



## NATO at 70: From Triumph to Tumult?

*By GMF Experts*

Restoring a measure of predictability to U.S. policy and leadership in NATO is the obvious priority. The United States hundred-year pivot to Europe may be under pressure, but it is not over yet. – *Ian O. Lesser*

Today, the eastern flank is where the alliance is more relevant than ever—challenged directly by a revanchist Russia—and where the security it provides is taken particularly seriously. – *Michal Baranowski*

One could easily depict the current situation only in dire terms, focusing on points of disagreement. Yet this misses the whole picture, including areas of renewed energy. – *Derek Chollet*

France's posture has traditionally aimed to find the right balance between being part of the Western bloc and keeping its independence in foreign and defense policy. – *Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer and Martin Quencez*

With Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, and Montenegro in, and North Macedonia soon joining, NATO has successfully incorporated the northern Mediterranean coast and secured its southeastern flank. – *Gordana Delić*

The United States has proven its commitment to the security of the Black Sea region, and it has supported the newer NATO members in their efforts to focus the attention of the alliance on their needs. – *Alina Inayeh*

The United States must understand that its allies are its greatest asset in the new great-power competition with China and Russia. And European countries—especially Germany—must start to see themselves as co-shaping powers in Europe. – *Ulrich Speck*

Thanks to years of complacency in Washington and Ankara, Turkey's commitment to NATO has become questionable and it will take very strong political will on both sides to reverse the situation. – *Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı*



### A NERVOUS ANNIVERSARY

*Ian O. Lesser, Vice President for Foreign Policy*

By rights, this should not be a contentious anniversary for the North Atlantic Alliance. Allies can look back on a history of success in the core mission of collective defense, having held at bay and finally seen the collapse of a highly capable adversary. The fact that NATO has had only one Article 5 contingency in seven decades—the largely symbolic decision to treat the 9/11 attacks on the United States as an attack on all—is a testimony to NATO’s effectiveness in deterring threats to members’ territory. Successive enlargements have played a key role in the political reintegration of Europe’s east and, in an earlier period, its south. Since the end of the Cold War, critics have tended to cast NATO as an alliance in search of a mission. Today, this rings hollow as a second Cold War gathers pace and nuclear, conventional, and unconventional security challenges loom large. This should be NATO’s moment. Yet it is a period of intense, troubled debate on both sides of the Atlantic.

The first and most obvious reason is the rhetoric emanating from the Trump administration. The demand that European allies pay more for their defense is hardly new. Past administrations have made this point, sometimes in very sharp terms. Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ 2011 speech on this theme is still remembered in Brussels. But President Donald Trump has taken the burden-sharing argument many steps further by questioning the underlying logic of the alliance and encouraging the idea that the U.S. commitment to European security is contingent. Since 1917, the European order has been shaped by the United States role as a security arbiter. The reality that it has its own interest in the stability of Europe and its neighborhood has gotten lost amid recriminations over defense spending.

Few would disagree that European NATO members need to spend more on defense. That is happening, even if the rather arbitrary “best efforts” commitment of countries to spend 2 percent of GDP is unlikely to be met fully anytime soon. Key allies, above all Germany, are far from meeting this goal and the

politics of doing more are becoming more uncertain. Most worryingly, the transatlantic discourse on burden sharing and persistent uncertainty about the U.S. commitment has reached a point where many NATO members will be hard put to spend more on a project pressed by a deeply unpopular administration. And if Europe is going to do more in defense terms, many are convinced this should be done in a European Union frame with Europeans driving strategy and decisions on the use of force. Europe is far from having the cohesion or the capacity for this, but nonetheless strategic autonomy is a fashionable theme in 2019—and not just in Paris. Transatlantic rebalancing of this kind used to imply greater NATO-EU cooperation (which has happened) or a more capable European core within the alliance. Now, European allies are looking to hedge against U.S. disengagement or wrongheaded policies.

Early in the Trump administration, the United States’ NATO allies worried about its commitment to collective defense under Article 5. Reassuring words from senior U.S. officials, together with visible increases in the U.S. security presence in Europe had a calming effect, at least for a time. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s December 2018 address at the German Marshall Fund

of the United States in Brussels was very tough on multilateral institutions, yet NATO came off relatively unscathed. But President Trump’s talk of withdrawal from the alliance and his repeated suggestions

that allies should pay a premium for the basing of U.S. forces in Europe have had a corrosive effect. At a minimum, his rhetoric has encouraged the view that the administration gives little priority to NATO in its strategic calculus. At worst, there is mounting concern that it might make good on its more extreme proposals. However, strong support for the alliance in Congress makes withdrawal a very unlikely prospect. Even significant redeployments from

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Europe would face stiff opposition. It is no accident that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has been invited to address a joint session of Congress as he visits Washington for the alliance anniversary.

