens of thousands of Palestinians. This instability includes the Houthi missile attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean.

These attacks have prompted shipping companies to bypass the Red Sea by using the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan, increasing shipping costs by 175 to 200 per cent according to Marco Forgione, Director General at the Institute of Export & International Trade.¹ There is also growing concern that a wider conflict in the Middle East could become a reality. This would further increase energy costs through the destabilisation of energy transportation. This would engender an economic slowdown related to energy and associated food insecurity issues expanding in both the developed and developing world. For Japan and NATO, these events have made it abundantly clear that states can no longer disconnect different regions of the world from the idea of preserving, protecting and investing in an international rules-based order.

Furthermore, for states that are highly dependent on sea lines of communication (SLOCs) such as Japan, Russia's invasion is a preview of the disruptions that could come to its own backyard, as is the disruption in SLOCs through the Red Sea.

Japan's Security Environment and Potential for Cooperation

Front and centre in Japan's security anxieties is China. Tokyo sees China as an important economic neighbour but also a country that continues to challenge the international rules-based order in sea lines of communication in the South China Sea (SCS), the Taiwan Strait, and the East China Sea (ESC). Collectively, these are all critical arteries that transport approximately 5.5 trillion US dollars in imports and exports each year.² They also transport critical energy resources that fuel the Japanese, Chinese and the South Korean economies, which are key engines of economic growth for the Indo-Pacific region and global community.

The highly coordinated response of Japan, the United States, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and NATO to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated the benefit of creating more synergy in the Japan-NATO relationship. It is this highly coordinated response that has helped Ukraine push back against Russian aggression with a plethora of tools including economic sanctions, financial instruments and the threat of NATO being mobilised to defend its members.

This coordination demonstrates how a multi-layered and multinational front is necessary to strengthen the current international rules-based

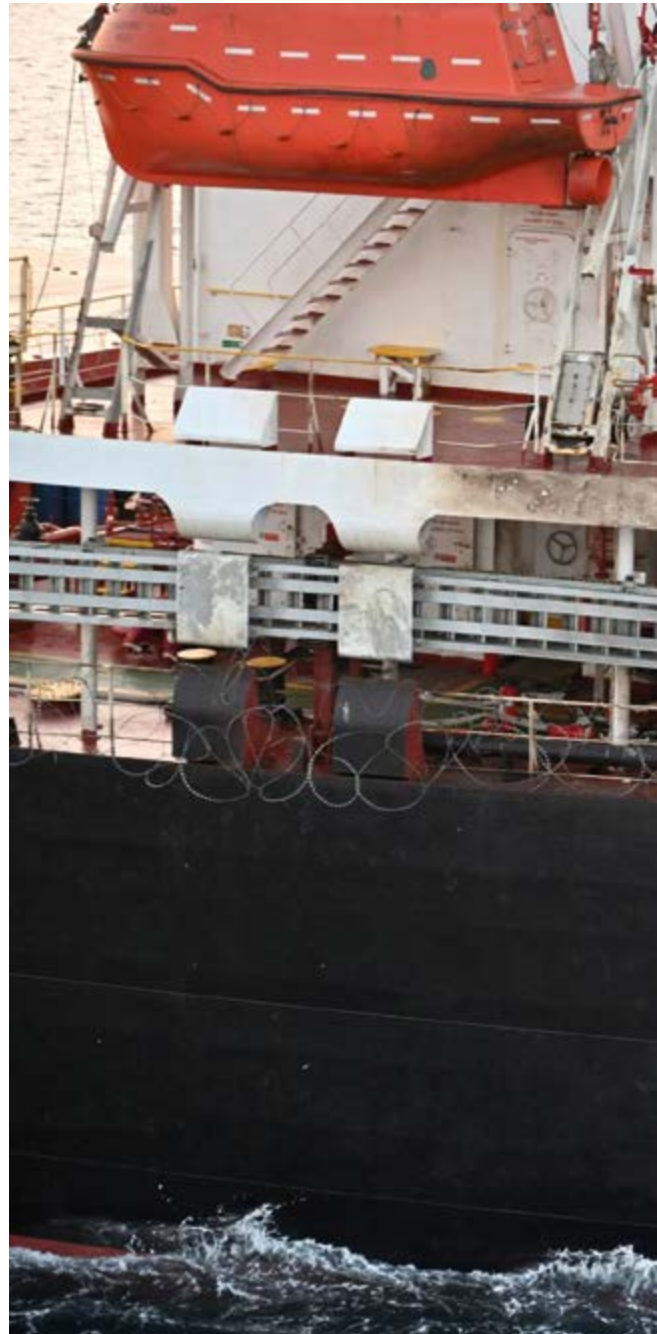
order that has brought peace and stability to the region and the world in the post Second World War era. For Japan, cooperation with NATO should include intelligence sharing, maritime and other domain awareness activities; this would build resilience in defence systems including cyber and coordinating training for contingencies that may have global repercussions, such as a forced reunification of Taiwan, a Korean peninsula incident, or a SCS incident that turns kinetic.

The coordinated response to Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine is in tandem with unilateral, bilateral and minilateral shifts in Japan's approach to security. At the unilateral level, in November 2022, Japan adopted a new National Security Strategy that advocated for doubling defence spending in five years and the acquisition of counter strike capabilities to deal with an increasingly severe regional security environment.³

Japanese policymakers long thought their society was immune to disinformation.

At the bilateral level, Japan has also deepened its cooperation with the US by strengthening the US-Japan alliance. Tokyo has also signed reciprocal access agreements with London and Canberra which facilitate “implementation of cooperative activities between the defence forces of the two countries and further promote bilateral security and defense cooperation”.⁴

Lastly, Japan has used minilateral arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, trilateral cooperation between Seoul-Tokyo-Washington under the Camp David Principles framework⁵ and cooperation between the US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines to enhance its security through defence-oriented cooperation.⁶



Core interests under attack: A US-owned ship is seen after being hit by a bomb-carrying drone launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea. Open sea lines of communication are of central importance for Japan and NATO allies alike. Photo: © Indian Navy via AP, picture alliance.

Cybersecurity and Disinformation

Cybersecurity and identification of disinformation are a priority of Japan's cooperation with NATO. This is because of the importance of these two areas and NATO's experience with Russia in both. Each are seen as borderless,

non-traditional security challenges that affect everyone, and as areas of active authoritarian activity with no geographic focal point. For example, disinformation deployed by China vis-à-vis Taiwan and/or Hong Kong not only targets those who can read Chinese in these two locations, but also ethnic Chinese globally to shape



the views of ethnic Chinese living in countries or regions such as Canada, Japan, the EU etc. for the purpose of influencing local democratic choices and processes.

Similarly, Russia's use of disinformation in Europe and in the 2016 US elections has ramifications for Japan and NATO countries that require cooperation. Here, cooperation includes identification, tracking, analysis of origins and developing defensive tools to protect open societies from the harmful effects of disinformation disseminated by state and non-state actors.

In the case of China and Russia, we also witnessed how both states disseminated disinformation about COVID-19 during the pandemic both domestically and internationally with regard to the origins of the virus, the efficacy of vaccines, and various governments' response to the pandemic; here the aim was to enhance support for policies at home and create political and social divisions in Western countries.

Japanese policymakers used to think that their society was immune to disinformation and, less so, cybersecurity threats. In her research on disinformation, Kyoko Kuwahara of the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) has highlighted that this has started to change with growing awareness of Chinese activities in Okinawa, which use disinformation to fuel a Ryukyu independence movement as part of a longer-term strategy to eject US troops from Japan.⁷ This disinformation campaign in Okinawa symbolises the nefarious nature of disinformation. By deploying disinformation that supports separation from Japan and the establishment of a separate country of the Ryukyu, Beijing hopes to dismantle the presence of US bases on Okinawa that form the first line of defence on the first island chain.

There is also growing awareness that disinformation campaigns deployed in Taiwan, the US and other places can create unfavorable outcomes for Japan such as the election of a US President that may not be an ardent supporter of the Japan-US alliance, NATO or the South Korea-Japan-US cooperation.

Japan continues to support its traditional interpretation of the One-China Policy, a policy that recognises Beijing as the capital of a unified China with Taiwan as a province of the People's Republic of China. At the same time, it also recognises that the status quo in which Taiwan continues to be on a good footing with Japan is critical to its security interest. This delicate balance is related to Taiwan's political and cultural affiliation with Japan as fellow democracies and to a shared history regarding the Taiwanese people's most favourable impression of the Japanese colonial period, but also the reality that Taiwan's geographic location lies on critical SLOCs that ferry existential imports, exports and energy resources to Japan. As a result of Taiwan's importance in SLOCs, Japan is worried that disinformation targeting Taiwan by Mainland China and its interests could negatively impact Japan-Taiwan relations. Tokyo increasingly recognises that combating disinformation and cybersecurity challenges emanating from revisionist states including China, Russia, North Korea and Iran will require coordination and cooperation with NATO and other like-minded countries including Australia, South Korea and New Zealand.

The Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea have negative downstream effects on NATO and Japan.

