PROJECT ON EUROPE AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

# NATO at Seventy

## An Alliance in Crisis

Ambassador Douglas Lute  Ambassador Nicholas Burns


HARVARD Kennedy School
BELFER CENTER
for Science and International Affairs

REPORT
FEBRUARY 2019

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Cover photo: A U.S. Marine carries cold weather equipment as he begins to march across the Icelandic terrain in preparation for NATO's Trident Juncture 2018 exercise, October 19, 2018. (NATO Photo)


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# About this Report

"NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis" is a report by the **Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship** at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. This Project aims to strengthen teaching, research, and policy-making on the relationship between the United States and Europe.

This report is timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 2019 as the world's most successful alliance faces perhaps the most daunting and complex set of challenges in its history. This report identifies ten major challenges for NATO—some from within the Alliance, others from beyond its borders or looming on the horizon—and specific recommendations for how to resolve them.

This report benefited from discussions with experts and officials on both sides of the Atlantic. The report's authors are Ambassador (Ret.) Douglas Lute, Senior Fellow at the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship and President of Cambridge Global Advisors and Ambassador (Ret.) Nicholas Burns, Faculty Chair of the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship and Roy and Barbara Goodman Family Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics at Harvard Kennedy School. Both are former Permanent Representatives of the United States to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

# About the Authors

### Ambassador (Ret.) Douglas Lute

*Senior Fellow with the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*
*President, Cambridge Global Advisors*

Ambassador (Ret.) Douglas Lute is the former United States Ambassador to NATO (2013-2017) where he contributed to designing and implementing the responses of the Alliance to the most severe security challenges in Europe since the end of the Cold War. A career Army officer, in 2010 Lute retired from active duty as a lieutenant general after 35 years of service. In 2007 President Bush named him as Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor to coordinate the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2009 he was the senior White House official retained by President Obama. Across these two Administrations, he served a total of six years in the White House. Before being assigned to the White House, General Lute served as Director of Operations (J3) on the Joint Staff, overseeing U.S. military operations worldwide. He now holds the McDermott Chair of Social Sciences at West Point and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Senior Military Advisory Group of the United States Institute of Peace, and the Board of Directors of the Atlantic Council.

**Ambassador (Ret.) Nicholas Burns**

*Roy and Barbara Goodman Family Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Politics, Harvard Kennedy School*

Ambassador (Ret.) Nicholas Burns is the Roy and Barbara Goodman Family Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations at Harvard Kennedy School. He is Faculty Chair of the Future of Diplomacy Project and the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship. He is Director of the Aspen Strategy Group and a Senior Counselor at the Cohen Group. From 2014-2017, he was a member of Secretary of State John Kerry's Foreign Affairs Policy Board at the U.S. Department of State. He served in the United States Foreign Service for twenty-seven years until his retirement in April 2008. He was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from 2005 to 2008. Prior to that, he was Ambassador to NATO (2001-2005), Ambassador to Greece (1997-2001), and State Department Spokesman (1995-1997). He worked on the National Security Council staff where he was Senior Director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia Affairs and Special Assistant to President Clinton and, before that, Director for Soviet Affairs for President George H.W. Bush. Earlier in his career, he worked at the American Consulate General in Jerusalem and in the American Embassies in Egypt and Mauritania. He serves on the board of several corporate and non-profit organizations.

# Contributors

The authors gratefully acknowledge the extraordinary substantive contributions of our colleagues at Harvard who worked tirelessly on this report. It would not have been completed without them.

## RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**Seth A. Johnston**
*Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow & Visiting Scholar, Center for European Studies, Harvard University*

Dr. Seth Johnston is a Major in the United States Army and veteran of NATO, most recently serving as a task force commander with the NATO Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Formerly an Assistant Professor of International Relations at West Point, he is the author of *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance since 1950*.

**Gabrielle Tarini**
*Master in Public Policy Candidate, Class of 2019, Harvard Kennedy School*

Gabrielle Tarini is a Master in Public Policy candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School and research assistant at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Previously, she was a Rosenthal Fellow in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and a research associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. She holds a B.A. in International Studies from Boston College.

## PROJECT ON EUROPE AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP PROGRAM SUPPORT

### Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook

*Executive Director, the Future of Diplomacy Project & the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, Belfer Center*

Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook is the founding Executive Director of the Future of Diplomacy Project & the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship. Her areas of expertise include EU-U.S. relations and digital public policy in urban and national contexts. Cathryn holds a Master in Public Administration from Harvard Kennedy School, a Master's Degree in European Studies from the London School of Economics, and an undergraduate degree from Brown University.

### Alison Hillegeist

*Assistant Director, the Future of Diplomacy Project & the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, Belfer Center; Special Assistant to Professor Nicholas Burns*

Alison Hillegeist has spent a 22-year career in non-profit organizations and higher education with expertise in developing and managing complex programs and projects, building partnerships in national and international settings, and fostering collaboration across disciplines and cultures. She has a B.A. in International Relations and a M.A. in Sustainable Development.

### Patricia Morris

*Research Director, NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis*

Patricia Morris leads the future of NATO initiative of the Belfer Center's Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship. She is an international conflict and governance professional, and previously worked at West Point, the World Bank, and Conflict Dynamics International, among others. She is a Truman Project National Security Fellow. She holds an MSc in Conflict Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a B.A. in Political Science and French from Wellesley College.

# Acknowledgements

This report benefited from the advice and comments of experts, scholars and practitioners representing generations of experience on the trans-Atlantic relationship. The authors are particularly grateful to the individuals listed on the following pages for their contributions to this report. The individuals on this list do not necessarily endorse all the recommendations in this report. The authors accept full responsibility for the contents of the report.

| North American Consultations |
| --- |
| Secretary **Madeleine Albright**, Former United States Secretary of State |
| Dr. **Jordan Becker**, Senior Transatlantic Fellow, Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel |
| **Robert Bell**, Former Defense Advisor, United States Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Secretary **Ash Carter**, Former United States Secretary of Defense and Director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs |
| Dr. **Philippe Le Corre**, Senior Fellow, Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government, Harvard Kennedy School and Affiliate, Belfer Center's Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship |
| Ambassador **Ivo Daalder**, Former United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Dr. **Karen Donfried**, President of the German Marshall Fund of the United States |
| **Thomas Donilon**, Former United States National Security Advisor |
| Ambassador **Kay Bailey Hutchison**, United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Ambassador **Robert Hunter**, Former United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| General **James Jones**, Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe |
| Dr. **Andrea Kendall-Taylor**, Senior Fellow and Director of the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for a New American Security |
| Dr. **Ian Lesser**, Vice President of the German Marshall Fund of the United States |
| Ambassador **Victoria Nuland**, Former United States Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Dr. **Alina Polyakova**, David M. Rubenstein Fellow at the Brookings Institution |

| |
|---|
| Secretary **Colin Powell**, Former United States Secretary of State |
| **Eric Rosenbach**, Co-Director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School |
| Dr. **Mary Sarotte**, Kravis Chair in Historical Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies |
| Dr. **Timothy Andrews Sayle**, Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto |
| Professor **Stanley R. Sloan**, Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and former Founding Director of the Atlantic Community |
| **James Townsend**, Former United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Ambassador **Alexander "Sandy" Vershbow**, Former Deputy Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and former Permament Representative to the NATO and U.S. Ambassador to Russia |
| **Damon Wilson**, former Special Assistant to the U.S. President, Senior Director for Europe Affairs at the National Security Council, and Executive Vice President of the Atlantic Council |

| **European Consultations** |
|---|
| General **Knud Bartels**, Former Chairman of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Military Committee |
| **Rose Gottemoeller**, Deputy Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Ambassador **Wolfgang Ischinger**, Chairman, Munich Security Conference |
| Dr. **Alexander Mattelaer**, Academic Director of the Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel |
| The Right Honourable Lord **Robertson** of Port Ellen KT, Former Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| **Jaap de Hoop Scheffer**, Former Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and former Foreign Minister of the Netherlands |
| Ambassador **Stefano Stefanini**, Former Permanent Representative of Italy to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Lieutenant General **Steven Shepro**, Deputy Chairman of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Military Committee |
| Dr. **Nathalie Tocci**, Director at the Istituto Affari Internazionali |
| Ambassador **Tomáš Valášek**, Former Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization |

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**A Slovak soldier with Stefanik Company charges through smoke during an exercise in eastern Latvia, October 4, 2018.**

**Stefanik Company, a mechanized infantry unit currently based in Adaži, Latvia, is Slovakia's first contribution to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe.**

NATO Photo

# Executive Summary

Approaching the seventieth anniversary of its founding in April 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains the single most important contributor to security, stability and peace in Europe and North America.

NATO provides the umbrella defending Europe from conventional and nuclear attack and a secure geopolitical landscape for the world's two largest economies—the European Union and the United States. NATO members comprise the largest and strongest alliance of democratic countries in the world. They contain Russian aggression and protect over 100 million East Europeans who now live in democracy and freedom after the fall of communism.[1] Far from obsolete, NATO remains vital for the more than 900 million Europeans and North Americans who benefit from it every day.[2] It is no overstatement that if NATO did not exist today, countries on both sides of the Atlantic would need to create it in a troubled, divisive 21st century where authoritarian powers are on the rise.

The NATO allies, however, are confronting daunting and complex challenges that are testing both their purpose and unity. Based on extensive discussions with current European and North American leaders, former senior officials, academics and journalists during the past six months, this report argues that NATO needs to come to grips with ten major challenges this year. The list is long, with simultaneous challenges from within the alliance, from beyond NATO's borders and looming on the horizon. Most significant is a challenge NATO has not faced before: the absence of strong American presidential leadership. NATO's leaders need to act decisively in 2019 to meet these tests and heal the widening divisions within the Alliance before it is too late.