The second reason for the state of the debate on NATO is that the alliance has accumulated a host of unresolved questions about its strategy and operations. Almost 20 years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NATO remains engaged in Afghanistan, largely at U.S. behest. Yet, the consensus in Washington around this protracted mission has reached an end, and the United States is now actively looking for an exit. This could be one of the few points of convergence between the preferences of President Trump and those of other NATO members. The prospective end of the NATO presence in Afghanistan will accelerate the return to territorial defense as a priority mission, principally looking east.

At the same time, NATO will need to grapple with the vexing question of a strategy for the south. Here, the challenges are more diverse—from counter-terrorism to maritime security and border control—and diffuse. The good news is that NATO has always had substantial command and force structure around the Mediterranean. But the problem of a southern strategy is more complex across a land, sea, and air space of thousands of kilometers. The politics of NATO's east-south balance are not as straightforward as is sometimes assumed. Beyond the obvious concerns of southern members, many core NATO countries in Western Europe are more concerned about risks emanating from North Africa, the Sahel, and the Levant than about Russia.

Beyond the ongoing task of bolstering NATO's capacity for rapid response and conventional defense vis-à-vis Russia, nuclear strategy is also back on the agenda. The Trump administration's plan to

“ **Even the most committed Atlanticist cannot ignore the steady rise of China as a strategic competitor.**”

withdraw from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty raises long-deferred questions about the role of nuclear weapons in the alliance's strategy and the future of arms control. European NATO members are largely in agreement about Russia's violations of the treaty and the challenge posed by its increasingly provocative nuclear doctrine. But they also fear the consequences of the collapse of the treaty and other arms-control regimes. Strategists on both sides of the Atlantic recall the searing experience of the Euro-missile debate in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And that was at a time of unquestioned transatlantic cohesion on other fronts.

Third, the values side of NATO is under pressure. The Washington Treaty is explicit about the importance of democracy and shared values. This has been a key facet of enlargement and has arguably acquired even greater importance in recent years. To be sure, NATO has had challenges on this front in the past, with authoritarian governments in southern Europe and military regimes in Turkey. But allies have come to expect more on this front, and NATO membership surely played a role in the democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe. Today, in different ways, developments in Turkey, Hungary, and Poland raise questions about democratic cohesion and NATO's future as a values-based alliance. Nationalism, populism, and identity politics are on the rise, and these forces will inevitably complicate alliance relations. In the coming years, it is conceivable that NATO will face calls for sanctions against authoritarian members. Its competitors can be expected to exploit these tensions.

Finally, even the most committed Atlanticist cannot ignore the steady rise of China as a strategic competitor and looming risks in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite deepening friction with Russia, the Euro-Atlantic space is unlikely to remain the center of gravity for global security indefinitely. There will be more consequential animating conflicts elsewhere. These dynamics are already affecting U.S. strategy and force posture, and there is every reason to expect them to accelerate. European interests will be profoundly affected, too. At a minimum, the

alliance will need to think much harder about how to work with partners outside Europe—and how to bring Asian security issues on to the NATO agenda.

The NATO ministerial in Washington will almost certainly lack the theatrics of the 2018 Brussels summit. That is no bad thing. It is an opportunity to stabilize a transatlantic security relationship facing real political and defense challenges. Restoring a measure of predictability to U.S. policy and leadership in NATO is the obvious priority. The United States hundred-year pivot to Europe may be under pressure, but it is not over yet.

### Seventy Years Old, Twenty Years Young

*Michal Baranowski, Director, Warsaw Office*

On April 4, NATO will turn 70 years old—but it is also 20 years young. In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joined it. At the time, the decision to enlarge the alliance was controversial. It would not have happened without the leadership of such historical figures as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who recently visited Warsaw and Prague to celebrate this anniversary. Today, the eastern flank is where the alliance is more relevant than ever—challenged directly by a revanchist Russia—and where the security it provides is taken particularly seriously.