Sea Lines of Communication

Another area of cooperation is SLOCs. The recent Houthi attacks on ships transiting the Red Sea and its associated negative impact on SLOCs have numerous negative downstream effects that impact on NATO and Japan.

First, the use of sea routes that bypass the Red Sea increases the cost and time of transporting energy. With its paucity of energy resources and

dependence on open and rules-based sea lines of communication, Japan, but also related economies such as South Korea, China and South-east Asia will have to bear the increased cost of disruptions in SLOCs that transit the Red Sea. This will aggravate the existing structural slowdown in the Chinese economy with downstream effects on economies that rely on the Chinese economy for their sustainable economic growth, including Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Southeast Asian states, to name a few.

Second, disruptions in SLOCs may impact economies and the provision of public goods, including security to countries in the Indo-Pacific. Japan and NATO both have a deep-seated interest in ensuring the integrity of sea lines of communication so they can provide security and relevant resources to the areas within the geographic scope of their mandates.

Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

A third area of cooperation that Japan is interested in exploring includes the area of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs), AI and quantum computing and their associated applications. Furthermore, maritime and space domain awareness as an area of technological cooperation, and the importance of logistics preparation and resilience are lessons learnt from the war in Ukraine.

In terms of EDTs, NATO has prioritised nine areas, including artificial intelligence (AI), autonomy, quantum computing, biotechnologies and human enhancement, hypersonic systems, space domain awareness, novel materials and manufacturing, energy and propulsion, and next-generation communications networks.⁸ Ukraine's innovative use of drone technology to defend itself against Russian aggression have also influenced how NATO views the importance of EDTs and developing partners that have the ability to cooperate in these spaces. Unsurprisingly, Japan sees these as key areas for prioritisation and seeks to work with NATO in order to accelerate the realisation of these EDTs with China, Russia and North Korea in mind.

The Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) discussed at the July 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, has been proposed as the key framework for core partners to jointly participate in activities with NATO, such as workshops, joint training exercises, competence building and political negotiations. As an update from the Individualized Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP), it is hoped that the ITPP will be a useful vehicle to initiate meaningful and sustained cooperation with NATO.

NATO resources should be placed in the geographic region with the greatest potential for disruption.

Tokyo also sees value in attaching itself to international institutions such as NATO to enhance its international image and enabling it to inform geographically distant security partners as to what security challenges in the Indo-Pacific they should be aware of.

Obstacles to Closer Cooperation

The challenge for Tokyo as it attempts to deepen cooperation with NATO relates to divisions within NATO about where to concentrate its limited resources, the geographic limits of NATO's mandate, Japan's legal and resource constraints when engaging in security cooperation and the limited number of programmes available to engage in concrete, sustainable and meaningful cooperation between NATO and Japan.

Japan needs to be sensitive to the views of Central and Eastern Europe, which does not want NATO resources to be redirected to the Indo-Pacific region to mitigate and push back against Chinese assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, across the Taiwan Strait and the East China Sea. This makes sense for Central and Eastern European countries. NATO resources should

be placed in the geographic region that has the greatest potential for disruption; that is, the border with Russia.

Despite most European states wanting NATO's resources to be concentrated in Europe to defend against an aggressive Russia, there are states such as Hungary that continue to advocate a rapid de-escalation of support by NATO for Ukraine and a compromise with Russia. These voices are a minority as most NATO members do not envisage the problem of Russia disappearing anytime soon.

For an Atlantic-centred alliance such as NATO, expanding the geographic scope of its activities to the Indo-Pacific region is problematic. Japan's priority areas such as the SCS, Taiwan Strait and ECS may be a bridge too far for NATO to extend its resources to, especially since Russia's war on Ukraine is expected to continue over the coming years. The best Japan may be able to expect is NATO pooling its resources to secure a sea line of communication in the Mediterranean and Red Sea areas to ensure that trade routes remain stable and unobstructed by terrorism or Iranian proxies such as the Houthis.



Japanese Prime Minister Kishida facing questions on his country's new National Security Strategy in parliament: While Japan has ramped up its defence efforts in recent years, there are still a number of homegrown obstacles to closer cooperation with NATO. [Photo: © Masanori Genko, AP, picture alliance.](#)

Japan has limits to the extent of its cooperation with NATO related to Article 9 of its Constitution, the disjunction between the national government and local governments, and lastly resources.

A conflict in the Taiwan Strait would be an existential threat to Japan.

Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution that makes it illegal to use military power as a legitimate foreign policy tool continues to be a major hurdle in fostering security cooperation to deal with Japan's increasingly severe security environment. By eschewing the use of military force as a foreign policy tool, this provision has hampered Japan's ability to cooperate and coordinate with multilateral military organisations like NATO in terms of creating the defensive cooperation needed to combat and mitigate military threats, hybrid and grey zone tactics.

As Mirna Galic, Senior Policy Analyst for China and East Asia at the U.S. Institute of Peace writes, there are other obstacles within Japan that may challenge a deeper Japan-NATO cooperation.⁹ For example, Tokyo has yet to develop a coordination mechanism between the central and local governments as to how to coordinate action in the event of an Indo-Pacific contingency, nor have the physical and human resources been distributed throughout Japan to deal with a security challenge. Coordination between the local and central government is critical for ensuring that security directives are translated into viable initiatives in parts of Japan that face security threats.

If coordination with NATO will eventually become a reality, some sort of joint command and coordination mechanism will need to be established to facilitate joint action. Resources will need to be allocated and distributed throughout Japan as well. This could include ammunition, replacement parts, fuel, emergency equipment and radios, among others.

Steps to Take

To overcome these obstacles, Japan may establish a reciprocal access agreement (RAA) or equivalent that would enable Japanese self-defence forces to train with NATO forces in Europe. This would have the effect of enhancing interoperability and developing shared perspectives on how to deal with security challenges facing NATO and Japan. While this would be an important step forward, it still would not overcome the geographic limitations on NATO activities.

These limitations notwithstanding, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that Japan needs to and must coordinate its activities, diplomacy and defence, and build experience to contribute to a rules-based order not only in its geographic backyard, but in all parts of the world.

At the same time, Japan needs to continue to articulate to NATO the serious concerns it has in the Indo-Pacific region. On the top of this list is a conflict or friction across the Taiwan Strait. Japanese policymakers are keenly aware that this would disrupt SLOCs and technology supply chains and would be an existential threat to Japan.

Tensions could spiral into a regional conflict involving the United States, Australia, Japan and others. This would have economic repercussions for the world's most dynamic economic region; it would disrupt supply chains that provide valuable goods to NATO countries, and would likely make the supply chain disruptions associated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine look insignificant by comparison.

Here, Japan needs to find opportunities for NATO to cooperate within the region to ensure that sea lines of communication remain arbitrated by rules and are as inclusive as possible. All states in this region depend on stable SLOCs for trade and economic engagement.

There are many things that Japan needs to do to be a more reliable partner for NATO. These include rethinking legislation to allow for Japan to participate in security operations. Article 9



of the constitution needs to be reconsidered in light of Japan's security situation within the region. Second, on the operational side, Japan needs to think about what appropriate assets it needs to contribute to NATO-Japan cooperation and where it can locate these resources within the region so that they can be accessed immediately. Lastly, the decision-making process or preparations within Japan for more seamless cooperation with NATO and other security partners are of great importance. Key questions will include: what is the appropriate coordination mechanism between local and national governments? How do you mobilise resources in a way that enables Japan to work in a way that complements NATO members on issues within the Indo-Pacific region and beyond?

Japan-NATO cooperation is imperative to protect the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Trial balloons to iron out these challenges could include search and rescue operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime domain awareness activities and possibly participation in Quad activities and/or the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) activities within the region. This joint participation by Japan and NATO partners in Quad training activities or RIMPAC activities could build shared norms, shared practices, trust and communication between like-minded countries to defend a rules-based order.

Japan and NATO may wish to find ways to cooperate with the AUKUS members (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States) in order to enhance their cooperation in the area of EDTs, AI and quantum computing and their associated applications. Alternatively, a separate initiative could be established to engage in joint research and development as well as application of technologies for defensive and economic purposes.

At the same time, this form of cooperation embeds Japan into a community of like-minded countries that understand the importance of pushing back against authoritarian states; such states want to revise regional orders in such a way that their neighbours defer to authoritarian wishes rather than rule-of-law.

The Japan-NATO partnership will continue to evolve to be one that provides public goods and security to regions challenged by military force. While this partnership evolves, it will be important to find ways to be as inclusive as possible so that neighbouring states see the Japan-NATO partnership as one that provides public goods to the Indo-Pacific region.

Non-traditional security cooperation in the areas of anti-piracy or combatting illegal fishing and sanctions evasion could provide platforms for building trust in such an inclusive manner. Another area of focus for Japan-NATO cooperation should be the reaction to grey zone operations and lawfare operations conducted within the Indo-Pacific. Grey zone operations include using Chinese merchant vessels to move in and out of territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands or to swarm around geographic features in the South China Sea. Lawfare operations, such as the 2021 Chinese Coast Guard law, enable the Coast Guard to use force in areas it considers Chinese territory but international law does not. Both contribute to a high probability of accidental conflict and highlight how Japan-NATO cooperation is imperative to protect the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Both grey zone and lawfare operations are likely to be the tools of transforming the Indo-Pacific region's security architecture and rules-based management for sea lines of communication in favour of China's strategic imperatives. Through their cooperation, communication and collaboration, Japan and NATO should be clear that their activities must find creative ways to mitigate these challenges, while also presenting a positive, contributing form of cooperation to the region so that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other stakeholders

see Japan-NATO cooperation as a stabilising partnership that does not entail choosing between China and this emerging partnership.