# Challenges from Within NATO

## Reviving American Leadership of the Alliance

NATO's single greatest challenge is the absence of strong, principled American presidential leadership for the first time in its history. President Donald Trump is regarded widely in NATO capitals as the Alliance's most urgent, and often most difficult, problem. NATO leaders, for example, considered not holding a 2019 summit to mark the seventieth anniversary this spring as they did in decades past. They feared President Trump would blow up a meeting in controversy as he has done each time he has met with NATO leaders during the past two years. Wary of his past behavior, NATO plans a scaled down leaders meeting for December 2019.

President Trump's open ambivalence about NATO's value to the U.S., his public questioning of America's Article 5 commitment to its allies, persistent criticism of Europe's democratic leaders and embrace of its anti-democratic members and continued weakness in failing to confront NATO's primary adversary President Vladimir Putin of Russia, have hurtled the Alliance into its most worrisome crisis in memory.[3]

There is no reason to believe President Trump's attitude will change for the better during the next two years. He believes NATO allies are taking advantage of the U.S.[4] These are the same allies and partners who came to America's defense on 9/11, suffered more than 1,000 battlefield deaths alongside American soldiers in Afghanistan,[5] are fighting with the U.S. now against the Islamic State and shoulder the main burden sustaining a fragile peace in the Balkans, in both Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

President Trump is the first U.S. president to view the European Union as an economic competitor rather than a vital partner of both the U.S. and NATO. His troubling anti-NATO and anti-Europe bias has caused European governments to question the credibility of the U.S. as the leader of the West for the first time since the Second World War.[6] The European public confidence in American leadership is also at historically low depths.[7] Every American president before Trump has encouraged the strength and

unity of Europe as a core interest of the U.S. Trump may well cause even greater damage to the Alliance while he remains in office.

For this reason, Republicans and Democrats in Congress must act together as a blocking force against President Trump's dangerous policies. Congress, on a bipartisan basis, should reaffirm the U.S. commitment to the Article 5 defense clause in the NATO Treaty. Congress should pass legislation this year requiring Congressional approval should President Trump attempt to alter U.S. treaty commitments to NATO allies or to have the U.S. leave the Alliance altogether.[8] Congress should continue to fund the "European Deterrence Initiative" to bolster U.S. military strength in Europe that is the primary deterrent against Russian adventurism.

## Restoring European Defense Strength

NATO's European members and Canada pose their own challenge to the Alliance—the weakness of their collective defense spending for NATO's common defense. President Trump has been right to push allies to spend more on defense. He has the support of the U.S. Congress and many Americans in doing so. It is simply unfair that only five of the twenty-nine allies are currently spending at least 2 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on their military budgets, while the U.S. is spending 3.5 percent and shouldering much of the defense burden.[9]

Germany, the largest and wealthiest of the European allies, has a major shortfall as it is currently spending only 1.24 percent of its budget on defense. Its coalition government has not summoned the strength and determination to convince the Bundestag and the German public to reach the minimum 2 percent level soon. Germany is thus abdicating this most basic obligation as a member of NATO. Italy, Canada, Spain, the Netherlands and other allies are also spending well below the agreed 2 percent level.[10]

Having made his point, President Trump should also acknowledge that aggregate NATO defense spending trends are actually heading in the right direction, despite insufficient spending by some allies. NATO allies have produced four consecutive years of real growth for a

collective increase in spending of $87 billion, particularly in reaction to Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and President Trump's public pressure since 2017.[11] A majority of NATO members plan to reach the 2 percent level by the agreed target date of 2024. More than half will spend 20 percent of their defense budgets on new equipment and research and development.[12] This new spending is critical to produce added NATO defense capabilities, including intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance, cyber and digital technologies.

The challenge for President Trump on NATO defense spending is to pivot from chief critic to chief cheerleader. His administration should also support new European Union efforts to strengthen the EU's own defense capacity as long as it complements, and not duplicates, NATO's existing capabilities and programs.

## Upholding NATO's Democratic Values

NATO is struggling to confront a potentially cancerous threat from within. Three allied governments—Poland, Hungary and Turkey—have undermined their own democracies in varying degrees by suppressing free speech and a free press and limiting the independence of the courts.[13] As NATO is, first and foremost, an alliance of democracies, the actions of these governments threaten the core values—democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law—to which each ally is committed in the North Atlantic Treaty.

Nearly every current and former NATO official with whom we talked for this report worried that a recommendation for NATO to discipline these anti-democratic governments would be highly problematic and divisive. Nonetheless, we believe NATO must find a way to shine a light on these recalcitrant allies. For example, NATO could review annually each ally's democratic practices, perhaps in a report prepared by a high-level, outside group. Allies that violate basic democratic standards could be suspended from NATO military exercises or denied access to NATO training and common infrastructure funding.

More than one European mentioned to us the ironic fact that the U.S. itself may be chastised for a deterioration of its own democratic standards in

such a process. Nevertheless, ignoring this challenge of democratic principles will undermine the core convictions that brought NATO together seventy years ago.

### Streamlining NATO Decision-Making

NATO allies have always reached critical decisions by consensus. This continues to make sense for all allies to agree on how NATO should act on major issues. But, it is time for the Alliance to empower the Secretary General on the administrative and resource issues that impede focusing on more significant challenges. The Secretary General must have the operational power to move an often-unwieldy Alliance forward in the way it plans and operates on a daily basis. Also important is improving decision-making in crisis scenarios.

## Challenges from Beyond NATO's Borders

### Containing Putin's Russia

NATO faces a challenge to deter further Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. Russian President Vladimir Putin is destabilizing NATO partners Ukraine and Georgia by the continued occupation of their territories. He also seeks to weaken the three Baltic allies from within.[14] And Russian cyber attacks, political subversion and aggressive social media campaigns pose a threat to all the NATO democracies and their electoral processes.

NATO allies thus need to take much stronger measures against Moscow than they have to date by:

- Reaffirming economic sanctions on Russia will remain in place for as long as it occupies Ukrainian territory;
- Sustaining indefinitely current back-to-back NATO rotational troop deployments to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, while adding enablers and improving readiness of reinforcements;

- Addressing vulnerabilities in the area of hybrid warfare urgently, the most likely form of Russian aggression against the Alliance;
- Preparing cyber offensive options to deter Russia from further cyber attacks.

At the same time, it makes sense for NATO leaders to maintain continuing contacts with the Kremlin on the many issues that divide NATO allies and Russia: Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereign territory, dangerous Russian air and sea maneuvers in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, the Russian Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) violation, Afghanistan and measures to prevent miscalculation that could lead to conflict that all wish to avoid.

Containing Russian power will be a generational challenge until Putin's Soviet-trained leadership circle leaves power during the next decade, perhaps beyond. There is no more important external challenge for NATO.

## Ending the Afghan War

NATO's largest and longest combat mission in Afghanistan is at a critical juncture. The war with the Taliban is at a stalemate. Afghan civilian and military casualties are at an all-time high.[15] Few believe the war can be won outright. President Trump appears determined to have the U.S. depart quickly sometime in 2019 after nearly 18 years of combat. President Trump and his advisors should proceed carefully, in close coordination with the Afghan government, to avoid a precipitous U.S. departure that would jeopardize American interests and risk further instability in Afghanistan.

The Trump administration is right to engage directly with the Taliban to explore a political process to end the war. A durable, sustainable settlement ultimately must be made among Afghans, including the elected Afghan government and the Taliban. The interests and views of Afghanistan's neighbors and the NATO allies with troops on the ground must be considered as well. The U.S. should proceed slowly and carefully, conditioning troop withdrawals on the Taliban's meeting agreed security and political benchmarks beginning with a ceasefire and including agreeing to engage

with the Afghan government. NATO allies should adhere to the "in together, out together" principle, avoiding unilateral national withdrawals.

### Refocusing NATO Partnerships

NATO maintains a partnership with forty-one countries outside the Alliance from Mauritania in West Africa to Japan.[16] Many states have been invaluable members of coalitions in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans and in the fight against the Islamic State. Most important, NATO should strengthen its partnership with the European Union. Partnerships with the Gulf Coordination Council, the African Union and the Arab League could promote stability along NATO's periphery.

### Maintaining an Open Door to Future Members

Following a historic two-decade expansion of the NATO Alliance with thirteen new members, NATO would be well advised to consolidate that expansion once North Macedonia joins the Alliance in the coming months. Over the next decade or two, however, NATO should keep the door open for any European democracy that meets the strict qualifications for membership. Georgia and Ukraine may not meet the conditions for years to come, but it is in NATO's interest to hold open the possibility of membership in the long term. No country outside the Alliance, most especially Russia, can have a veto over who NATO accepts as it pursues its goal of providing for a free and peaceful European continent.

# Challenges on the Horizon

## Winning the Technology Battle in the Digital Age

NATO faces yet another critical challenge in adapting quickly to a rapidly changing, global, military technology landscape. Its often-byzantine defense planning processes date to the Cold War, long before the extraordinary, current advances in military arms powered by artificial intelligence, cyber, robotics, quantum computing and biotechnology—perhaps the most decisive change in military technology since the start of the nuclear age. NATO allies, led by the United States, must now commit a far greater share of their military budgets to acquiring these new military technologies, lest China and Russia gain a decisive advantage in the decade ahead.