Poland joined the alliance just it was looking for a new post-Cold War rationale—the mantra then was “out of area or out of business.” Instead of focusing on its traditional role of collective defense, NATO moved to crisis-management operations, first in the Balkans and then in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. Even the 2008 war in Georgia did not refocus NATO on the strategic challenge coming from resurgent Russia. It took Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its war in eastern Ukraine to provide the necessary wake-up call.

Since 2014, the alliance has put deterrence back at the center of its strategy, while also maintaining the “360 degrees” approach. NATO summits in Wales, Warsaw, and Brussels provided needed

improvements to the defenses of the eastern flank. While before 2014 there were hardly any NATO troops in the Baltic states and in Central Europe, and even NATO contingency plans were missing, there is now an increasingly robust presence of the alliance in the east. With the Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the Baltic states, and the Armored Brigade Combat Team there are between 4,000 and 5,000 troops rotating through Poland alone at any given time. NATO is also focusing on readiness of its forces with the 4x30 initiative and on the

ability to make its way to potential hot spot in the east with the military mobility initiative. What has not changed yet, even 20 years after enlargement, is that Poland and other countries of the eastern flank still do not host a larger permanent NATO presence. The alliance still depends here on the strategy of deterrence by punishment, rather than moving to a strategy of deterrence by denial.

That said, what worries Poland and other countries in the region is not so much the military, but predominantly the political strength of the alliance. As the former NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said recently in Warsaw, “NATO is militarily strong, but politically weak.” Alliance unity—the holy grail of NATO and the source of its real strength—is undermined on both sides of the Atlantic.

The European members’ shaky commitment to burden sharing exposes them to bipartisan criticism in the United States that they are not taking their defense seriously. But, of course, the situation varies across Europe; countries like Poland and Estonia that see the reality of the Russian threat spend the agreed 2 percent of GDP on defense, while others do not. The biggest problem, in terms of capabilities and political dynamics, is found in Germany. Not only

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is the country not on track to fulfill its commitment of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense by 2024, according to the latest budget proposal it looks that, after a brief increase, defense spending will fall in the next few years.

Another problem is the commitment of some allies to democratic norms. Given that NATO is an alliance built on values, backsliding on democracy, and in some cases even semi-authoritarian tendencies, lead to further questions over the political bond between allies.

On the other side of the Atlantic, President Donald Trump's tweets, his style of addressing allies, and his reported questioning of the United States' role in NATO, undermine U.S. leadership and perceptions of NATO's strength—including, importantly, in the eyes of adversaries like Russia. Even the steady reassurance of the U.S. commitment coming from Congress is not able to erase the growing impression among many Europeans that the United States might not be fully there for them in an hour of need.

Given these political dynamics, some begin to question whether the United States and Europe are not heading toward a strategic decoupling. This idea was recently discussed at a GMF seminar in Washington among analysts of transatlantic relations. The conclusion was that this is not happening yet, but also that the risk should not be dismissed outright. Such a decoupling would undermine security of all the allies, but it would be particularly disastrous for Poland and other countries of the eastern flank. Transatlantic tensions do not lead to a more unified European security policy, as some could conclude from all the rhetoric about a European army or a European aircraft carrier. When looking at the United States, Europeans are increasingly divided, with France aiming for strategic autonomy, Germany for strategic patience, and Poland currently choosing a strong strategic embrace.

On its 70th anniversary, NATO is doing pretty well as a military alliance, but not well enough as a political alliance. The enlargement of 20 years ago was a historical achievement, including more countries

and more peoples in a Europe whole, free, and at peace. With a resurgent Russia (and China), the united West embodied by NATO is needed more than ever before. But the alliance is also more fragile than at any point over the past 70 years. This week's celebrations should serve as a perfect opportunity to reflect on what all of its members can do to renew the purpose and unity of the most powerful alliance in history.

### Still in the U.S. Enlightened Self-Interest

*Derek Chollet, Executive Vice President for Security and Defense Policy*

Forged in the smoldering rubble of the Second World War, NATO demonstrates its value every day—from advancing shared security interests to acting as a force-multiplier for Western democracies. But, on the eve of its 70th anniversary, internal tumult spells worry for the future.

Unlike during the turbulences of the past—such as Cold War disputes over nuclear weapons or post-Cold War broodings over the purpose of the organization—NATO members are now worried about basic assumptions. They watch debates (and read Twitter feeds) in the United States and wonder how committed the country remains to the alliance. Amid this strife, Congress must play a more active role in affirming and bolstering U.S. leadership within NATO.