Lastly, Japan-NATO cooperation needs to address not only security-related challenges in the Indo-Pacific but also the dearth of public goods provision among the Global South. Here, cooperation will face many of the obstacles and limitations outlined in this article. However, finding opportunities for functional, ad-hoc cooperation between Japan and NATO in the provision of public goods to the Global South, such as securing SLOCs to protect energy and food security, could attract broader support for Japan-NATO or NATO-AP4¹⁰ cooperation.

Stephen Nagy is a Professor of Politics and International Studies at the International Christian University, Tokyo, and Visting Fellow with the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA).

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[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

Family Reunion

NATO and Australia

Bertil Wenger/Justin Burke

Nobody in Canberra wants or expects Article 5-style security guarantees from NATO. However, located in a region faced with China's increasing expansionism, Australia could greatly benefit from a closer partnership because alliances are what China fears most.

Introduction

In the early 20th century, it was unquestioned in Australia that Europe's wars were Australia's wars as well. But in a seminal moment in 1942, Prime Minister John Curtin openly defied British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's authority over the Australian Seventh Division and ordered them to return to the homeland. This was instrumental in Australia switching its principal security relationship from the United Kingdom to the United States. In the ensuing Cold War, Australia and NATO's European members – while sharing a powerful ally in the US – had quite different experiences and little contact.

But like distant family members brought together by tragedy, it was the war in Afghanistan that brought Australia and NATO into sustained contact for the first time. In present times, the growing risks posed by a revisionist China across the Indo-Pacific region, and its potential consequences for an interconnected world, are forging an even deeper partnership between Australia and NATO.

NATO certainly has its sceptics – and indeed critics – in Australia. Nobody is, in fact, offering or asking for something equivalent to NATO's Article 5 security guarantees. Short of that, the growing partnership is broadly seen as consistent with Australia's other alliances, beneficial in preserving peace. And with continued engagement, and some foresight and creativity, it could have the potential to be immensely valuable in a crisis.

History of Australia and NATO

Despite anomalous examples such as the Royal Australian Air Force's No. 78 Wing based in Malta

in the early 1950s, which participated in many NATO exercises in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Europe, “the fundamentally different geographic locations of Australia and NATO have meant that for a long time the activities of each had very little relevance for the other”, according to Stephan Frühling.¹

Australia's deployment of special forces to Afghanistan in 2005 became the catalyst for a relationship with NATO. Australia became a “contact country” in 2006, an informal status which allowed participation in selected “Partnership for Peace” activities. But by 2007, issues such as Australia's lack of access to NATO planning documents were beginning to chafe. “It might be that we were getting most of it indirectly through our friends and allies in the United States, but it made no sense to me that we were sending our young people potentially to die in the battleground in Afghanistan, and yet we weren't being given a seat at the planning table”, said then Defence Minister Joel Fitzgibbon.²

By 2012, the Australia-NATO relationship had progressed to a “Joint Political Declaration” which included the appointment of an Australian Ambassador to NATO (in practice, triple-hatted as Ambassador to Belgium and to the European Union as well). This was followed by an “Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme” in 2013, which has been further promoted to a “NATO-Australia Individually Tailored Partnership Programme 2023–2026”. Further, Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has attended NATO summits since Madrid in 2022 alongside the heads of government from the other so-called Asia-Pacific 4 (AP4) of Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand.

Perceptions of NATO

There is little indication of what the Australian public think about NATO. The Lowy Institute has polled citizens on their perceptions of foreign countries, leaders and issues annually since 2005, but never once directly or indirectly mentioned NATO, perhaps implicitly concluding that the organisation is peripheral to the Australian public's awareness.

NATO has been the subject of elite debate, sometimes in strongly vitriolic terms.

NATO has, however, been the subject of elite debate, sometimes in strongly vitriolic terms, and not aligning neatly with party politics more generally. Last year, former Prime Minister Paul Keating, who led a Labour government in the early 1990s, described NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg a “supreme fool”, adding: “Stoltenberg by instinct and by policy, is simply an accident on its way to happen.”³ Specifically, Mr Keating was criticising the proposed opening of a liaison office in Tokyo ahead of the present-day Labour Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s trip to the NATO Vilnius summit. “The Europeans have been fighting each other for the better part of 300 years, including giving the rest of us two World Wars in the last 100”, he said. “Exporting that malicious poison to Asia would be akin to Asia welcoming the plague upon itself. With all of Asia’s recent development amid its long and latent poverty, that promise would be compromised by having anything to do with the militarism of Europe – and militarism egged on by the United States.”⁴ His comments can

be contextualised as representative of an older generation of progressive politicians, whose world view was shaped by a closer proximity to the World Wars and a sense in which Australian blood had been repeatedly spilled on European battlefields – sometimes wantonly – due to



RIMPAC: Australian, Mexican, Canadian and US navy divers are seen participating in the 2022 edition of the Rim of the Pacific maritime warfare exercise. The United States is central to Australia's security alliances.
Photo: © U.S. Navy, Zuma Press, picture alliance.

excessive deference and disconnected from Australia's own national interests.

A number of voices from the conservative side of politics agreed with the substance of Mr Keating's points, if not his tone. Former High

Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Liberal Senator and Federal Attorney-General George Brandis wrote that while greater strategic integration was a necessary and inevitable development, it is very different from expanding NATO's "coverage" to the region; the most



likely effect of which, he argued, would be to strengthen China's hand with non-aligned countries such as India and Indonesia.⁵

This conflation of any form of NATO cooperation with Article 5 is reductive, and implicitly promotes the notion repeated by Russian propagandists that NATO's mutual defence clauses are somehow provocations. Other Australian analysts have emphasised that no one is suggesting Article 5-style security guarantees in the Indo-Pacific, and this is distracting from the important NATO goal of signalling to China that European nations will not be indifferent to Chinese use of force in Taiwan or elsewhere.⁶

For his part, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told the Vilnius Summit that Australia was betting on partnerships that promote stability in the world. "Whilst [NATO's] focus is obviously on the north Atlantic and Europe, many of the principles are applicable globally. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a reminder that something that happens in one part of the world affects everywhere in the world," adding Stoltenberg was a "friend of Australia".⁷ Mr Albanese's attendance at Vilnius, and Madrid the previous year, and probable attendance at the 75th anniversary summit in Washington D.C. this year, have demonstrated a growing commitment to this partnership.

Australia and the US have fought alongside each other in every major war since 1918.

Australia is cognisant that beyond the AP4, liberal democratic Western European norms are not evenly observed across the Indo-Pacific region, and views on NATO vary. Specifically, nations whose identity is inextricably linked to liberation from European colonialism would not necessarily see NATO as unalloyed friend. Indeed, regrettably, many of the citizens of these nations are receptive to Chinese government narratives portraying NATO as belligerent, foreign and unwelcome in the region.

Australia's Alliances

Australia's most crucial alliance is ANZUS, a treaty signed between Australia, New Zealand and the United States in 1951. While New Zealand was suspended for refusing port access to nuclear-powered or -armed US naval vessels in the mid-1980s, Australia and the US remain committed to a security assurance known as "Article III": "The Parties will consult together whenever in the opinion of any of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened in the Pacific."⁸

Despite Australia and the US fighting alongside each other in every major war since 1918 – colloquially known as the "100 years of mateship" – it was only after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 that the then Prime Minister John Howard formally invoked the treaty for the first time.

The treaty relationship is marked by annual meetings between each nation's Defence and Foreign Ministers – AUSMIN – held alternately in the US and Australia, a high rate of military exercises from the US-run maritime warfare exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) to the biennial joint-services "Talisman Sabre" exercise, a range of jointly run military intelligence facilities such as Pine Gap and, for the last decade, a rotational detachment of Marines based in Darwin.

In annual surveys by the Lowy Institute, high levels of public support for Australia's alliance with the United States have been consistent across the last two decades, with more than 80 per cent agreeing that the alliance is either very or fairly important.⁹

The defining similarities of ANZUS and NATO are the centrality of the US, and also the longevity of both alliances by historical standards.¹⁰ To European observers, the geographical limits of this assurance will suggest similarities to NATO's Article 6, whereas the crucial word "consult" clearly falls far short of the guarantees in NATO's Article 5. "Australia was quite aware that its alliance with the United States was less

institutionalized, less comprehensive and arguably less reliable than was NATO,” writes Stephan Frühling.¹¹ At the same time, it has been argued that ANZUS has attracted far less drama than NATO. “Compared to the stormy seas of NATO, for instance, where there seems to have been a crisis almost every year, ANZUS has mostly been as placid as a mill pond”, according to Australian scholar Coral Bell.¹²

Arguably of equal importance is Australia’s membership of the longstanding intelligence alliance, the Five Eyes (FVEY), which also includes the US, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. It is a simultaneously well-known yet understudied compact.