## Competing with China

While China does not pose a direct military threat to most NATO allies, it is emerging as a global competitor politically, economically and in seeking dominance in digital military technologies. Europe, the United States and Canada need to adopt a more cohesive approach to China. Beijing is emerging as the strongest strategic competitor of both North America and Europe in this century. The European allies need to focus more intently on the challenge from Chinese economic and technological power and industrial espionage. NATO allies should thus tighten restrictions on Chinese investments in key technology sectors on both sides of the Atlantic. And NATO should strengthen its military partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and others.

China will be the main geo-strategic competitor of the United States in the decades ahead. It is in the interest of NATO allies to take on the defense burden in the trans-Atlantic region more equitably, to enable the U.S. to focus increasingly on the competition with China. In this strategic sense, NATO's military strength and unity could be a potentially decisive factor in the long-term competition ahead in the Indo-Pacific. The goal is to live and work with China where possible, but to compete to maintain the primacy of the free, democratic countries in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

# Summary

The United States bears a special responsibility to help its allies to meet these tests. President Trump is wrong to question NATO's central importance to American security. On its own, the United States is a powerful nation. But America's European and Canadian allies expand and amplify American power in ways that Russia and China—with few allies of their own—can never match. United States access to European air and naval bases alone bring American forces a continent closer to the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia.[17] The United States is substantially stronger in NATO than it would be on its own. There is ample evidence President Trump does not understand—and certainly does not appreciate—this basic strategic fact about NATO.

This is why decisive action by the Congress this year to reassert America's commitment and leadership in NATO is imperative. And it is also why NATO allies, on both sides of the Atlantic, must work together to narrow the growing divisions within the Alliance and to meet these historic challenges as NATO turns seventy.

## Notes for Executive Summary

1 The population of East European countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is approximately 109 million. See "NATO Countries: Statistical Profile," Nation Master, accessed January 3, 2019, https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/groups/NATO-countries.

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9 "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2011-2018)," NATO Press Release PR/CP(2018)091, July 10, 2018, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_07/20180709_180710-pr2018-91-en.pdf. However, data on defense spending can be misleading. While the U.S. devotes 3.5 percent of GDP to defense, not all of that is committed to NATO.

10 "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2011-2018)," 2018.

11 Nicholas Burns, "What America Gets Out of NATO," *The New York Times*, July 11, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/opinion/what-america-gets-out-of-nato.html.

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13 Jonathan Katz and Torrey Taussig, "An inconvenient truth: Addressing democratic backsliding within NATO," *Brookings Institution*, July 10, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/07/10/an-inconvenient-truth-addressing-democratic-backsliding-within-nato/.

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16 Partnership for Peace: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Malta, The Republic of Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan; Mediterranean Dialogue: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia; Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates; Partners from across the globe: Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan; International organizations: United Nations, European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. See "Partners," NATO, last updated November 11, 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/51288.htm.

17 Jens Stoltenberg, "The Value of NATO in the 21st Century," *Heritage Foundation*, Washington, DC, September 14, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/defense/event/the-value-nato-the-21st-century/.

**A view of the interior of the new NATO headquarters in Brussels, February 22, 2018.**

NATO Photo

# NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis

NATO stands once again at a crossroads, but this is different. As the world's oldest and most successful military alliance celebrates its seventieth anniversary in April 2019, it faces an array of diverse, simultaneous challenges. Some challenges are familiar, others new and pressing; some from within the Alliance, others from beyond NATO's borders and still others looming on the horizon. Taken together, these challenges represent the most severe crisis in the security environment in Europe since the end of the Cold War and perhaps ever. The question is whether the Alliance can adapt to these challenges, revitalized and retooled for the decades ahead. This report aims to address the array of challenges and offer practical recommendations.

## Challenges from Within NATO

### Reviving American Leadership

The single greatest challenge NATO faces today is the critical need for reviving strong, reliable American leadership. With American leadership, anything is possible within the Alliance; absent American leadership, progress will be slow at best. At the most basic level the next American president must reaffirm U.S. commitment to the Alliance, especially the **Article 5 collective defense pledge**, in both words and deeds. Given the opportunity to do so within months of his inauguration in May 2017, President Trump refused to honor the U.S. commitment to Article 5, even while unveiling a memorial at the new NATO headquarters commemorating its historic invocation after 9/11.[1] His persistent disrespect toward some key democratic leaders and warmth toward some autocrats, denigration of NATO and the EU and penchant for unpredictable statements and decisions combine to erode European governmental and public confidence in American leadership.[2]

> "...an armed attack against one or more [ally] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all..."
>
> – Article 5, Washington Treaty

Actions speak louder than words, but words still count. Effective deterrence and defense—the essence of NATO—depend not only on capability, but also on adversaries' perception of allies' collective political will.[3] The U.S. demonstrates its commitment to NATO with senior diplomatic and military leadership, troop deployments to Europe including to the Baltics and Poland, active participation in NATO exercises and prepositioning equipment to ease rapid reinforcement.

The 9/11 and Article 5 Memorial at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, November 21, 2018. (NATO Photo)

Especially under the leadership of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, NATO made progress on readiness, mobility, cyber security and command structure reforms. Fortunately, bipartisan congressional support is unwavering: Senate and House resolutions in 2017 reaffirming U.S. commitment to the Alliance, the introduction of a Senate bill preventing the President from leaving NATO without Senate approval in 2018 and 2019, the passage of a House resolution in 2019 prohibiting the appropriation of funds to withdraw the U.S. from NATO and steady funding increases for the European Deterrence Initiative.[4] Polls show that the American people, too, understand the value of NATO and support the Alliance, including America's Article 5 commitments.[5] This public support for trans-Atlantic ties is deeply rooted, as NATO allies represent six of the ten largest diaspora groups in America.[6] The Trump administration's Secretaries of State and Defense have reassured allies of the U.S. commitment to NATO at the annual ministerial-level meetings.[7] All of these measures are necessary for deterrence and defense, but not sufficient if the U.S. President casts doubt on America's commitment. Meeting the challenges outlined in this report begins with American leadership and American leadership begins at the top.

More broadly, the U.S. Government—both the executive and legislative branches—is not working effectively and predictably.[8] Staff vacancies and lack of collaborative processes stagnate policy making and implementation. Divisive hyper-partisan, zero-sum politics amplified by social media defy compromise, strain Washington's national security institutions and leave U.S. allies questioning what may come next.

As President Trump cannot be expected to change, responsibility lies with the Congress to check and balance his approach to NATO. We recommend the Congress take specific steps this year:

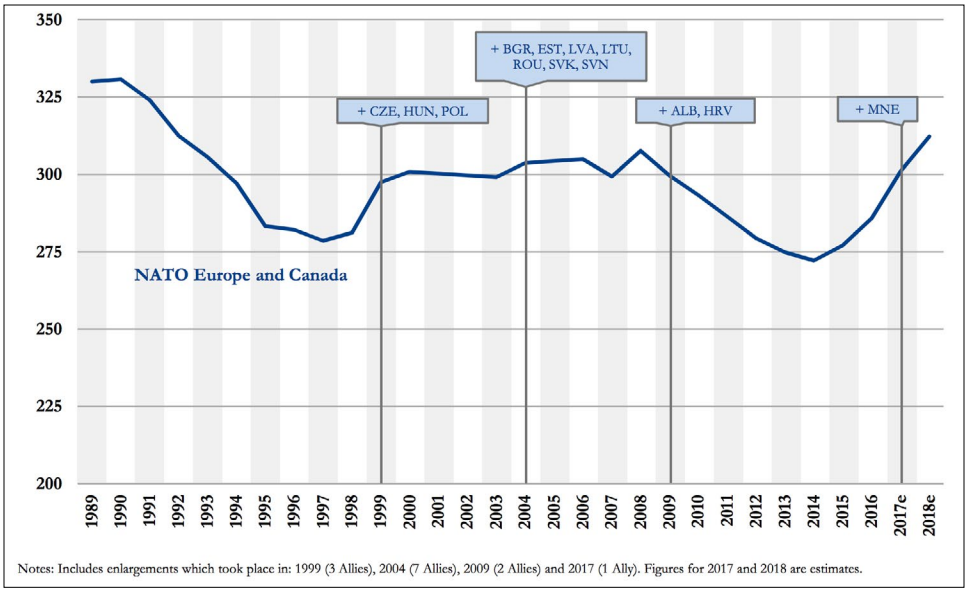
- Congress should reaffirm again the U.S. commitment to the Article 5 defense clause in the NATO Treaty to express bipartisan support for U.S. allies and to bolster deterrence.
- The Senate and House also should pass legislation this year requiring congressional approval to alter any U.S. treaty commitments to NATO or to withdraw the U.S. from the Alliance altogether.[9]
- Congress should continue to fund the "European Deterrence Initiative" to reinforce American military strength in Europe, deter Russian aggression and help with building NATO allies' capability.

## Restoring European Defense Strength

The issue of burden sharing is as old as the Alliance itself. In its current form the debate springs from the Wales Summit in 2014 when for the first time NATO leaders agreed to move toward the goal of 2 percent of their national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for defense spending by 2024, in the Defense Investment Pledge.[10] President Trump is right to demand progress in accordance with the "Wales Pledge"—a critical part of NATO's initial reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine in the first half of 2014.[11] After many years of steady decline in defense spending especially among European allies, in the first four years after Wales, 2014-2018, there has been significant progress: five allies now meet the 2 percent mark; all allies have made real increases in spending; and cumulative increases outside the U.S. since 2014 total $87 billion.[12] President Trump should acknowledge this progress while continuing to press allies to do more. This progress, however, has been

overshadowed by President Trump's fixation on 2 percent as the sole measure of NATO's value and his refusal to understand how NATO funding works.[13] His public threats against allies who have not reached the mark is counter-productive, making it harder for allied leaders seen by their publics as complying with his demands.[14] As a result, the 2 percent pledge designed to unite the allies around a common goal has evolved into a most divisive issue and diverts attention from equally important measures.