Taking a step back, one could easily depict the current situation only in dire terms, focusing on points of disagreement. Yet this misses the whole picture, including areas of renewed energy, which can be measured in at least four ways.

First, NATO is increasing its commitment to territorial defense. In 2013, the last U.S. tank left Europe as part of the post-Cold War withdrawal. Yet today, an U.S. armored brigade combat team—comprised of 3,500 personnel and 87 tanks—is deployed to Poland. Non-U.S. allies and partners are also doubling down on their own security, leading the way with contributions to NATO's multinational

initiatives such as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and the Enhanced Forward Presence. Finally, members are beginning to meet their spending goals. In 2014, only three spent more than 2 percent of their GDP on defense; last year, that number rose to nine countries, and by 2024, a majority of members will meet that goal.

Second, NATO continues to live up to some of its basic principles, such as the Open-Door Policy—as recently observed in the cases of Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Third, despite all the political noise regarding NATO, support among the U.S. public remains steadfast—with recent polls showing 75 percent of Americans in support of either maintaining or increasing the nation's commitment to the organization.

Finally, member states continue to support common security efforts by contributing significant support to ongoing missions. This includes those in places like Afghanistan, where allies and partners contribute nearly half the 17,000 troops deployed as a part of the Resolute Support Mission.

NATO continues to serve as a unique asset to the United States; however, it faces no shortage of challenges. From illegal occupations of sovereign nations to election meddling, geopolitical adversaries continue to test, divide, and weaken the alliance. For example, NATO fighter jets regularly scramble in the skies above the Baltic Sea—110 times in 2016 alone—to confront reckless Russian incursions. It is not just Russia that poses such challenges; so does China, whose rising political-military threat is only starting to garner greater attention among European countries.

Other challenges include emerging cyber and hybrid threats, which evolve at a rate faster than NATO's ability to respond. Furthermore, the organization's southern flank increasingly suffers from instability rooted in violent extremism, state failure, and refugee flows.

The last and perhaps most difficult challenge stems from internal tensions that undermine alliance unity. As NATO stands for common values as much as armaments and military capabilities, rising authoritarianism and nationalist politics test the very core of the Washington Treaty, which extols the “principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.” In turn, this makes it harder to maintain unity and threatens the alliance's commitment to serve as a sentinel of liberal values. Finally, many member states are wondering whether the United States would fulfill its commitment to collective defense.

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Since the United States' support for NATO is so crucial, Congress must play an increased role in maintaining U.S. leadership within the alliance. For example, it must fund U.S. military and diplomatic efforts in Europe. The \$6.5 billion European Deterrence Initiative was an important step—yet the Trump administration's latest budget with its proposal to cut these resources, and with further cuts likely to finance the border wall with Mexico, is concerning. Members of Congress must also step in as informal ambassadors by travelling to Europe and showing support for NATO while also pressing for its continued reforms. Members can also buttress the alliance by passing bipartisan bills—such as the NATO Support Act—that reaffirm the United States' basic commitment to it and make it harder for any president to reduce this.

Congress' current role in rekindling the spirit that energizes U.S. leadership in NATO is not a new one. Almost 68 years ago, a similar debate gripped Washington, and specifically the U.S. Congress. In early 1951, many major political figures doubted the wisdom of NATO, claiming that deploying U.S. troops to Europe was not in the nation's best

interest. It fell to General Dwight Eisenhower to come out of retirement and galvanize support for sending troops to Europe. In February 1951, just before he took command as NATO's first supreme commander, he came to Capitol Hill to make his case before both chambers of Congress. He passionately and successfully argued for what he called the "enlightened self-interest" of U.S. leadership in NATO.

Eisenhower's words ring prescient today, when domestic politics echo similar doubts about the NATO's value to U.S. interests, because if the alliance did not exist the United States would be racing to invent it.

*This essay is based on the author's testimony before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, March 14, 2019.*

### Complementarity, not Competition

*Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, Director Paris Office and Senior Transatlantic Fellow, and Martin Quencez, Fellow and Senior Program Officer, Security and Defense*

France is a founding member of NATO and has always seen itself as a key military and security actor in Europe. Over the last 70 years it has also had a particular role and voice within the alliance, as the French vision of the transatlantic alliance has often differed from the one promoted by the United States. More recently, the idea of a "global NATO" aligned with U.S. priorities, including increasingly vis-à-vis China, has been problematic for France, while Washington still fears that French-led initiatives in European defense cooperation threaten or duplicate NATO and the U.S. security commitment to Europe.