In more recent times, Australia has been pursuing key unilateral security agreements. AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership announced in 2021 between Australia, the UK and the US, to enable the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines for the Australian Navy and to collectively pursue a suite of advanced defence technologies from hypersonic missiles to quantum computing. It made global headlines, not least because it replaced a troubled submarine contract with the French company Naval, but also due to its leader-level political endorsement from the three nations, and the unmistakable message it sent to China, which at that time was conducting a significant campaign of economic coercion against Australia. Since then, significant progress has been made, particularly in US congressional approval for the transfer of three Virginia Class submarines (two in-service and one new) to Australia in the early 2030s. But the challenges involved in nuclear custodianship, workforce development and infrastructure are mammoth.

AUKUS is not a new treaty, as it is often mistakenly described, nor does it feature mutual defence obligations. But it is true to say that Australia’s treaties – ANZUS, FVEY and even Australia’s longstanding constitutional links with the UK – have all contributed to the deep trust which has made cooperation under AUKUS possible. Nonetheless, some US politicians have described

AUKUS as the start of NATO’s “expansion” in the Indo-Pacific region, including Senator Tammy Duckworth, a member of the influential Senate Armed Service Committee, who said NATO’s “expansion” “had already started [given] our successful AUKUS agreement between the UK, Australia and the United States”.¹³ This is probably only true in the most general sense.

While it has no explicit security guarantees, QUAD is a response to China’s belligerent behaviour in the region.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), also including Japan, India and the US, is a very noteworthy development. Its origins are the maritime cooperation forged during the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, and while it went into hiatus between 2008 and 2017 due to Australian and to some degree Indian reluctance, it has been revived (sometimes called Quad 2.0) and elevated to leader level summits and annual multilateral naval exercises “Malabar”.

In stark contrast to NATO, it is not an alliance and features no founding documents, headquarters, secretariat or fixed schedule. (A “vision statement” was published last year.) It certainly has no explicit security guarantees between the participants. It is, however, a flexible tool for responding to China’s growing power and belligerent behaviour in the region; the late former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called it a “democratic Asian security diamond” in response to Chinese “coercion”, implying it is a group which could harden under external pressure.¹⁴

In recognition of India’s longstanding non-aligned foreign policy, the Quad has engaged in more non-traditional security topics such as climate change as well as critical and emerging technologies, and “public goods” such as vaccine coordination. Unsurprisingly, it has attracted a

great deal of criticism from China for being an “Asian NATO”. However, many historians point to the failure of the anti-communist collective defence pact, Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) 1944 to 1977, which was modelled on NATO, as an example of how such notions are doomed to fail in this highly diverse region.

There is no conceptual conflict between Australia’s US-centric defence treaties, intelligence sharing, advanced technology and unilateral democratic cooperation, and increased partnership with NATO. Mutual security guarantees would be a different matter. The synergies and opportunities will be discussed below.

What Does Australia Expect of NATO?

In practical ways, Australia has a lot to gain from its growing partnership with NATO. There are challenges that Australia may face in its alliance management where NATO has long-term, day-to-day experience: joint allied strategic commands, joint defence planning processes and force generation processes, to name a few. And beyond Brussels, there is great potential in Australian engagement at relevant NATO Centres of Excellence for example.

These practical matters could yield strategic benefits. Some have argued that such patterns of



Alliances are what they fear most: China’s representative to the UN in Vienna giving a press conference on the AUKUS security partnership alongside his Russian counterpart. Beijing has fiercely criticised anything resembling NATO in the Indo-Pacific. Photo: © Guo Chen, Xinhua, picture alliance.

cooperation and deep involvement will enhance Australia's ability to know what to ask for, and whom to ask about it in NATO. For example, during a time of conflict in the Taiwan Strait, South China Sea or East China Sea, NATO maritime "backfilling" in the Western Indian Ocean could be beneficial. Security crises can shift seemingly immovable political consensus within NATO, from which agile partners can benefit. For example, there is some ambiguity amongst French scholars about whether Article 5 includes French territory such as New Caledonia. As Prime Minister Howard's invocation of the ANZUS treaty showed, there can be reinterpretation of certain aspects in time of crisis. In a Pacific Islands security contingency, even the ambiguity of this status could be a helpful deterrent.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has awakened many to the interrelatedness of the Indo-Pacific and European theatres.

In a strategic sense, as Prime Minister Albanese said, Australia values NATO as a partner for stability. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has awakened many to the interrelatedness of the Indo-Pacific and European theatres. That means that European nations individually, and in some cases as the European Union, and in other cases as NATO, have a very welcome role to play in signalling to China that the rules-based international order and open sea lines of communication in the Indo-Pacific are key interests for Europe, too.

The fact that this intention has been sustained during the Russian invasion of Ukraine is praiseworthy. Similarly, Australia has played a modest role in the provision of aid, military equipment and military training to Ukraine in order to signal its commitment to freedom from coercion. The Australian assumption that this supportive engagement will result in reciprocity from NATO member countries, should the security

environment deteriorate in the Indo-Pacific, must be interpreted as more than just an undertone.

After a certain point, however, increased NATO presence in the Indo-Pacific inevitably means resources being diverted from the European theatres. To the extent that many European NATO members are not yet spending the required two per cent of GDP on defence (Australia is approaching 1.9 per cent), this obliges greater involvement and investment from the United States, which could otherwise be deployed in the Indo-Pacific. As the late Australian Rear-Admiral James Goldrick wrote, "Australia welcomes European powers having an active role in the Indo-Pacific and regular deployments of European naval forces in the region, but a more coherent geostrategic approach would see Europe focus – and increase – its naval and military efforts on Europe, while the United States and other Indo-Pacific powers continue to reorganise to balance China."¹⁵ That is, the more responsibility Europeans take for their own defence, the better it will be for Australia.

Conclusion

It might surprise Europeans that Australia's relationship with NATO is only a relatively recent phenomenon. Of course, there have been many non-NATO military contact points over the years; not least the Australian-led INTERFET mission to stabilise East Timor 1999 to 2000, which saw contributions from many European militaries. Moreover, the significant shared values of liberal democracies have perhaps made the formal connection something easy to overlook, but at the same time easy in some respects to remedy.

That is not to discount the challenges Australia faces in engaging and understanding NATO, an organisation like no other. But the benefits of doing so successfully could be immense.

And yet for Australia it must be an "and" not an "or". That is, it can never replace Australia's multifaceted security relationship with the US (ANZUS, FVEY, AUKUS and through the QUAD),



nor should it come at the cost of understanding and engaging with Australia's immediate region. As Sam Roggeveen correctly points out in his recent book¹⁶, no other nation holds greater significance for Australia's ultimate defence than Indonesia, a young democracy of nearly 275 million people and the world's largest Muslim nation, and an archipelago through which any adversary would need to traverse to threaten Australia.

Australia may also consider how a no-holds-barred debate about NATO and ad-hominem attacks on its personnel might be interpreted by its European friends. Certainly, Australia should have a clear view of its historical experience and interests. But a nation at ease with its heritage and geographical location – its European settlement and multi-ethnic future – should be able to more confidently engage with nations of all types and without rancour.