**Figure 1: NATO Europe and Canada total defense expenditure (in 2010 $US billions).**




Source: "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2011-2018)", NATO, July 2018.

Allies must contribute equitably to the Alliance and 2 percent of GDP is a fair premium for the 'whole life insurance' benefit of Article 5's collective defense commitment.[15] Allies must deliver. Germany especially, the largest European ally and the strongest economy, must do much more, or its leadership position within the Alliance will be jeopardized. But 2 percent was never designed to be the sole measure of value. The Wales Pledge itself is broader, committing allies to 20 percent of defense spending for major new equipment and research and development of new capabilities, and highlighting the importance of output measures as well. More than half of allies have made the 20 percent target.[16]

While retaining the goal of 2 percent GDP for defense spending, it is time for NATO, led by the United States, to broaden the framework by which

it measures defense contributions. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg rightly notes that allies provide "cash, capabilities and contributions" that strengthen NATO.[17] Focusing on inputs alone is deceptive. European NATO members together spend more than three times as much on defense as Russia and slightly more than China.[18] Total military spending by all twenty-nine NATO members was $900 billion in 2017, accounting for 52 percent of world defense spending.[19] Yet inefficiencies diminish the impact of these investments and significant capability gaps persist, so merely spending more is not sufficient.

We recommend three possible approaches. First, NATO should be more transparent. Alongside measuring defense spending as an input, the Alliance should make public more of its assessments of the capabilities that defense budgets acquire, that is, *how* the inputs are spent, or measures of output. Some will argue that this approach will reveal information that is politically sensitive for some allies, but the overall benefit for the Alliance is clear.[20] NATO already publishes some data on outputs, which should receive more attention.[21] For example, money spent on current operations, replenishing stocks, research and development on and acquiring new equipment to fill identified capabilities gaps—such as precision munitions, modern air and missile defenses and heavy airlift—is more important than pensions for retired officers.[22] Here the data are available and should be carefully assessed annually and publicly by defense ministers. Focusing more on outputs also can draw attention to the potential for increased specialization, especially for smaller allies.

Second, the Alliance should ensure it is accounting fully for national spending that contributes to NATO's collective defense and security, whether that spending is in defense ministries or other parts of national budgets.[23] NATO today faces a diverse range of threats that cannot be addressed by conventional defense capabilities alone. Spending on national cyber security and intelligence, for example, could well be included as part of national defense expenditures for NATO purposes,[24] especially in this time when hybrid threats are so prominent as discussed later in this report. Investment in dual-use transportation infrastructure that facilitates movement of NATO forces across Europe is an important contribution, as NATO now relies heavily on rapid reinforcement to complement in-place

forces.[25] Some also suggest that development assistance funding that contributes to stabilizing areas on NATO's periphery in the Middle East and North Africa also contributes to NATO's security.[26] While we do not suggest including such spending under NATO's internal definition of defense expenditure, there is value in assessing it alongside defense expenditure in public discussions on the topic. Such broader measures should supplement, not replace or obscure, the Wales Pledge. We support taking a broad and holistic approach to measuring what the Alliance needs and how each ally contributes, in addition to the 2 percent pledge.

Third, the United States should support, rather than criticize, European Union initiatives to promote European defense capabilities with legal, institutional and financial incentives.[27] The EU has a long way to go. After Brexit, 80 percent of NATO's defense spending will come from allies outside the EU and the EU's military capability will be greatly diminished, making NATO even more important.[28] It is in the United States' interest to support European defense initiatives—for example the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defense Fund (EDF) and military mobility improvements—so long as these contribute to NATO as well.[29] As agreed in the original Brussels and Berlin agreements of the late 1990s, the standard should remain that EU initiatives must be complementary to NATO, not competitive.[30] The measure is straightforward: NATO assesses regularly what capabilities it needs, and the EU should do likewise. This should lead to developing and delivering those mutually reinforcing capabilities, which would be available to both organizations. Avoiding duplication is the key. For example, NATO and the EU both require airlift and intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance capabilities; so, if a European ally acquires these with EU assistance they should be available for both NATO and EU operations based on a national decision. On the other hand, NATO already has world-class standing headquarters structures and communications capabilities, which can be made available to the EU so the Union need not invest in these. EU initiatives will be even more important in the future as the expense of modern systems continues to increase, demanding greater efficiency, sharing and inevitably specialization.[31] As European defense spending increases, European allies should seek "strategic responsibility" but not aim for stand-alone "strategic autonomy" for collective defense.[32] It is important to sustain the shared understanding

that for the collective defense of the continent—especially against Russian aggression—the United States must be heavily engaged, and, as all allies agree, that means NATO.

In summary, as Lord Robertson, former NATO Secretary General, states "NATO needs the military capability to go far, go fast, hit hard and stay long." These are the essence of restoring European defense strength.

## Upholding NATO's Democratic Values

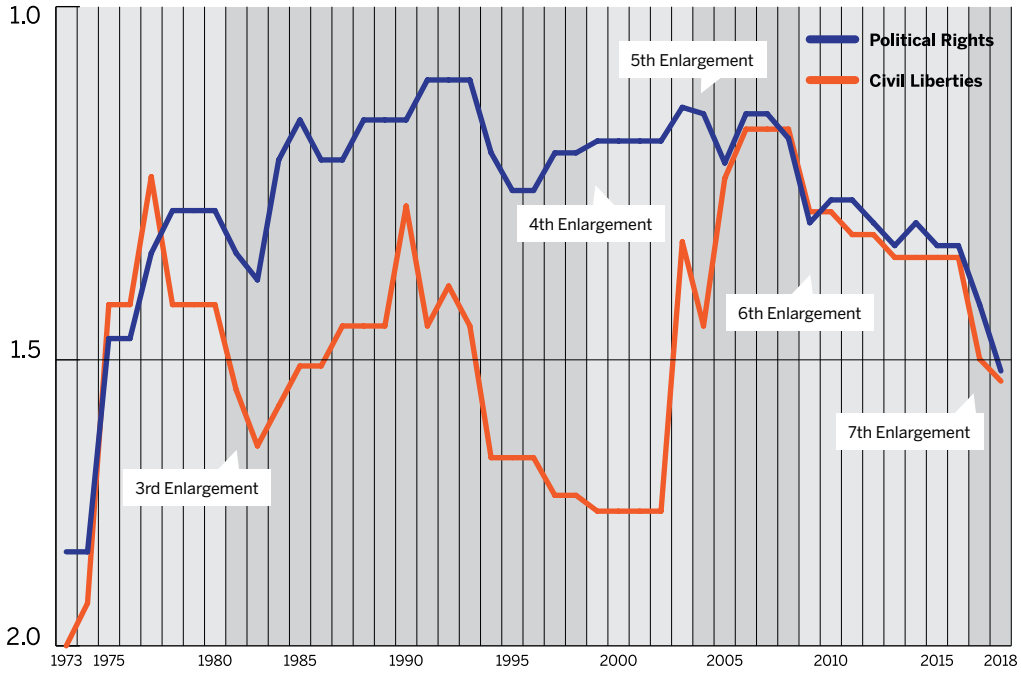
> "The Parties to this Treaty.... are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law."
>
> — Washington Treaty

From the outset in 1949, NATO formed around common values: **democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law**.[33] These values are a significant part of the glue that has held the Alliance together for seventy years, through decades of the Cold War, at the end of the Cold War in 1989-1991 and during the decades that followed. Yet today, as the Alliance again faces diverse challenges, there is obvious drift from these core values within some member states. The rise of authoritarian tendencies that erode democratic values is not entirely new to the Alliance. NATO has seen military dictatorships in the past.[34] Today, again there is a pattern among several allies that places in question their commitment to the values that underpin the Alliance. Wherever it occurs in member states, the Alliance must confront authoritarian centralization of executive power; suppression of free press, civil society and political opposition; and interference with the judiciary.

NATO needs to take a hard look at itself. Across twenty-five indicators of democracy rated by Freedom House, the downward trend among NATO allies over the past decade is stark.[35] Especially in Central Europe but not exclusively, there are setbacks in the media, the judiciary and the functioning of national democratic institutions. The rate at which democracy is declining in Poland, Hungary and Turkey is particularly alarming. In 2017 and 2018, these three states' scores represented some of the largest one-year declines in political rights and civil liberties of all 195 countries ranked by Freedom House.[36] Poland—with the largest category declines in the forty-year history of the survey—is close to leaving the "consolidated democracy" category.[37]

Hungary is no longer rated a consolidated democracy. Turkey, whose decline in freedom over the last ten years represents the largest of any country in the world, crossed the threshold from "free" to "not free."[38]

**Figure 2: Average of NATO members' Political Rights and Civil Liberties ratings according to Freedom House, 1973-2018. (1 = most free.)**




While less severe today, nationalist populism movements in other allies represent a broader, more diffuse threat to NATO and can amplify other challenges facing the Alliance. The United States is not immune, with its Freedom House rating declining in 2018 due to "Russian interference in the 2016 election, violations of basic ethical standards by the new administration and a reduction in government transparency."[39] While this slippage in the U.S. is relatively recent and still minor in scale, it nonetheless diminishes America's standing as a standard-bearer for democracy and further erodes its leadership position within the Alliance. Further, anti-democratic policies among allies open vulnerabilities for interference by competitors outside the Alliance, especially Russia that seeks to divide NATO and the EU politically using hybrid tactics.[40]

The question for allies is what must the role of the Alliance be in reinforcing its core values when they are under assault from within. NATO is both a political and a military alliance. It is not enough to be bound together by a commitment only to Article 5 collective defense. The values in the

Treaty and the adherence of NATO allies to those values is fundamental for Alliance cohesion. That shared commitment to values in turn makes credible the Article 5 commitment. The Washington Treaty is binding for both its political and military commitments.[41] Allies cannot ignore the failure to abide by political commitments including values and expect military commitments to be unaffected. In short, NATO allies should not expect that they could violate democratic values without consequences, while resting assured that NATO cohesion is intact and other commitments in the Treaty will be upheld. The Treaty is not a menu of options from which allies can select some obligations while ignoring others.