France's NATO story is deeply linked to its strategic vision for and within the transatlantic relationship in general. In 1966, President Charles de Gaulle's decision to withdraw the country from the integrated military command structure while it remained an active member of NATO symbolized its special place. Traditionally defined as "friend, allied, but

not aligned", Paris's posture has traditionally aimed to find the right balance between being part of the Western bloc and keeping its independence in foreign and defense policy. Although France never left NATO, the memory of France's balancing will continue to influence the way it is viewed by other allies, especially those in Central and Northern Europe for whom military protection by the alliance and the United States is vital.

After the end of the Cold War and of the bipolar world, this position had to be revised. Traditionally attached to a vision of the alliance as a military rather than a political one, significant debates took place in the French political and strategic community about NATO's *raison-d'être* in the 1990s and 2000s. During the same period, French troops took part in NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, with 70,000 soldiers sent to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. The 2008 decision by President Nicolas Sarkozy for France to reintegrate the military command structure was meant to "normalize" the country's place in the alliance and to increase its influence at the political and bureaucratic levels.

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Ten years later, despite this normalization and its participation in NATO reassurance initiatives in Central European and Baltic states, France continues to have a singular image inside the alliance. Its drive to deepen European defense cooperation is often perceived as indirectly weakening the transatlantic link and duplicating NATO. For France, European security and defense issues are such that all formats (bilateral, unilateral, and multilateral) must be used in a complementary and diversified manner.

France's commitment to NATO should remain strong in the near future. Official strategic documents define the alliance as the main guarantor

of European collective defense, and Paris is increasing its efforts to strengthen NATO's deterrence posture. More importantly, France promotes the deepening of European defense cooperation within the EU or in ad hoc frameworks in complementarity with NATO, not as an alternative to it. This pragmatic approach is likely to remain the same in the coming years, as the alliance with the United States is a necessity but cannot address all the security challenges that European countries will face in the future.

New threats have stemmed from technological innovation and the transformation of the strategic environment around Europe. The alliance built in the Cold War period provides answers for 20th century threats but is not necessarily the best format of cooperation to address all of them, especially when they take place under the threshold of Article 5. For instance, in the French perspective, NATO cannot be the sole vehicle for responding to cyberattacks and terrorist acts, and overreliance on the United States is an issue for European security.

In parallel, the evolution of the transatlantic relationship will continue to play an important role in the French position on NATO. France is particularly concerned that too many allies consider the long-term U.S. commitment to European security as a given. For Paris, the United States will increasingly seek to share the burden of defense with its partners, and Europeans must prepare to become more autonomous operationally and strategically, especially in Africa and the Middle East, where France seeks to "Europeanize" the military element in the fight against terrorism, while the United States is reallocating its military resources within and out of the region. The more Europeans demonstrate capacity to tackle this issue (as well as the migration crisis), the more credibility they will gain as strategic partners in the eyes of the United States.

Finally, the evolution of politics in France could affect its commitment to the alliance in the long-term. NATO is not seen in the country as protecting it against an existential threat, and the alliance's significance is regularly questioned by political

leaders, notably on the far right and far left of the political spectrum. Anti-establishment parties are generally very critical of the transatlantic partnership and continue to denounce President Sarkozy's 2008 decision. The political prospects of these parties will largely define the role of France in NATO in the coming decades.

### Security Matters to the Western Balkans

*Gordana Delić, Director, Balkan Trust for Democracy*

As NATO members meet in Washington to celebrate the alliance's 70th anniversary, their goal is to project political unity. Given the global geopolitical challenges they face, this may not be an easy task. Globalization has turned into a sort of regionalization with competing rising powers, opening the door to a multipolar world that will require NATO to transform itself into a much more flexible, diverse, and ever-learning mechanism.

At the same time, despite the global challenges and even some disunity within the alliance, it keeps demonstrating its capacity to grow and expand when it comes to Southeastern Europe. With Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, and Montenegro in, and North Macedonia soon joining, NATO has successfully incorporated the northern Mediterranean coast and secured its southeastern flank.

The countries of the region have always been at the crossroads of continents and thus prone to threats one associates with this kind of multipolar world. Hence, for many of them NATO has become in recent years a prerequisite for their security, economic growth, and development. This is particularly obvious since the EU's enlargement and even accession negotiation processes have been questioned and slowed down to a crawl.