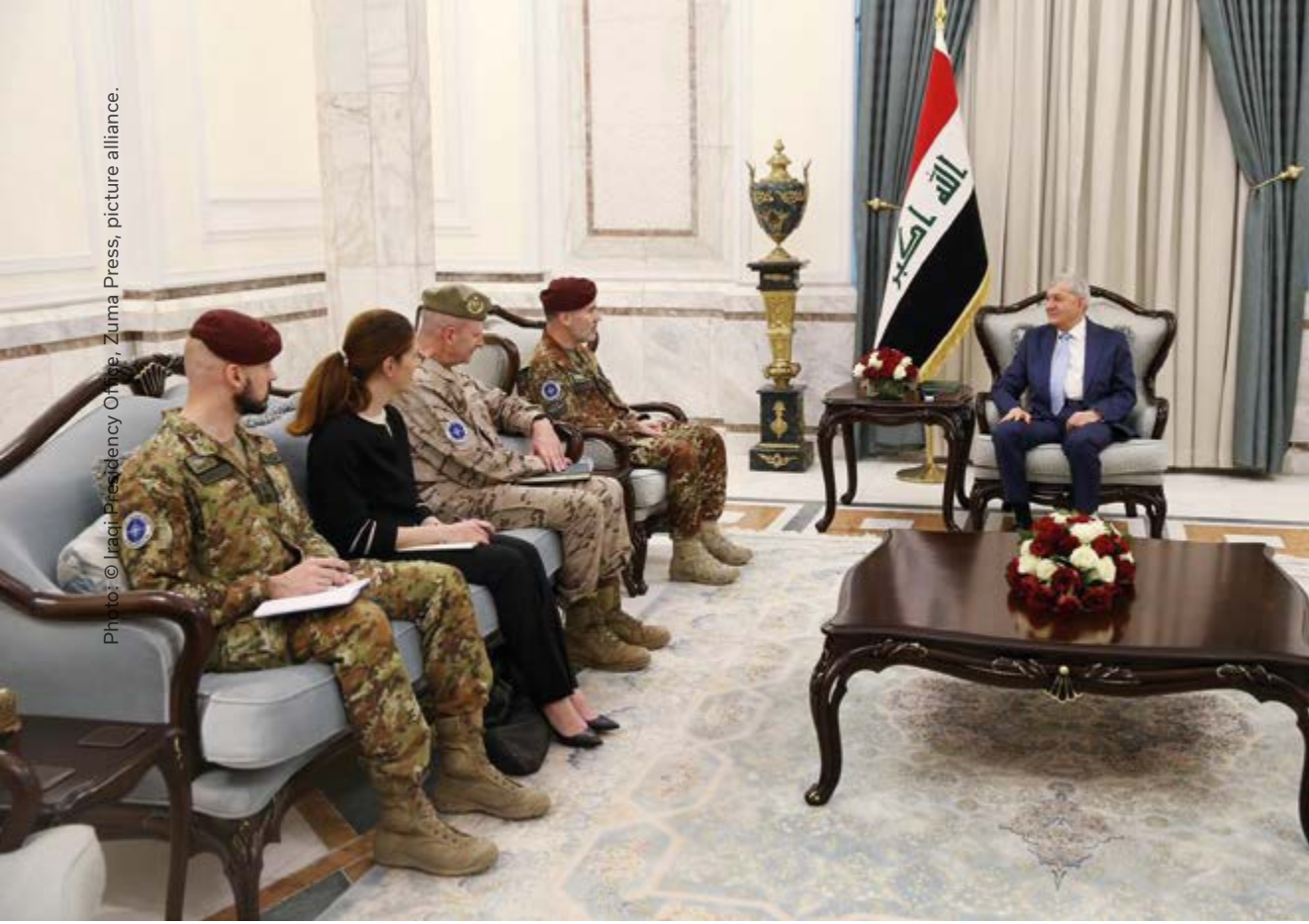
It is worth reemphasising that no one can face the epochal challenge of China's rise without friends and allies. Indeed, if China's vociferous attacks on anything resembling NATO in the Indo-Pacific are anything to go by, it is alliances they fear the most, preferring to dominate smaller nations bilaterally. "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact", said senior diplomat Yang Jiechi in July 2010.¹⁷ In this context, Australia's partnership and cooperation with NATO is something to be cherished.

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Justin Burke is Senior Policy Advisor at the National Security College, Australian National University, in Canberra. He is also a non-resident Fellow at the Center for Maritime Strategy & Security at ISPK, University of Kiel.

Bertil Wenger is Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's office for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific (KAS AUS).

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[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

Looking in All Directions

NATO Mission Iraq and the Alliance's Role on Its Southern Flank

Lucas Lamberty

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO is once again focusing its attention on classic alliance defence on the eastern flank. While this shift is right, NATO should not lose sight of other threats. Above all, this applies to fragile states on the alliance's southern periphery. With its advisory mission in Iraq, NATO is looking for ways to stabilise the region with a moderate use of resources – and to define the role the alliance itself wishes to play overall in the southern neighbourhood in the future.

NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) is the last NATO mission outside European territory. In times of strategic reorientation – away from crisis management on the southern flank and towards classic deterrence and alliance defence on the eastern flank – it is a relic of the out-of-area missions of past decades. The mission has been active in Baghdad since 2018 and aims at strengthening Iraqi security institutions in order to support Iraq in its fight against the so-called Islamic State (IS).

NATO's renewed concentration on its eastern flank has made it necessary for the alliance to contemplate what role it wishes to play in its southern periphery in the future with respect to fragile states, terrorism, wars and crises. Besides robust crisis management measures, NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept primarily envisages civil-military support for partner states deemed strategically important in order to strengthen the resilience of these countries. Unlike the previous mission, NATO Training Mission Iraq, or the major missions in Afghanistan, NATO Mission Iraq is purely an advisory mission. With NMI, NATO aims to provide answers to the challenges it is facing on its southern flank and to fulfil the ambition it formulated in 2015 of maintaining a defensive posture based on a 360-degree approach. But is that proving successful in Iraq, and can the mission be a model for future missions to other countries?

NMI as Part of the 360-Degree Approach

After the 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan and the onset of the Russian war of aggression in

Ukraine in 2022, there has been a major shift in NATO's focus from its southern flank to its eastern flank. This shift is important and necessary. Yet, it is not in NATO's interests to abandon the skills in crisis management and out-of-area operations it has gained over the last two decades or to neglect its southern neighbourhood. Carlo Masala for example argues with regard to foreign missions of the German armed forces: "The reasons why foreign deployments may be necessary have not disappeared overnight. The world has not suddenly become safer in this respect. In our security considerations, we cannot neglect to include both territorial and alliance defence on the one hand and foreign deployments on the other hand."¹ The same is true for NATO as a whole.

The alliance is pursuing a 360-degree approach ratified in the June 2015 defence minister meeting in Brussels that entails the ambition of meeting security challenges on both its eastern and southern flanks.² Traditional alliance defence and deterrence are supposed to go hand in hand with out-of-area missions, the fight against terrorism and international crisis management. Despite this aim, NATO's focus on its eastern flank, formalised in June 2022 with the new Strategic Concept, has forced it to reduce its ambitions in its southern periphery.

To assert its security interests on the southern flank NATO has developed the concept of "projecting stability".³ By connecting crisis management missions with the principle of cooperative security, NATO aims to stabilise its southern

periphery. The approach envisages cooperation with selected partner countries that are to be enabled to guarantee their own security and thus contribute to the stabilisation of the region overall.⁴ While NATO has focused on either training missions at the tactical/operational level, such as NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I) and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan, or on combat missions such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the past, NMI focuses on the strategic level and provides advice to Iraqi security institutions.

The decision for NATO Mission Iraq was taken in July 2018 at the NATO summit in Brussels. The set-up of NMI began in August of that year in Baghdad. The mission's goal is to support Iraq in establishing sustainable, transparent, inclusive and effective security institutions and forces that can stabilise the country, combat terrorism and prevent a resurgence of IS.⁵ The mission encompasses around 600 soldiers, among them 150 advisors, with contributions from all NATO member states and NATO partner Australia.⁶ The German Bundeswehr is contributing some 45 soldiers. NMI is in Iraq at the request and invitation of the Iraqi government and is advising Iraq's Ministries of Defence and Interior, the Office of the National Security Advisor, the National Operations Centre and professional military education institutions assigned to the defence ministry.⁷ Advisory tasks focus on training, personnel, logistics and standardisation. For example, NMI involves German Bundeswehr officers advising professional Iraqi military education institutions on the orientation of training for Iraqi soldiers. NMI's long-term goal is a comprehensive reform of the Iraqi security sector.⁸

NATO Mission Iraq differs significantly from its predecessor. NTM-I was a classic training mission in Iraq from 2004 to 2011 that contributed to the training of about 5,000 Iraqi officers and 10,000 policemen. Compared to the far greater engagements by the US and the Multi-National Force Iraq, NATO, unlike in Afghanistan, always played a minor role in the country at the time. One of the reasons for this was the rejection on

the part of member states such as Germany of the war in Iraq. Following the withdrawal of the US Army, Iraq became an official NATO partner in 2011, forming the basis of today's NMI advisory mission.

20 years after the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraq is still a fragile state.

Unlike ISAF, NMI is not a combat mission. It also has a much smaller footprint (fewer soldiers) than the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. This gives it low public visibility, making it politically and militarily less vulnerable and therefore more flexible. The advisory mandate of the mission is limited to the alliance's core military expertise and is clearly defined, so that the mission can precisely target areas where Iraqi security forces have the greatest need to catch up.⁹ The mission also combines military and civilian elements and is strongly oriented towards Iraqi needs. In times when NATO is tied to its eastern flank, NMI thus represents an attempt to efficiently and effectively project stability into areas on its periphery while maintaining a low political profile and using few resources. But is this sufficient, given the major challenges Iraq is facing?

The Challenges in Iraq

In the Middle East, and thus NATO's southern periphery, Iraq holds special geostrategic significance. Its 40 million inhabitants make it the third-most populous country in the Arab world. Iraq's size means that developments there have an impact on the entire region. The country can be both an anchor of stability or a factor of instability. It borders on Turkey and thus shares a direct border with NATO. There is therefore a great interest in a stable Iraq closely tied to NATO – especially given the 2015 refugee crisis and the terror attacks by al-Qaeda and IS in Europe. However, the country's challenges are tremendous and exemplify the insecurity

factors NATO is facing on its southern flank. From a security policy perspective, three of these challenges are particularly important:

1. Iraq's weak statehood,
2. Islamic State's continued presence in the country, and
3. the influence of external actors, especially Iran.

20 years after the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraq remains a fragile state characterised by a low degree of statehood. Although the country has stabilised in the last few years, it is still near the top of the Fragile States Index.¹⁰ Iraq has experienced repeated phases of complete state failure as a so-called failing state since 2003.¹¹

The democratic system in Iraq is young and a democratic culture still not firmly established. State institutions are weak and characterised by corruption and nepotism. The ethnic/religious fragmentation of the political system has also contributed to state fragility.