The NATO Treaty has no provision for policing members that drift from common political values, unlike the European Union Treaty's Chapter 7 that has been invoked recently toward several EU member states with some success.[42] While it would be impossible to achieve consensus to impose penalties on wayward allies, given that the ally in question could veto any penalties, a range of escalating political initiatives on the part of the Secretary General and a coalition of the other allies could assert pressure. As a start, the Secretary General should express concern in his bilateral meetings with the anti-democratic governments, with the support of key allies and in partnership with the European Union. To increase awareness within the Alliance and among the public, foreign ministers could review annually indicators of democracy for all twenty-nine allies, perhaps prepared by an informal high-level group of experts drawing on Freedom House data. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly and coalitions of allies can amplify the message.[43] To increase pressure, NATO could suspend hosting of visits, official meetings and even military exercises with these nations. In severe cases, NATO infrastructure spending and even access to military schools and information sharing could be affected. An indirect way to express concern among allies is to increase the prominence of core democratic values when considering NATO enlargement decisions in the future.[44] None of these steps is without political cost and risk, even if calibrated carefully. But the costs and risks of the gradual erosion of Alliance cohesion as member states drift from the founding values are even greater. NATO cannot expect to remain coherent and relevant and able to address the full range of challenges it faces, if it ignores the internal drift from democracy within some member states. This drift is a fundamental issue for the Alliance.[45]

## Streamlining NATO Decision-Making

Finally, the challenges facing NATO today demand more flexibility in executive decision-making. As a core principle in preserving NATO cohesion, consensus decision-making must remain the basis for major NATO actions.[46] The Treaty requirements for consensus on collective defense decisions (Article 5) and enlargement decisions (Article 10) remain sensible. Major policy decisions like the Defense Investment Pledge or the creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force rapid reaction capabilities require consensus. But today with NATO enlarged to twenty-nine members and facing increasingly diverse and complex challenges, it is time to consider how other, more routine, administrative decisions can be taken more efficiently. But this should be a management function, not derogation from the consensus principle.


Jens Stoltenberg chairing his first meeting of the North Atlantic Council as NATO Secretary General, October 1, 2014. (NATO Photo)

We recommend strengthening the Secretary General's role as the chief executive of the Alliance with broader authority to carry out routine business without seeking consensus among the twenty-nine members. For example, the Secretary General should consult allies on matters such as agendas and timings of Ministerial Council meetings, but not be required to seek consensus agreement. Today the agenda and even the dates of a Foreign Minister meeting

or a NATO-Russia Council meeting can consume hours of formal Council time seeking consensus at the ambassadorial level, consuming headquarters' bandwidth and crowding out more substantive and urgent topics, including many outlined in this paper. Further, the Secretary General's flexibility on international staff personnel changes and NATO budget matters should be increased. Today, for example, the Secretary General is severely constrained from adapting the Alliance to emerging challenges by making meaningful shifts in personnel and budgetary resources.[47] While nations will continue to want a critical role in all these decisions, criteria should be developed that will provide for more flexibility while ensuring that all allies gain a fair share of opportunities and allocation of resources.

A related problem is the tendency of some allies to bring into the Alliance bilateral issues that impede progress on collective issues of the Alliance. As an example, an ally might hold up agreement on the entire NATO military exercise program because of an unrelated bilateral dispute with a NATO partner who wishes to participate in an exercise.[48] This practice erodes Alliance cohesion and should not be permitted. After appropriate consultation, we recommend the Secretary General should have the authority to exclude such external issues from consideration in the Alliance, even if it means moving forward without full consensus.

Speeding up decision-making in a crisis also deserves attention, especially considering hybrid warfare scenarios that are designed to be ambiguous, complicate attribution and delay decisions. While preserving political control for actual employment of forces, the Alliance should authorize the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe (SACEUR) to alert, prepare and stage forces based on intelligence indicators and while consulting NATO civilian authorities. Such delegated authorities are required, because the Alliance today relies on rapid reinforcement of modest forces based forward, and can contribute to deterrence and be overseen by political authorities.[49]

# Challenges from Beyond NATO's Borders

## Containing Putin's Russia


Pro-Russian rebels ride on a tank flying Russia's flag, on a road east of Donetsk, Ukraine, Monday, July 21, 2014. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

Geography still matters. Russia—NATO's largest, most militarily capable neighbor—remains NATO's principal external challenge. Russia under President Putin ignores international commitments; violates Ukrainian, Georgian and Moldovan sovereignty; conducts provocative exercises and maneuvers along NATO's borders; expands military activity in the Arctic and North Atlantic; intervenes in parts of the Middle East against Western interests; and interferes in democratic processes within members of the Alliance, aspiring members and partners.[50] President Putin's objectives seem clear: secure his leadership position within Russia and prevent regime change; undermine the international rules-based order in favor of a Europe re-divided into spheres of influence; assert increasing influence on the Russian periphery, especially in Ukraine and Georgia, to prevent the success of democratic, pro-European governments whose example could undermine his own kleptocratic system; seize every opportunity to erode the cohesion of NATO and the EU; and widen divisions within individual member states.[51]

NATO should continue to rely on a two-track approach to counter and contain President Putin's Russia: deterrence and dialogue.[52] Deterrence must cover a spectrum of threats against NATO from nuclear, to conventional, to hybrid warfare. NATO is most familiar with and most capable in the nuclear and conventional realms. In these realms the Alliance has taken prudent steps since 2014 to bolster deterrence, especially with the forward deployment of ground forces to allies on the eastern flank in the Baltics and Poland, enhancements to rapid response forces, revisions to the command structure and a more robust exercise program.[53] These efforts must be sustained. NATO's current rotational troop deployments in the Baltics and Poland should be sustained indefinitely without gaps while adding appropriate enabling capabilities.[54] Priorities for the future include increasing readiness of reinforcing conventional forces; filling capability gaps in high-end conventional enablers such as precision strike, intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance and air-missile defense; and ensuring protocols are in place to access both national strategic nuclear and offensive cyber capabilities.[55] Most recently the NATO Readiness Initiative aims to provide 30 ready battle groups, air squadrons and naval combatants in 30 days; now this policy must be implemented.[56] In the Baltics, deterrence can be bolstered by focusing on the fielding of portable anti-armor and anti-air systems, along with training specialists qualified in directing precision air support. The essence of NATO deterrence of Russia remains the United States' unquestioned commitment to Article 5, up to and including extended nuclear deterrence.[57] This reality underlines the importance of stronger American presidential leadership highlighted at the outset of this report.

(NATO)

Deterrence of hybrid, or sub-conventional, attack demands urgent attention. NATO is vulnerable to means short of Article 5's "armed attack" including by cyber attacks, intimidation by threatening energy cut-offs, political subversion by covert agents and funding, disinformation campaigns and election interference.[58] Russia has already attacked NATO members in this realm. Examples include the 2007 cyber attack on Estonia, and interference in 2016 elections in France, the United States and the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum.[59] NATO allies must invest in building national resilience—the ability to resist such measures and to respond effectively if an attack occurs. The idea of resilience is not new: Article 3 of the Treaty commits allies to "…develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."[60] Today this mandate must extend below the classic Article 5 threshold where Russia is most likely to attack.