The accession process for Montenegro and North Macedonia has had a transformative effect, allowing them to resolve decades-old problems. For the former, these were borders and maritime security while for the latter it made it possible to



resolve the deadlock with Greece over the country's name. It is reasonable to believe that NATO membership will have an immediate positive effect on both countries economically too. For example, Montenegro lives off foreign tourism and thus security is vital. It now can receive funding from the Science and Peace Security program and use NATO's resources in emergency situations, as was the case with recent fires along its coasts. The same applies for foreign direct investment, especially from the EU, which still represents the largest business partner for all the countries in the region.

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It is important, though, to note that Montenegro's plan to join NATO triggered an internal process of public debates that heavily polarized people. The resentment over NATO's intervention in 1999 lives on in parts of the region, including in Montenegro where almost 30 percent of the population consider themselves ethnic Serbs. Despite skeptics' expectations to the contrary, Serbia acted responsibly and as a leader for the stability of the region by declaring no interest in interfering with the country's internal debate and decision regarding NATO membership. The process was however, marked by foreign interference that Montenegro managed to overcome along with its internal challenging public debate.

Unlike most of the other Southeastern European countries, Serbia does not aspire to join NATO. Instead, it follows the path of military neutrality. With its geographical position and size, it is the key country in the Western Balkans. Centrally located, with the largest population and the greatest national and religious diversity of all the Western Balkan countries, it is vital to the region's development, mobility, stability, and security. The NATO intervention in 1999 left a bitter taste in the mouth of a nation that considers itself a natural and traditional ally of the United States, Europe, and

all who fought against imperialism, fascism and Nazism in World Wars. In 1999, the democratic elite of Serbia pleaded in an open letter for dialogue and diplomacy, knowing that the regime of President Slobodan Milosevic would only be reinforced by NATO's air strikes. Exactly 20 years later, the topic remains controversial in the country and it will be for many years to come.

Since then, NATO and Serbia have walked a long and complicated road. Despite the resentment, Serbia is future-oriented and is therefore deepening its political dialogue and cooperation with NATO on issues of common security and interest. The country joined Partnership for Peace in 2006 and signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2015. In 2018 Serbia hosted the first exercise organized by NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre as a platform for civilian first responders to learn from each other how they can save lives.

With no membership aspirations from Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the only countries in the Western Balkans that might become NATO members. However, both face huge challenges that hinder their integration. NATO has been present in Kosovo for 20 years with the KFOR international peacekeeping forces, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995 and the signing of the Dayton Peace accords with local headquarters and a high representative. Yet, neither country has managed to develop into a functioning transitional democracy.

NATO's overall role has been strongly influenced by events in the Balkans over the past three decades and the region remains of special concern to it. Even though all the countries of the Western Balkans aspire to join the EU and are engaged with the alliance, the question of securing region's long-term stability and security remains key and NATO shares responsibility in defining strategies and objectives to achieve it.

### An Increasingly Serious Black Sea Player

*Alina Inayeh, Director, Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation*

With Romania and Bulgaria joining the alliance in 2004, bringing up to three—with Turkey—the number of littoral member states, NATO became an even more serious presence in the Black Sea. Georgia and Ukraine aspired to join the alliance as well, yet in 2008 they were famously denied the first entry step in the form of a Membership Action Plan. Back then, few thought NATO's presence was really crucial for a region whose progress in achieving stability and prosperity had been much praised. The “little war that shook the world,” as Ron Asmus famously described the Georgian-Russian war, followed that same year, and starting then Russia changed its posture in the region and indeed the world. Its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine since, accompanied by its heavy military buildup in the peninsula and the modernization of its Black Sea fleet, have led to a new and very different security landscape. With an aggressive Russia trying to dominate the region, and recently the sea itself, NATO's regional presence became and remains more important than ever.

The alliance's members in the Black Sea region and on its eastern flank, keenly aware of the new security threat, and joined by the United States, have insistently and effectively advocated for a strong NATO presence in the region, on land and sea. The last five years have seen a serious reorientation of alliance focus to the region and measures to reassure members there and to deter Russia's further aggression. Although further enlargement of NATO is not foreseen in the near future, despite intense diplomatic and political efforts to include Georgia, it partners with all non-members in the region and conducts numerous joint exercises and trainings. While all this gives NATO a good posture there, one that is very different from that of 15 years ago, members in the region argue that more measures and a more enhanced presence is needed to counter Russia's military threat effectively. In the same vein, the alliance needs a sharper focus on the

hybrid-warfare tools that Russia employs in the region and elsewhere as well as a better maritime strategy in the Black Sea.