An expression of Iraq's limited statehood in the past few years has been its weak security institutions. While Iraq now has control over its entire territory for the first time since 2014 – a noticeable advancement – a long-term strengthening of the army and police force remains one of Iraq's major challenges given the security situation. What is more, there are the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella of militias that is nominally under Baghdad's



Gaping void: After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the US-led forces largely dissolved his security apparatus – initially creating a security vacuum. The picture shows Firdaus Square in the centre of Baghdad with the pedestal that bore a statue of the Iraqi dictator until 2003. Photo: © Mohammed Jalil, dpa, picture alliance.

command, but is de facto not completely integrated into the country's security sector and is partially controlled by external actors such as Iran and by local political and religious leaders. These militias have an ambivalent relationship with the state. While they support the state to some extent (in combatting IS, for instance), they are often in competition with it and form their own parallel structure.

Iraqi and international forces are currently maintaining military pressure on IS and limiting its radius.

In recent years, weak Iraqi statehood has created a vacuum in the region, one that other actors have exploited. For instance, the weakness of Iraq's security forces, in conjunction with the civil war in Syria, facilitated the rise of IS in 2013. IS is essentially an Iraqi terror organisation that controlled about one third of Iraqi territory between 2014 and 2016, including Mosul, which is home to millions. The international coalition against IS, made up of 86 partners including Germany, succeeded in destroying the IS territorial caliphate, but IS itself has not disappeared.

The organisation has succeeded in morphing back into an underground insurgency movement with asymmetric means and maintains structures and cells in Iraq while executing regular attacks on Iraqi and Iraqi-Kurdish security forces. Its areas of operation are in central Iraq south of Kirkuk and in the hard-to-control desert areas on the Iraq-Syria border. Iraqi and international forces are currently maintaining military pressure on IS and limiting its radius, preventing it from executing larger, more complex attacks. However, if this pressure subsides, IS might regain its strength and once again pose a threat to Europe.

In addition to the rise of IS, weak statehood has also promoted external actors' influence in Iraq. Since 2003, Iraq has become the arena for

geopolitical and regional power struggles. This primarily pertains to conflicts between Iran and the US in the Middle East. Iraq is an essential component of Tehran's strategy, which involves creating a Shiite axis from the Mediterranean to Central Asia in order to consolidate its geo-strategic position and expand its influence in the international system by establishing a military threat posture. The targeted establishment and expansion of militias has enabled Iran to become the most important external actor in Iraq.

Opposing Iran is the US, the second important actor in Iraq, whose policy is aimed at containing and isolating Iran. Iraq oscillates between these two poles, with each side attempting to assert its interests in the country. This confrontation has incrementally escalated since the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023. Militias affiliated with Iran have executed more than 150 attacks on US positions in Syria and Iraq since mid-October 2023. The US, which still has 2,500 soldiers stationed in Iraq, has responded with retaliatory strikes against these militias.

At global level, too, Iraq is increasingly becoming a theatre for geopolitical competition. China and Russia in particular, at times in cooperation with Iran, are attempting to expand their influence in Iraq at the expense of the US and its allies. During his visit to Moscow in October 2023, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani expressed an interest in joining the BRICS format during his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹² For Iraq, whose current government is pursuing a neutral foreign policy course, this would mean turning away from the West and towards the East, which would undermine attempts to connect the country closer with the US and Europe.

Difficult Tasks and Initial Successes

With respect to the three challenges – weak statehood, IS persistence and external influence, especially by Iran – NMI operates in an extremely volatile environment. This volatility

has been intensified since December 2023 with a renewed discussion in the country about an end of the international coalition against IS and the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, which control military bases in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and in central Iraq.

Actors in the country who favour Iran, and tend to come from the Shiite Arab spectrum, tradi-

tionally call for a withdrawal of American forces to strengthen Tehran's position. Repeated US military strikes against Shiite militias on Iraqi territory have given renewed vigour to these voices. The Iraqi government has so far been cautious. Yet there are also efforts within the government to end combat missions by foreign troops in Iraq. The main reason for this has to do with reputation: Iraq is to prove that it is



Weapons seized from IS: The Islamist terrorist organisation has been significantly weakened in Iraq in recent years. However, it has by no means disappeared. Photo: © Hadi Mizban, AP, picture alliance.

a safe, “normal” country that is no longer reliant on external military support in its struggle against IS.

In Iraq, NATO standards are considered the highest and best.



NMI has not yet been the target of withdrawal demands. This is insightful in terms of NMI’s successes in meeting the challenges in Iraq and promoting NATO’s security interests in the southern periphery. First of all, it is clear that the mission is held in high esteem by Iraqi decision-makers, who particularly appreciate NATO’s expertise. In Iraq, NATO standards are considered the highest and best. The government in Baghdad hopes for Iraqi security forces to benefit from this. Owing to great Iraqi demand, NMI was already enlarged once, in 2021, and the advisory mission was expanded to include the Ministry of the Interior in the summer of 2023 at the request of the Iraqi government. This makes sense from a practical perspective – the paramilitary Federal Police, comparable to the Italian Carabinieri or the French Gendarmerie, have repeatedly assumed military tasks, especially in the fight against IS – but also demonstrates the trust NMI has built up among Iraqis over the last five years. Second, NMI benefits from having only an advisory and no combat mission, as well as from not being perceived as US-dominated.

At the same time, it is clear that NMI cannot meet Iraq’s challenges on its own. They are too large and complex. Reforming the Iraqi security sector is a colossal task and politically difficult to execute, since a large number of veto players are involved. Nevertheless, the NMI mandate is the right one for the challenges in Iraq. It explicitly aims at strengthening state structures. In this area, NATO works with the civilian European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq), which has been in the country since 2017, and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Overall, the mission is bearing its first fruit five years after its inception. Practical support for Iraqi security forces has allowed them to stabilise greatly over recent years. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq has traditionally had strong state security institutions. In the 1980s, the Iraqi army was deemed to be one of the strongest in the region. But the conflicts of past decades and especially the complete dissolution of the army after 2003 by the Coalition Provisional Authority, have left their mark on Iraqi security forces.

The partial collapse of the Iraqi army in its fight against IS in Mosul in the summer of 2014 represented a low point in Iraq's recent history and bore testimony to the weakness of the Iraqi security sector; a sector that was plagued by corruption and mismanagement in the mid-2010s.

NATO can apply important skills to the task of further stabilising the Iraqi state.

Since then, Iraq's security forces have consolidated again, including in the course of the recapture of territory originally occupied by IS and thanks to international support. Today, NMI representatives attest to a good state of the Iraqi army with respect to equipment and tactical-operational training. What the security forces are missing is organisation and long-term orientation in peacetime. This strategic level is precisely where NMI, unlike the international coalition against IS, is directing its work at. This ensures that a potentially greater effect can be achieved with less personnel deployment. That Iraqi statehood has, according to the Fragile States Index, improved since 2017, especially in the area of security forces, is partially due to NMI.

At the same time, realism is needed, since NMI is faced with three strategic challenges and one operational one. First, reforming security forces remains the task of the Iraqi government. One advantage of this is clear ownership; at the same time, it makes NMI dependent on Baghdad's political will. While Iraq has stabilised politically since the government of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani took office in October 2022, the situation continues to be fragile and the country politically fragmented. Navigating the complicated political context in Iraq is a challenge for all international actors.

A second challenge is related to this: NMI aims to establish state structures, which are repeatedly undermined by Iran through the infiltration of the security sector by Iran-friendly militias

and the creation of parallel structures. Tehran has no interest in sustainable security sector reform, nor is it interested in strong regular Iraqi security forces, given the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. This means that the mission's success not only depends on the will of the Iraqi government, but also indirectly on Iran's willingness to cooperate, and this last point limits the mission's scope.

The third challenge is that NMI has so far been limited to the forces of Iraq's central government. Reforming the Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga is the job of the international coalition against IS. Efforts have been stagnant for years due to inter-Kurdish upheavals.¹³ This also stymies NMI's long-term success.

The fourth challenge is the short time on the ground for NATO advisors in Baghdad (generally six months), which entails great operational challenges. The mission is being carried out in a region where personal relationships play a crucial role, and its success is therefore in many ways dependent on trust between advisors and representatives of Iraqi security forces. Short advisor stays hamper relationship sustainability and the advisory success on the whole.¹⁴

Overall, NMI closed a gap in Iraq that had existed between the training of the Iraqi and Iraqi-Kurdish security forces at the tactical-operational level by the international coalition against IS on the one hand, and the support of comprehensive security sector reform by the EU and the UNDP at the political-administrative level, on the other. NATO can apply important skills to the task of further stabilising the Iraqi state. But it is also clear that success in combating IS was largely due to US military support as part of the international coalition against IS. NMI's mandate would not allow it to close the gap left by a possible US withdrawal from Iraq; its advisory mission means that it will always remain a complementary instrument. Moreover, the extent to which a possible withdrawal of the international coalition against IS, which provides logistical support to NATO, would impact on NMI, remains to be seen.