Deterrence of hybrid attack, however, is vastly more complex than traditional deterrence. Deterrence can be achieved by denying an attacker's ability to attain objectives and by increasing the risk of unacceptable punishment for an attack.[61] Hybrid tactics challenge both forms of deterrence. National capabilities required to deny hybrid objectives extend well beyond traditional defense and are dispersed among other elements of the government at multiple levels and even the private sector, complicating integration and coordination. Cybersecurity and election security illustrate this point. Further, while the first responsibility for resilience lies with states, both NATO and the EU have a responsibility to back up member states, yet lines of authority between these multilateral institutions and member states may not be clear, common standards are not established and sharing classified information remains a persistent challenge.[62] Deterring by promising punishment requires clarity on the origin of the attack. Hybrid attacks, however, are designed to be ambiguous, complicate attribution and shield the attacker from punishment. As we have seen in Ukraine, ambiguity and difficulty of attribution stressed Alliance decision-making and risked paralysis while Russia established facts on the ground that are hard to reverse. Finally, deterring hybrid attacks is connected to the drift from NATO's core values discussed in this report. Moving away from common democratic values opens vulnerabilities for Russian attacks that aim to erode the cohesion of the Alliance by exploiting political divisions within and among allies.[63]

As a start, NATO should define standards for national resilience and clarify shared responsibilities for deterring hybrid attacks.[64] The Alliance should be a leader in the global effort to adapt traditional deterrence principles to the cyber realm. Exercises that focus on hybrid attacks, including at the level of ministers, can illustrate the deterrence challenge and lead to refined policies. NATO could bring together ministers of defense, ministers of interior and national intelligence officials to increase the value of such exercises. NATO and the EU should coordinate common standards in member states, with priority on cybersecurity, election security and countering disinformation. A priority should be placed on publicly disclosing the nature and source of hybrid attacks. Russia must be held to account, not allowed to deny, obfuscate and hide in the shadows. In the longer term, diversifying energy sources and fully assimilating Russian-speaking minority populations should be addressed as vulnerabilities that Russia could exploit.[65]

Allies must continue bolstering deterrence by ensuring consequences for Russian actions. Recent examples include sustaining U.S.-Canadian-EU economic sanctions five years after Russian aggression in Ukraine, the Netherlands' public commitment to holding Russia accountable for its role in the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014 and the responses after the Novichok chemical agent attacks in the U.K. [66] Going forward, the U.S. and the EU together must never recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and reaffirm economic sanctions will stay on Moscow for as long as it occupies Ukrainian territory. These measures, however, have not changed Russian behavior. Even less impressive are the reactions to Russian interference in elections and recent aggression in the Black Sea and denial of Ukrainian access to the Sea of Azov.[67]

While confronting Russian aggression and bolstering deterrence, NATO must remain open to dialogue with Russia when it is in the West's interest. Russia is a major European power that must be taken into account.[68] First, dialogue is fundamental to deterrence, as Russia must clearly understand NATO's intent and the consequences of aggression. Second, even in a period of increased tensions, there are topics for dialogue that serve common interests. The NATO-Russia Council should continue to meet regularly to address risk reduction measures, provide transparency on military exercises and exchange views on

priority political issues, including the conflict in Ukraine. Allies should press the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to update the Vienna Document to improve predictability and transparency of conventional forces in the region.[69] Russia should return an ambassador to NATO and NATO should re-open military-military contacts below the four-star level. It is not in NATO's interest that the Russian military liaison cell at Allied Command Operations' SHAPE remains closed. Third, balancing deterrence and dialogue is essential to sustaining political cohesion among allies some of whom have differing perspectives on the nature of the Russian threat and the best responses to it.[70] NATO should not return to "business as usual" with Russia as before 2014, but restricting dialogue is not an effective form of punishment. In periods of increased tension, the risk of accident and unintended consequences increases—dialogue can mitigate some of that risk. In short, sustaining and even expanding dialogue with Russia is in NATO's interest.

Arms control remains an important goal of real dialogue with Russia. Even during the height of the Cold War, U.S.-Russian agreements, while imperfect, reduced weapons stockpiles, improved stability and were the basis of a degree of trust.[71] The Russian violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is a serious setback and threatens the "fabric" of arms control agreements that have contributed to security for decades.[72] First, the United States should not abrogate the Treaty, as this step diverts attention from the Russian violation and is not required by the United States to counter the Russian deployment. Even now that the U.S. has begun the six-month process of withdrawing, every effort must be made to preserve the Treaty using diplomacy to hold Russia accountable and bring it back into compliance. The U.S. should continue to explore every diplomatic angle, while continuously consulting allies at every step. For example, the parties should explore more fully reciprocal on-site inspections for Russia at the NATO ballistic missile defense sites and for the U.S. at Russian cruise missile sites.[73] Such negotiations would not be simple or quick, but are worth the effort considering the severe impact of losing the INF Treaty. Another potential diplomatic approach is to begin discussions to broaden the Treaty to include China, which has INF systems of concern to both Russia and the U.S. Especially with the renewal of the New START Treaty in 2021, now is the time to use every tool to preserve and even extend arms control agreements. NATO should stand united in support of American diplomacy to sustain arms control with Russia by exploring

new measures to prevent a renewed arms race that would be destabilizing and expensive. The alternative is that in two years there may be no arms control treaties with Russia for the first time in over 50 years.

Russia is unlikely to change in the near- to mid-term. President Putin will be in power at least until 2024. His successor will face the same declining power indicators—economic, social-political, demographic and health—likely requiring centralized power in the Kremlin, rallying nationalism against NATO as an enemy and seeking to control the periphery, especially neighboring states that move toward democracy and the West.[74] For these reasons, NATO must take a long view toward Russia, containing President Putin, investing in the twin pillars of deterrence and dialogue, while contending with multiple other challenges.

## Ending the Afghan War

The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, December 2018. (NATO Photo)

NATO has led the international military coalition in Afghanistan beginning in 2003, making it the Alliance's largest and longest combat operation.[75] Today the roughly 17,000 coalition troops from thirty-nine nations demonstrate NATO's adaptability, cohesion and staying power.[76] But it is time to reconsider this mission. The fight against the Taliban is a military stalemate. Afghans are the second largest refugee population in the world.[77] Afghan civilian and security forces casualties are at all-time highs.[78] Coalition bombing is also at a peak.[79] The war in Afghanistan may

be approaching a political turning point as the Afghan government, the U.S. and others engage the Taliban to end the conflict.[80]

The Trump administration is right to be engaging the Taliban directly to explore a political process to end the war. NATO should prioritize this political effort, subordinating the military campaign to a supporting role. Only a political settlement among Afghans—including the elected Afghan government and the Taliban—will provide a durable, sustainable outcome that secures NATO's mission to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a terrorist safe haven.[81] The outline of a compromise may be within reach: the Taliban breaks ties with al-Qa'ida, ends the insurgency and attains a share of political power; an inclusive, elected government governs under the framework of the Constitution; neighboring states benefit from a stable Afghanistan and agree not to interfere; and the NATO-led coalition achieves its original mission of denying safe haven to al-Qa'ida. The diplomatic process will be difficult and likely prolonged. The U.S. should proceed slowly and carefully, conditioning troop withdrawals on the Taliban's meeting agreed security and political benchmarks, beginning with a ceasefire and including engaging with the Afghan government. Verification and enforcement of a deal will be major challenges. NATO's main role will be to sustain its support for the Afghan security forces, denying Taliban efforts to gain influence at the bargaining table by military means. Especially during this shift to diplomacy, any changes in coalition force posture must be linked to the talks and made in concert with the Alliance as a whole. NATO allies should adhere to the "in together, out together" principle, avoiding unilateral national withdrawals that would undermine the diplomatic effort, the confidence of Afghan partners and Alliance cohesion.[82] Even after a settlement, Afghanistan will require financial support indefinitely, or face state collapse. NATO allies and the EU should prepare now to lead the international effort to financially sustain the Afghan government and its security forces in the years ahead.[83]

## Refocusing NATO's Partnerships


NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and EU High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, December 2017. (NATO Photo)

NATO's partnership program began with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) in 1991 and Partnership for Peace in 1994, reaching out to the former Warsaw Pact states and Soviet republics to help stabilize their transitions, prepare for possible NATO membership and serve as a substitute for those that would not join, perhaps ever. Thirteen former partners, of course, became NATO members. Today forty-one states are formal NATO partners, ranging geographically from Mauritania in Western Africa to Japan, many with diplomatic representatives at NATO Headquarters.[84] NATO demonstrates democratic values and military standards to its partners while gaining political insight and military support from a diverse array of states. Partners vary politically and in military capability too, with close partners like Sweden, Finland and Australia adding significantly to NATO operations and exercises. The basic premise is sound: if NATO's neighbors are stable, then NATO is more secure.[85] Today, however, NATO's neighborhood is anything but stable. Instability among partner states runs along most of NATO's periphery in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and across North Africa. Along this "arc of instability" weak states struggle with frozen conflicts, terrorists inspire strikes on NATO capitals and migration challenges allies' ability to cope and can be used as an excuse to drift further from NATO's

values. Beyond the value of political consultations, the current partnership program does little to improve the situation.[86]

It is time to recast NATO's partnerships to better serve NATO's interests. In practice, the programs suffer from two inter-related limitations: too few resources and too little focus. NATO invests insufficient resources to promote stability and effect meaningful change even among priority partners. Less than 1 percent of NATO's common funding budget, or about $20 million annually, goes to partner programs. This means that NATO's impact on regional stability is minimal, even in priority partner states like Ukraine, Georgia, Jordan, Iraq and Tunisia.[87] NATO must rely on member states' national contributions, sometimes placed under a NATO flag, while most members run their own assistance programs. NATO's common budget is unlikely to increase. We recommend another approach. NATO should serve as a clearinghouse for security-related national assistance programs among its member states. NATO would convene allies interested in assisting partner states and promote the sharing of information of national assistance programs. NATO's role would be to promote transparency and improve effectiveness by exposing gaps, seams and redundancies. Such an effort would be completely voluntary for allies and some may prefer not to participate or to share only partial information on their programs. Nonetheless, any gains in effectiveness among allies would likely be more impactful than the current minute resources from NATO itself.