Russia's aggression gave the region a unitary threat and, to a certain extent, united it in its need for a stronger NATO presence. How strong this presence should be and what form should it take is the subject of continuous negotiations among the littoral members that, while sharing the same perspective on the common threat, are conditioned by their different respective economic or social relations with Russia. In this respect, they are not different from the alliance members as a whole.

Throughout the past decade of increased Russian aggression and threat, countries in the Black Sea region had one steady ally and advocate: the United States. Starting in 2009, with the renewed decision to place elements of an anti-missile shield in the region, the United States has proven its commitment to the security of the region, and it has supported the newer NATO members in their efforts to focus the attention of the alliance on their needs. Despite the turmoil that presidential tweets and statements create within the alliance from time to time, and the apparent rift between the Trump administration and some European allies, the United States continues to stay focused on the region. And over the past two years it has increased its military expenditures directed toward the region.

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Russia's aggressive posture remains the best advocate for an enhanced NATO presence in the Black Sea region. In the short term, maintaining a credible deterrent remains a high priority for the alliance and partners, especially as Russia becomes more aggressive in trying to impose its dominance in the waters it wants to control. In the medium term, NATO will need to focus more on countering Russia's

other warfare techniques—such as cyberattacks and informational warfare—that are meant to weaken not only individual members, but also the cohesion and stature of the alliance. In the Black Sea region, NATO has assumed an active role in ensuring regional security, and its presence will continue to be needed for years to come. In the long term, even if Russia’s military aggressiveness eventually fades, NATO’s presence will remain important politically, as it continues to stand as a symbol and promoter of its values as these are increasingly countered by an ever-stronger illiberal narrative coming not only from Russia but also other states, including increasingly some of the alliance members’ own governments.

### Fearing Change in a Vital Institution

*Ulrich Speck, Senior Visiting Fellow, Europe Program*

For Germany, NATO has been vital in the last decades. The country’s recent history and its successes cannot be disentangled from the existence of the alliance. Without NATO—into which it was admitted in 1955 after a French attempt to build a West European army failed—West Germany’s recovery and resurgence after the Second World War, its integration in the West, and its survival as a frontier state in the Cold War would have been much harder if not impossible. And European integration might not have happened without NATO, as the existence of the alliance reassured Germany’s neighbors and removed the threat of German revisionism—clearing the way toward cooperation.

Furthermore, NATO was key for German reunification. It provided the security umbrella under which East and West Germany could focus on social and economic reunification without worrying too much about geopolitics and security. This repeated itself with the unification of Europe after the Cold War, when NATO took care of the external security aspects while the EU focused on internal socio-economic and political dimension.

NATO also played a central role in the military operations in the Balkans and in Afghanistan, in which Germany was heavily invested. And it has helped keep

in check a militarily aggressive Russia in recent years through a renewed focus on territorial defense, a development in which Germany has played a key role.

NATO has been always an instrument of U.S. power in Europe as well as an institution with its own character and significance. The United States has always been the most powerful member by far and yet NATO, as an institution with its mechanisms and specific functions, has always been much more than just a cover for U.S. influence and power. At least formally, the members meet as peers. And with its Brussels headquarters the organization gained considerable weight and became an important center of gravity in transatlantic security.

The current fear in Germany is that the character of NATO as a joint North American and European institution is changing with President Donald Trump—and also as a result of a more general change in attitudes in the United States.

“**The current fear in Germany is that the character of NATO as a joint North American and European institution is changing.**”

While public opinion polls show broad support in the United States for deterrence against Russia via NATO, which also is the object of a bipartisan consensus in Congress, Europeans are nevertheless alarmed by the transactional attitude Trump has shown towards the alliance, by his regular outbursts over allies that allegedly take advantage of U.S. security guarantees without paying their fair share, and by his general contempt for institutions.

If these transatlantic disagreements were to deepen, leading to NATO being dissolved, or losing its relevance as the central institution for military security in Europe, European countries would have either to build security among themselves or try to get bilateral guarantees from the United States, just as countries like Japan and South Korea do in the Asia Pacific. Some European countries, Germany among them, might in such a scenario draw closer to

Russia and China, accommodating the two Eurasian powers that have an interest in splitting Europe from the United States and preventing the emergence of Europe as a coherent security player.