Politically, NMI strengthens Western presence in Iraq and secures important channels of communication. At the level of the political elite, it thus represents a meaningful component of the relationship between Iraq and the Western states. If NMI is successful in helping to further strengthen state authority in the country, the vacuum in Iraq that enables external influence and the persistence of IS, will also dwindle, thus strengthening the country's overall sovereignty. NMI's successes in the past few years are encouraging with regard to this goal.

Is NMI a Model for Further Missions in NATO's Southern Periphery?

In NATO's 75th year of existence, the focus has returned to the threat that prompted the alliance's formation: an attack by Russia on its eastern flank. Deterrence and conventional alliance defence are the order of the day. But NATO must maintain the expertise that it has built up over the last two decades in crisis management and out-of-area missions and keep an eye on its southern flank. Given limited resources, it will be a challenge for the alliance to fulfil its aspirations of maintaining defence based on its 360-degree approach, especially since the Indo-Pacific may well become a third theatre in the future.

NATO Mission Iraq shows how NATO can contribute to stabilising its southern periphery. Experiences in Iraq are positive and can serve as a model for similar NATO missions in other parts of the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel. The concept of a small, flexible advisory mission with a low political profile and decreased political and military vulnerability, a tightly defined mandate and a concentration on NATO's core competencies and the needs of the host country has so far proven useful in cooperating with NATO's partner, Iraq. This approach affords NATO the opportunity to work with other actors to counter the complex threats on its southern flank and support strategically important states in a targeted manner, while remaining realistic about the complexity and magnitude of the challenges in those countries.

NATO's limitation to an advisory mandate makes the alliance itself an interesting partner for other countries and allows it to secure important channels of communication and visibility as part of the West's larger "Global South" approach. From a German perspective, missions such as the one in Iraq offer a way of contributing to burden-sharing within NATO at comparatively little cost, thus improving transatlantic relations.

The increasing spread of terror organisations could make states in West and East Africa particularly suitable spots for similar missions in the future. This would require political will and clear ownership on the part of such partners. For NATO, establishing a partnership on eye level would be critical. Moreover, its aspiration should not be to solve political problems with advisory services. Missions such as NATO Mission Iraq can only ever be part of a comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, they represent an instrument that the community of Western nations should increasingly employ in NATO's 75th year of existence.

– translated from German –

Lucas Lamberty is Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Iraq office.

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[NATO. The Indispensable Alliance](#)

A Security Partnership with Substance

Colombia as a Global Partner of NATO

Stefan Reith

Outside the expert community, very few people in Europe are likely to know that Colombia is a global partner of NATO. In fact, the country is even something of a pioneer among NATO's global partners and the cooperation offers concrete benefits to both sides – so concrete that the partnership seems able to withstand President Gustavo Petro's anti-Western rhetoric.

Since 2017, Colombia has been the only country in Latin America to belong to NATO's exclusive circle of global partners. The inclusion of Colombia and other global partners was enabled by the Strategic Concept adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, where the Alliance defined new threats to international security and acknowledged its role as a global security actor. This facilitated new forms of security cooperation with partners worldwide, extending beyond the actual members and the original geographical framework of the defence alliance.

Phases of the Cooperation between NATO and Colombia

During its 75 years of existence, NATO has undergone several phases of strategic development.¹ During the 1950s, the alliance had a purely defensive character for conventional collective defence. From the 1960s to the early 1990s, the Alliance developed strategies focused on the nuclear deterrence of the Warsaw Pact. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the stabilisation of Central and Eastern Europe and NATO enlargement came to the fore. At the latest with the devastating Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 and the first declaration of *casus foederis* (an alliance defence situation) under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, new, non-conventional threats such as international terrorism became the focus of the Alliance. Following this, key milestones were the Strategic Concept agreed at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, and the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. This brought alliance defence back to the fore and motivated NATO members to significantly increase their defence spending and agree on the two per cent

target. The Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 2022 has shifted the parameters further and led to an increased military presence on NATO's eastern flank. It has also brought changes to the security environment risk analysis as set out in the new Strategic Concept of Madrid in 2022.

With the Lisbon Strategic Concept of 2010, the Alliance defined itself as a global security actor and opened itself up to security partnerships beyond the circle of its actual members. This laid the foundations for the creation of a global partnership network with key regional players. Today, NATO has a range of partnership formats with some 40 non-member states, including the "global partners" Afghanistan (currently suspended), Australia, Iraq, Japan, Colombia, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan. These partnerships aim to contribute towards peace, stability and security inside and outside NATO territory. They are based on "common values, reciprocity, mutual benefit and mutual respect".² Each partner coordinates with NATO to decide on the speed, scope and focus of the partnership and sets individual goals.

Colombia has traditionally been one of the United States' closest allies on the South American continent. As part of Plan Colombia, agreed in 1999, the US provided extensive economic and military aid in subsequent years to stabilise the country, combat drug trafficking and professionalise the military and police forces. The successful military pushback of the FARC guerrillas (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), which still controlled large swathes of the country at the turn of the millennium and aimed to capture the capital Bogotá, would have been

inconceivable without the funding, equipment and training programmes provided by the US.

On the verge of military defeat and severely decimated, the FARC agreed to enter into peace negotiations that ultimately led to the signing of the peace treaty and the demobilisation of the FARC in 2016 under President Juan Manuel Santos. Although illegal armed groups and guerrillas such as the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) and FARC dissidents continued to exist, the dissolution of the key military player in Colombia's internal conflict freed up military, political and economic capacities. President Santos used this to expand and diversify Colombia's foreign relations following a decades-long focus on the domestic threat. At nearly the same time as it joined the global partnership with NATO, Colombia became the third Latin American country after Mexico and Chile to join the OECD. The goal of President Santos was to make Colombia an active member of the international community and anchor it in the community of shared democratic values.

Thanks to its partnership with NATO, Colombia has reported progress in combating corruption in the defence sector.

However, cooperation between NATO and Colombia began much earlier. Back in 2013, an agreement was signed to guarantee the confidentiality of sharing classified and security-related information. While the agreement was of a more technical nature, it was an essential precondition for future cooperation. 2015 was the first time that Colombia successfully participated in the NATO-led Operation Ocean Shield to combat piracy in the Horn of Africa, where it demonstrated its high level of professionalism and the ability to militarily cooperate in accordance with NATO standards. In 2017, Colombia and NATO signed an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP), which was updated in 2019. The programme's priorities included: cyber

security, maritime security, the fight against terrorism, gender and security, demining, and strengthening the capacities and capabilities of the Colombian military. At a press conference with President Santos in Brussels in 2018, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also expressed the hope that the Colombian experience could contribute to the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.³ In December 2021, the partners agreed to intensify their cooperation by signing an Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP).

This is a model agreement, as it is the first of its kind that NATO has concluded with one of its partners. The ITPP set out several specific aims for the partnership: dialogue and consultation; counter-terrorism; disaster management; education and training in the security sector; strengthening integrity and transparency in the security and defence sector; capability development and interoperability of the armed forces; language skills in NATO languages for Colombian military personnel; security diplomacy; cyber security; and climate change and security.⁴ On paper, this is an ambitious agenda for further cooperation between Colombia and NATO.

Joint Interests and Goals of the Partnership

Colombia and NATO derive many joint benefits from the global partnership. For decades, Colombia had no option but to concentrate on its domestic conflict and the fight against guerrilla movements, drug cartels and other heavily armed organised criminal groups. Now, however, the partnership affords the opportunity to further professionalise its military and security apparatus and adapt it to international standards. Joint exercises and deployments with NATO forces as well as access to the wide range of services offered by NATO training centres will strengthen the Colombian military's expertise and improve its interoperability with international partners.

Thanks to its partnership with NATO, Colombia has already been able to report progress in the fight against chronic corruption in the defence

and security sector. NATO standards and control mechanisms have been introduced in the military to create transparency when awarding contracts and procuring materiel.

The joint training programmes on human rights and human security are also crucial for enhancing the professionalism and integrity of the Colombian armed forces, given that during the internal conflict, members of the military committed serious human rights violations by tolerating or even coordinating massacres of civilians by paramilitary groups and murdering civilians in order to pass them off as guerrillas killed in battle. These crimes are currently being investigated and dealt with by the transitional justice system agreed in the peace treaty with the FARC. The training courses with NATO help to ensure that respect for human rights and protection of the civilian population become embedded in the Colombian military's DNA and are guaranteed for the future.

Colombia is not a one-sided beneficiary of the partnership. It also provides skills to NATO.

Another factor that should not be overlooked are the programmes to promote bilingualism in English and Spanish for command personnel, which is a basic requirement for effective cooperation in international missions. As regards cyber security – a topic of increasing importance for security and defence policy in Colombia in light of the growing number of cyber-attacks – the country can benefit from working with NATO member states, as Colombia's experience and capacities in this area are still inadequately developed. Colombia also has a great deal of catching up to do when it comes to gender and security, especially the integration of women in leadership positions in the military and police. This is to be remedied through the introduction of NATO standards.