Migrants sit in a rubber dinghy after Proactiva Open Arms, a Spanish NGO, spotted and rescued them in the Central Mediterranean Sea at 45 miles (72 kilometers) from Al Khums, Libya, December 21, 2018. (AP Photo/Olmo Calvo)

Further, NATO should shift the focus of its partnership efforts from individual states to regional international organizations. The European Union is the most natural partner for NATO, sharing core values, twenty-two member states and geographic focus. The EU is NATO's most critical strategic partner.[88] While much has been accomplished with the EU, there is much greater potential for enhancing NATO's mission by coordinating further with the EU than by engaging any other combination of the current forty partner states.[89] Prime topics include developing complementary defense capabilities while avoiding duplication, countering hybrid tactics especially focusing on cybersecurity and conducting joint exercises to improve coordination. NATO should do much more to support ongoing EU operations to contend with migration from Africa and the Middle East—the critical challenge in Europe that destabilizes governments, inflames populism and erodes the solidarity of the EU. For example, NATO could support the EU with high-end surveillance aircraft to provide early warning of migration flows in North Africa and the Sahel. Much more can be done to share and fuse information between the two institutions to improve crisis awareness and response times. NATO and the EU should collaborate on assistance to enhance stability along Europe's periphery.

NATO's comparative advantage is providing multinational institutions a model for security cooperation: values, structures and procedures. Beyond the EU, NATO could seek partnerships with the African Union, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, all of which could benefit from NATO's experience in building a durable political institution and framework for regional military cooperation. Such institutional partnerships would not have to replace NATO's current state partnerships, but over time could significantly increase the impact NATO has beyond its borders.

## Maintaining an Open Door to Future Members

**Article 10 of the Washington Treaty** is clear: any European state may aspire to NATO membership. Given the range of strategic challenges facing the Alliance outlined in this report, however, the priority should be on consolidating Alliance cohesion after the historic enlargement of the past two decades, rather than taking on new members in the short term. The addition of thirteen members since the end of the Cold War was right on strategic grounds. The desire for membership in NATO led many European countries to reform their political systems, resolve differences with neighbors and meet other conditions for membership that advance the NATO Treaty's aims of peace, security and shared values.[90] North Macedonia, just beginning the formal accession process to become NATO's thirtieth member, is the most recent example. The door to membership must remain open. The Treaty specifies that aspirants must "further the principles" of the treaty and "contribute to the security" of the Alliance.[91] Especially in the current security environment, these are high standards. In purely military terms, security on NATO's flanks may be improved with new allies in the Nordic region and in the Western Balkans—but NATO's most significant challenge is not flank security. For Georgia and Ukraine in particular, the door is open, there is a path, but this may be a long journey. NATO must remain firm with its position: no one outside the Alliance has a vote or veto on enlargement.[92] In the longer run, NATO may add new members, but the "unanimous agreement" among current allies required by the Treaty does not exist today, so pressing enlargement now would only erode NATO's internal cohesion—cohesion required to contend with all the other challenges at hand.

> "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty."
>
> — Article 10, Washington Treaty

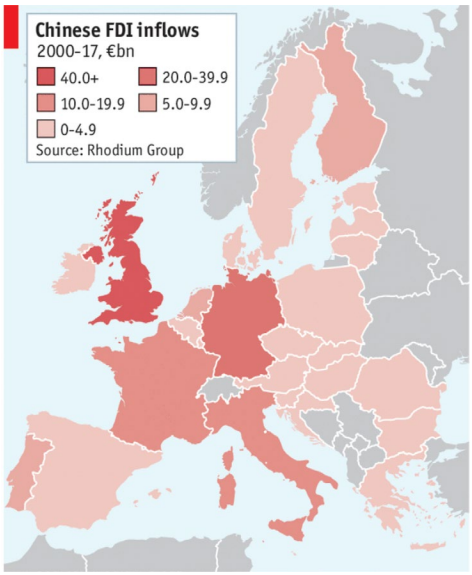
# Challenges on the Horizon

## Winning the Technology Battle in the Digital Age

Mid-term developments in digital technologies threaten to undermine NATO's current military and intelligence advantages. The U.S. and China are in direct competition to develop new technologies—especially artificial intelligence (AI), cyber, robotics, quantum computing and biotechnology—that may well revolutionize warfare.[93] The combination of these technologies may rival earlier advances like satellite-based navigation and even nuclear weapons.[94] Quantum computing, for example, will be a game-changer for the security of intelligence, cyber networks and communications, including systems on which the NATO command structure and nuclear command and control depend.[95] Civilian and military communications that rely on 5G mobile phone networks will face new vulnerabilities.[96] While NATO relies on individual allies to incorporate such technologies in their national defense capabilities, now is the time to assess how these will impact NATO's ability to fight together in the future.[97] Even if some NATO allies master these technologies, not all allies will do so at the same pace, eroding decades of work to build interoperability.[98] The Alliance may soon face an even greater separation between its most capable allies and the others, a divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Now is the time to adapt the NATO Defense Planning Process to account for these new technologies. The current four-year process—that begins with agreed political guidance, considers scenarios and results in capability targets for each ally[99]—is insufficiently agile to contend with rapid and fundamental technological change. NATO's Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia, should lead now an in-depth assessment of the potential impact of these changes on NATO's war-fighting capabilities. Allies should increase spending to acquire these emerging technologies lest China and Russia gain a critical advantage in the next decade. As a subset of overall defense spending, NATO should track national investments in these areas. The most technologically capable allies also have a responsibility to consider these impacts. The U.S. should work alongside NATO allies to integrate with them these new technologies.

## Competing with China




Source: "Chinese investment in Europe is increasing," *The Economist*, October 18, 2018. www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/10/10/chinese-investment-in-europe-is-increasing

China will not likely pose a military threat to Europe in the foreseeable future, but its inexorable economic growth as well as its efforts to undermine the international rules-based order present other challenges that NATO should begin to assess. China, of course, is the main competitor of the U.S. in developing the emerging defense technologies. More immediate is the impact of Chinese commercial investment in European transportation and communications infrastructure.[100] China's annual foreign direct investment in Europe grew to $42 billion in 2017, a huge increase from $840 million invested in 2008.[101] Total Chinese investments in Europe amount to $318 billion, 45 percent more than Chinese investment in the U.S. between 2008 and 2017. It is clear that one of the primary destinations of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the European market of over 500 million people and over 25 percent of global GDP.[102] China focuses particularly on infrastructure in Eastern Europe that can solidify links between Europe and BRI projects further east.[103] China also invests in the opening of Arctic Sea channels to the west.[104]

Chinese commercial in-roads today can lead to political influence, as seen already in some EU decisions.[105] For example, in June 2017, Greece vetoed an EU statement at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) regarding China's human rights violations, marking the first time the EU had failed to make a joint statement at the UNHRC.[106] In March 2017, Hungary derailed EU consensus by refusing to sign a joint letter denouncing the reported torture of detained lawyers in China.[107] Such political influence can widen divisions among European allies, eroding NATO's and the EU's political cohesion. NATO should anticipate that increased Chinese military presence will eventually follow commercial and political inroads.

To begin to contend with this looming challenge, NATO should expand and deepen its military and political cooperation with its partners and America's allies in East Asia. Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand—already NATO partners—understand China and its strategies and can help the Alliance assess this challenge. The U.S. and Canada should work much more closely with European allies to develop common strategies toward China—political, economic and security—underlining the importance of **the trans-Atlantic alliance** as a strategic advantage that China cannot match. Within NATO, more attention should be paid to China's economic development funding that can lead to political influence, both among allies and on NATO's periphery. China should be a priority topic for NATO-EU consultations. More specifically, NATO should welcome recent EU initiatives to implement measures to control foreign investment, similar to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS). [108]

> "The Parties will... encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them."
>
> – Article 2, Washington Treaty

Most important, on the scale of grand strategy, the rising challenge from China underlines the enduring importance of the NATO alliance. The defining geo-strategic contest of the 21st century will be between the U.S. and China, which will play out in political, economic and perhaps military dimensions. Both Europe and America are best postured for this competition inside a strong, cohesive NATO that balances the security burden equitably and enables the U.S. increasingly to focus on China. This looming strategic reality amplifies the recommendations of this report. NATO, the trans-Atlantic bond, will become even more important as China's power grows. The goal is to live and work with China where possible but to compete to maintain the primacy of the free, democratic countries in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

## Meeting the Challenges

Against this imposing set of issues, NATO should adapt a "back to basics" approach. First, back to basics means focusing on the two fundamentals highlighted throughout this report: American leadership and Alliance cohesion. As stated at the report's outset, the single greatest challenge today is the need to renew U.S. presidential leadership. But NATO cannot sit in a holding pattern, simply waiting for the next American president. The stage must be set now for a time when the U.S. not only continues to lead from the front with its actions, but also restores trust that has eroded under President Trump. Further, much can be done to strengthen NATO, including alliance cohesion, in the next two years under the strong leadership of Secretary General Stoltenberg and other NATO civilian and military leaders. When the time is right, with renewed American leadership, the challenges outlined here should be addressed in a revision of the Strategic Concept—after the North Atlantic Treaty—the fundamental policy document guiding the Alliance. The current document dates to 2010 and was drafted in a much different European and global security environment.[109] Alliance cohesion remains a key element and a revised Concept will help strengthen cohesion. Cohesion enables NATO's major decisions requiring consensus: notable are invoking Article 5, increasing military capabilities and deployments, adding new members and adapting major policies. Alliance cohesion is the product of shared values and unquestioned commitment to Article 5. These are the essence of NATO and must be guarded vigilantly. In short, with renewed American leadership and Alliance cohesion, NATO certainly can adapt, remain relevant and continue as a pillar of international security as it enters its eighth decade.

Second, it is important to remember that today is not the first time in NATO's long history that it faces such fundamental challenges. The Alliance should draw strength from its past. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union two years later, forty-five years of Cold War came to an end. At this strategic inflection point NATO confronted the existential question of what its purpose should be. Under the leadership of U.S. President George H. W. Bush, U.K. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and French President François Mitterrand, the Alliance adopted the vision

of a Europe **"whole, free and at peace."**[110] NATO later welcomed to its ranks Central and Eastern European states newly free to choose their own path, while deepening its partnership with Russia under the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and 2002 Rome Declaration. As a result, one hundred million Europeans became NATO citizens as thirteen new member states joined the Alliance.[111] The EU, too, added members on a path parallel to NATO's. NATO also welcomed over forty states as partners, offering political consultations and military standards to states outside the Alliance.[112] On the military front, NATO shifted attention to stability on its periphery, initially to the Balkans, bringing peace to Bosnia and later Kosovo.[113]

> "Let Europe be whole and free. To the founders of the alliance, this aspiration was a distant dream, and now it's the new mission of NATO."
>
> — **President George H.W. Bush**
> Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, May 31, 1989

Then after the al-Qa'ida attacks on the United States on 9/11, NATO took the historic decision to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the following day declaring that the attack on America was considered an attack on all allies. Within twenty-four hours of the attacks, the Alliance—formed more than fifty years earlier to bring the United States to defend Europe against an attack by the Soviet Union—brought European allies to help defend the United States against an attack by a non-state terrorist group.[114] In the aftermath of 9/11 and U.S. intervention against al-Qai'da and its Taliban enablers in Afghanistan, NATO later reinforced the United States in the effort to forestall security threats from that country and to try creating a better security and political future. NATO remains together there today, seventeen years later, with allies and partners who lost over 1,000 soldiers alongside 2,350 Americans.[115] There is no clearer evidence of NATO's ability to adapt to changes in the security setting and no clearer evidence of the political durability of an alliance founded on common values and principles.

Beginning in 2014, twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, NATO again saw fundamental shifts in the security setting challenging the NATO alliance. In the first six months of that year, President Putin's Russia seized and illegally annexed Crimea, a part of sovereign Ukraine. This is the first time since the end of World War II that one European state had seized territory of another by force, violating the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Bucharest

Memorandum and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. President Putin had thrown out the rulebook that had governed security in Europe for a generation. Weeks after Crimea, Russian-supported separatists destabilized two provinces in eastern Ukraine, with Russia providing overt military support in an effort to end Ukraine's alignment with the European Union and NATO.[116]

In June 2014, the so-called Islamic State declared a caliphate across northern Syria and Iraq, along Turkey's—and NATO's—southern border. This move worsened the tragic civil war in Syria and sparked Islamic State-inspired terrorist attacks in European cities and a flood of refugees from the war zone into Europe.[117] In 2015 and 2016, migration into Europe from the Middle East and Africa spiked, posing existential challenges to European democracies and the European Union.[118] The security setting had changed dramatically, presenting NATO its second strategic inflection point, comparable only to the end of the Cold War in 1989-1991. NATO weathered earlier crises, including Suez in 1956, theater nuclear force debates in the 1980s, the Balkan fighting in the 1990s and the Iraq War in 2003. None of these, however, rose to the scale and scope of today's challenges.

Today, even as the Alliance continues to come to grips with these recent events to the east and to the south, new challenges emerge, both from within the Alliance and from beyond, leaving allies on both sides of the Atlantic to consider the way forward. As NATO stands today at a new historic inflection point, its leaders should draw strength and confidence from the post-Cold War experience. In the period following 1989-1991, NATO faced fundamental challenges and adapted. NATO has been tested before and emerged reshaped, revitalized and refocused.

Finally, for Americans especially, "back to basics" means remembering why they should value NATO. Americans need to remember that NATO is in America's vital national interest.[119] Recently, President Trump has charged that over the years NATO allies have taken advantage of America and past administrations of both parties have supported NATO because of misplaced generosity, altruism and naiveté.[120] This narrative is false and dangerous. In fact, Americans learned the perils of disengagement from Europe in the years leading up to World War II and, following that terrible conflict, committed to sustained involvement with a strong Europe

as the best way to advance America's own interests. This worked: for the past seventy-plus years, Europe has been at peace, secured by NATO, and both America and Europe have prospered as a result.[121] With stability and predictability underpinned by NATO, individual nations and collective effort—notably what is today the European Union—produced a miracle without precedent. The trans-Atlantic economy is the largest and most integrated in the world, accounting for 46 percent of global GDP, 11 percent of world population, one-third of goods traded, over half of global foreign direct investment and the highest level of cross-border data flows.[122] Europe and America are each other's largest trading partners and each other's largest sources of foreign direct investment.[123] NATO's military power protects and buttresses these economic ties.

Politically, too, America benefits from the Alliance. In Europe and Canada, the United States enjoys more treaty allies than in any other region of the world. The twenty-nine NATO allies, bound together by common democratic values, are a powerful political bloc on the world stage, the place to start when forming political coalitions to address global problems. This political strength begins with the values found in the second sentence of the NATO Treaty: democracy, individual liberty and rule of law.[124] NATO allies are three of five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, six of seven members of the G7 and seven members of the G20. Political cohesion translates into political staying power: consider NATO's continued engagement in the Balkans more than twenty years after the 1995 intervention, or the forty-nation NATO-based coalition in Afghanistan seventeen years after 9/11. NATO allies know one another well, each with a permanent diplomatic mission under one roof at NATO Headquarters in Brussels and with five annual meetings of foreign and defense ministers, a firm foundation for trusting political engagement. Allies do not always agree on political issues, of course, but NATO provides a forum for regular consultations and a starting point to address common problems.

As a military alliance, NATO's most important contribution to American interests is security. Above all, NATO has helped keep the peace in Europe after centuries of division and war. NATO has invested for decades in the ability of its members to operate together—so-called "interoperability"—based on practiced procedures, common standards and NATO's

historically unique integrated military command structure. Many of NATO's partners also share in this interoperability. This military potential means that when America faces security challenges anywhere, it has ready teammates based on NATO, either with the Alliance as a collective whole or with select allies to form a purpose-built military coalition. Further, NATO allies provide America basing and access rights across Europe; bringing U.S. forces a continent closer to trouble spots in the Middle East, Africa and beyond, and providing improved response times and sustainability. Bases like Lakenheath in the U.K., Ramstein in Germany, Aviano in Italy, Rota in Spain, Souda Bay in Greece and İncirlik in Turkey are strategic assets. NATO allies employ tens of thousands of intelligence personnel, extending the reach of the United States' eyes and ears.[125] In short, NATO reinforces America's national military strength with increased scale, diversity and geographic position.

NATO is not perfect. This report addresses the array of significant challenges the Alliance must face. At heart, however, Americans must remember that a Europe "whole, free and at peace" is fundamentally in the U.S. interest and NATO is America's primary bridge across the Atlantic.[126] In fact, most **Americans continue to support NATO** overwhelmingly.[127] America by itself enjoys great human capital, vast resources and favorable geographic position. Together with its allies, both in NATO and in East Asia, America holds an unmatched geo-strategic advantage over any potential competitor, today and for the foreseeable future. America's main strategic competitors, China and Russia, do not compare. Sustaining this strategic advantage by nurturing and investing in alliances, beginning with NATO, is therefore in America's vital national interest. Allies are the ultimate guarantee of American security and prosperity.

> "Three quarters of Americans favor maintaining or increasing the US commitment to NATO, and nearly one in five Americans want to see that commitment increased – the highest level of support ever surveyed."
>
> – Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2018

# Conclusion

This report outlines a daunting array of challenges facing NATO. The scale and scope of today's challenges combine to mark dramatic change—a strategic inflection point—unlike any moment in NATO history except 1989-1991. The end of the Cold War, however, was a time of promise and optimism. In sharp contrast, today the trend lines are negative. NATO faces a crisis, with severe challenges from both within and beyond. The fundamental question now is whether the Alliance can adapt to contend with the dramatic changes in the security environment and remain relevant. The need for action is urgent. Just maintaining the status quo would spell failure. Renewing U.S. presidential leadership is a crucial requirement. U.S. congressional support for protecting and extending NATO as a vital U.S. national interest is key. Allies, too, must step up to provide the resources required, share in Alliance leadership and commitment and sustain Alliance cohesion.

We hope this report serves as food for thought within the Alliance, prompting a focused look at tough issues, including some requiring deep introspection among allies themselves. At the Alliance's seventieth birthday, the NATO allies must individually and collectively be mature and confident enough to look at themselves in the mirror, assess challenges and weaknesses and hold themselves accountable. As the world's premier security institution, NATO proved resilient in the past and continues to provide unmatched value for its members today.

## Endnotes

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37 Nate Schenkkan, *Nations in Transit 2018: Confronting Illiberalism* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2018), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_NationsInTransit_Web_PDF_FINAL_2018_03_16.pdf, p. 3.

38 Abramowitz, *Freedom in the World*, 2018, p. 7 and p. 10. Other allies face challenges as well, including the United States. Albania, for example, continues to be ranked by Freedom House as "partly free," a status it has maintained for over two decades due to a historical legacy of corruption and organized crime. Montenegro – the lowest scoring NATO ally after Turkey according to Freedom House – has been ranked as "partly free" since 2016, a decline after five years of "free" status from 2010 to 2015. Bulgaria and Romania, each facing entrenched political corruption and problems with the discrimination of ethnic minorities, have received worse Freedom House scores than Poland every year since they were admitted to the Alliance in 2004. Latvia received a worse Freedom House score than Hungary each year since 2008 until as recently as 2017. See "Country Reports," Freedom House, accessed January 7, 2018, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018.

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Cambridge, MA 02138

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