Both sides benefit from the partnership when it comes to the environment, climate change

and security. Colombia has defined these three issues as a key area for national security and launched the Artemisa military operation under President Iván Duque (2018 to 2022) to combat the illegal clearing of the rainforest and protect the extensive national parks. Twenty-three thousand soldiers and police officers were deployed to protect 200,000 hectares of forest. The results are mixed, but provide a vital information basis for future cooperation in the area of environment and security. Since taking office in August 2022, President Gustavo Petro has made the protection of the Amazon rainforest a core topic of his agenda, and he even proposed setting up an “Amazon NATO” at the Amazon Summit in Belém, Brazil, in August 2023. This is an agreement on military and judicial cooperation between the Amazonian states to take action against illegal deforestation.⁵

Colombia is not a one-sided beneficiary of the partnership. It also provides NATO with vital knowledge and skills that cannot simply be taken as a matter of course among member states. This includes decades-long experience in irregular or asymmetric warfare and the knowledge thus acquired, along with a high degree of professionalisation, especially among commandos and special forces.

The elimination of key leaders was vital for winning the fight against the FARC. Under President Duque, the strategy of identifying and eliminating targets of high operational value was also successfully continued in the fight against FARC dissidents and other illegal armed groups. The high quality of Colombia's special forces is also evident when compared to other countries in the region. Since 2006, Colombian special forces have won the American commando competition twelve times, making them the best on the continent.⁶ The capabilities of the Colombian special forces and their experience in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime are of great interest to NATO member states in view of the asymmetric challenges described in the new Strategic Concept of 2022.⁷



Colombian experts have trained Ukrainian soldiers in detecting and defusing mines.

Colombia also has extensive experience in humanitarian and military mine clearance. In 2019, the Colombian training centre CIDES (Centro Internacional de Desminado) became the 33rd member of the NATO Partnership Training and Education Centres (PTEC) network and has since run several training courses for NATO personnel. Colombian experts have

also trained Ukrainian soldiers in detecting and defusing mines so as to support Ukraine's fight against the Russian invasion.

Apart from military conflicts, the Colombian armed forces have also gained valuable experience in the peace process with the FARC guerrillas and can contribute this to the NATO network. The military played a key role, both as an actor at the negotiating table and in the subsequent stages of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of the former FARC combatants.⁸ This expertise is of great interest to NATO partners with respect to other post-conflict scenarios and future stabilisation and peacekeeping missions.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (right) and then Colombian President Iván Duque after a meeting in Brussels, in 2018: Colombia and NATO both benefit in various ways from their cooperation. Photo: © Dursun Aydemir, AA, picture alliance.

Outlook for the Partnership after the Change of Government in 2022

August 2022 was the first time that a decidedly left-wing president had taken the helm of a traditionally conservative Colombia. President Gustavo Petro, a former member of the M-19 guerrillas demobilised in 1990, former mayor of the capital Bogotá and a long-time senator, had often levelled sharp criticism at previous

governments from the opposition bench for their rapprochement with NATO and close partnership with the US. He continued his anti-NATO and anti-US rhetoric even after taking office, utilising a classic narrative of the Latin American left: the imperialist North systematically oppresses and exploits the Global South in the colonial tradition. Since then, there has been a clear change of direction in Colombia's foreign policy, with the aim of strengthening



At ease with dictators: Colombia's current President Gustavo Petro (left) is seeking rapprochement with the left-wing autocratic Maduro regime in Venezuela after years of frosty relations. Although he shares the latter's anti-Western rhetoric, in practice Petro has not yet diminished cooperation with NATO. Photo: © Ariana Cubillos, AP, picture alliance.

cooperation with countries of the Global South. The Petro government does not shy away from contact with dictatorships or authoritarian regimes.

This is particularly evident in the resumption of diplomatic relations and cordial tone adopted with the Maduro regime in Venezuela. In contrast to his predecessor Duque, President Petro has yet to utter a single word of condemnation about the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, instead limiting himself to calling for peace on both sides. The same applies to the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 and the Israeli response. True to the spirit of his former guerrilla group M-19, which bombed the Israeli embassy in Bogotá in the 1980s, he has repeatedly legitimised the “Palestinian people’s struggle for liberation” and sees Israel in the role of aggressor.

Then President Duque voiced criticism of a deepening Russia-China cooperation, including their support for the repressive regime in Venezuela, to NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg during his visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels in February 2022, only a few days prior to the Russian attack on Ukraine,⁹ yet such a conversation would be unthinkable under the current presidency. In his much-noticed first speech as Colombian President to the UN General Assembly in September 2022, Petro said: “Why wage war when we need to save the human species? What use are NATO and empires when the end of intelligence is imminent?”¹⁰

However, political observers point out that the president’s harsh anti-imperialist rhetoric is more aimed at satisfying his own supporters, left-wing parties and political forces at home than any serious desire to end the partnership with NATO. It was quite the opposite: following his speech to the UN, President Petro met with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg in New York. The content of the meeting has not been disclosed. Some of Petro’s domestic supporters accuse the president of duplicity and incoherence and vehemently call for an end to the cooperation with NATO, whereas military circles

confirm that, in practical terms, the partnership is continuing to run smoothly.

For example, in May 2023, the 22nd annual meeting of the PTEC-NATO training centres was held in Bogotá. One of the outcomes of this was an agreement to support Ukraine with military training, particularly in the areas of defence against cyber-attacks, energy security and mine clearance. In September, a group of students from the Colombian War College paid a routine visit to NATO headquarters to discuss current security issues, the war in Ukraine, the role of NATO and the new Strategic Concept. In September, too, Colombian Defence Minister Iván Velásquez Gómez visited NATO in Brussels and exchanged views with NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană on the status and future of the agreed partnership programme.¹¹

The global partnership between Colombia and NATO is far from being a paper tiger.

To the displeasure of the president’s left-wing supporters in Colombia and to the surprise of many left-wing populist politicians in the region, the Petro government’s guidelines on security and defence policy contain a clear commitment to continuing the partnership and expanding relations with NATO. For example, the strategy adopted by the government is to advance the international security and defence sector agenda and strengthen cooperation with NATO within this framework, particularly in the areas of cyber security, climate change, human rights and the integrity of the military. The government also wants to continue enhancing the capabilities of its own military, drawing on NATO’s training and education programme and participating in joint exercises.¹² In this way, the incumbent Colombian president’s jarring, anti-imperialist rhetoric lies in stark contrast to the hitherto harmonious development of the partnership between Colombia and NATO and its own security policy agenda.



Political observers believe that President Petro faces a dilemma. On the one hand, as Colombia's first left-wing president, he has to fulfil the expectations of his voters and supporters. On the other hand, as a political realist, he is aware of just how important the global partnership with NATO is to Colombia. As the only NATO partner in Latin America, Colombia has a unique selling point that gives the president prestige, international standing and a voice in a major international forum.

In view of the still precarious security situation in the country – even after the peace treaty with the FARC – there are practical reasons, too, for advancing professionalisation of the country's military with the support of NATO partners. Decoupling from NATO's information, research and training networks and giving up privileged access to materiel procurement would weaken the performance of the Colombian armed forces over the medium term and instantly trigger sharp criticism of the president in the security and defence sector. Against this backdrop, the Petro government can be expected to continue walking a tightrope between rhetoric and practical implementation.

Conclusion

The global partnership between Colombia and NATO is far from being a paper tiger. On the contrary, the security cooperation is both substantial and concrete. Since 2013, the relationship has been steadily developing and deepening. Due to its long-standing domestic conflict, the subsequent peace process with the FARC and numerous successful participations in UN peacekeeping missions¹³, Colombia's valuable experience and expertise is beneficial to the NATO network. With the Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP) that was signed in 2021, Colombia can even be seen as a pioneer and role model among the 40 or so different NATO partnerships.

The change of government in Colombia in August 2022 and President Petro's anti-NATO rhetoric have not yet posed an obstacle to practical cooperation. Colombia's withdrawal from

NATO networks is considered highly unlikely over the short-to-medium term. Even though, for ideological reasons, the current Colombian government strives for a more neutral position and equidistance between the major powers, especially the US and China, in lieu of its traditionally close partnership with the US, and seems to attach less importance to the domestic political conditions of international partners, Colombia remains structurally an important value partner that is indispensable in the fight for democracy and a rules-based world order.

In addition to deterrence, defence and crisis prevention, NATO's current Strategic Concept defines cooperative security as a key task of the Alliance. The corresponding section under point 42 states: "Political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners, based on mutual respect and benefit, contribute to stability beyond our borders, enhance our security at home and support NATO's core tasks. Partnerships are crucial to protect the global commons, enhance our resilience and uphold the rules-based international order."¹⁴

With this in mind, political decision-makers in Colombia and NATO should endeavour to further expand and deepen the global partnership in their mutual interest in order to leverage untapped potential. Political and military actors in Germany should also make greater use of the framework of NATO's global partnership with Colombia so as to promote security policy cooperation. The German and Colombian navies have traditionally had a close relationship and worked together for decades in terms of training, personnel exchange and armaments projects. Germany could play a key role in expanding the partnership in light of this.

- translated from German -

Stefan Reith is Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's country office in Colombia.

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Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.
Klingelhöferstraße 23
10785 Berlin
Phone +49 (0)30-269 96-33 88
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