All this would massively threaten European stability and could easily lead to new conflicts in and around the continent. It would also further weaken an already threatened liberal, multilateral order which has been the key to Germany's success story in the last decades. Keeping NATO intact, therefore, is by far the preferable option for the allies. Together with other liberal democracies, the countries of Europe and North America have a far better chance of standing up to autocratic powers and push back against their vision of a world based on dominance and submission.

The challenge for NATO, however, still is to move from a Cold War institution, largely dominated by the United States, to an institution that keeps the transatlantic partners together on a more equal footing and allows them to push back jointly against forces that are trying to weaken the liberal order and to make the world safe for autocracy. If NATO manages such a transformation successfully, it will keep its role at the center of transatlantic security and open a new chapter in its history.

That, however, requires both sides to overcome their frustrations and work out more clearly a new mission. The United States must understand that its allies are its greatest asset in the new great-power competition with China and Russia. And European countries—especially Germany—must start to see themselves as co-shaping powers in Europe and accept that military means are key for the survival of the liberal order in the continent and beyond, and invest accordingly in their militaries.

“ **The U.S.-Turkish relationship suffers from mutual suspicion, the absence of a relevant strategic framework, and a lack of ownership on both sides.**”

## Turkey's Questionable Commitment to NATO

*Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, Director, Ankara Office*

After almost 70 years as a member of NATO, Turkey's long-term commitment to the alliance has become debatable. The story of Turkey's membership begins with President Harry Truman's policy of supporting the country, alongside Greece, against Soviet expansionism. Turkey joined NATO in 1952, only three years after its founding, and the alliance quickly became the central pillar of Turkish defense strategy. The country benefited from membership not only through the collective defense mechanism, but also through the modernization of its army, mainly with U.S. aid. NATO facilitated the relationship with the United States and brought Turkey closer to Europe. The alliance has also been important for the country as a political platform in which it has equal voice with its European allies and the United States. At the same time, Turkey's contribution to NATO was significant, as it played a very important role in the alliance's southern flank.

Things started to change with the end of the Cold War, albeit slowly. First, separatist terrorism by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) replaced the Soviet Union as the main security threat for Turkey. While NATO could provide a very credible security guarantee against the former, it has practically been irrelevant for dealing with the latter. More generally, the strategic framework of the U.S.-Turkish relationship crafted during the Cold War became obsolete and did not provide a relevant guideline for cooperation against contemporary threats such as terrorism.

Furthermore, the Gulf War in 1990 and the Iraq War in 2003 provided the PKK with a safe haven in northern Iraq, aggravating the challenge for Turkey. More recently, the United States' policy of working by, with, and through the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in the campaign against Islamic State in Syria has further complicated the situation as Turkey considers the PYD to be organically linked to the PKK. Turkey's reluctance to fully cooperate with the United States in the Gulf and

Iraq Wars and the campaign against Islamic State, as well as the lack of U.S. attention to Turkey's security concerns, have eroded trust between the two allies. Today the relationship between them suffers from mutual suspicion, the absence of a relevant strategic framework, and a lack of ownership on both sides. Turkish policymakers suspect that the United States has a long-term plan to establish a Kurdish state on Turkey's borders, and there is growing suspicion in the United States that Turkey could turn to the "dark side"—for example, Russia—at some point in the future.

While Turkey continues to fulfill its alliance obligations, complies with all NATO decisions, and participates in all NATO operations, demonstrates its commitment, there is a visible effort in the country to decrease its dependence on NATO and the United States.

This effort has led Turkey to compartmentalize its foreign policy and to engage in flexible alliances, including cooperation with adversaries of NATO, as with Russia in Syria, when such a course of action suits its interests. Another example of this kind of cooperation is Turkey's plan to buy an S-400 missile defense system from Russia in reaction to not receiving a plausible offer in terms of price, technical

specifications, and technology transfer from the United States for the Patriot missile system. While Washington finally made Turkey a very good offer for Patriots recently, this may have come too late as Russia is a few months away from delivering the S-400s.

The United States has warned the government that going ahead with the S-400 deal would cost Turkey access to the F-35 program and make it subject to sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. This could put Turkey on a path away from NATO and toward an inviting Russia in the medium to long term, even though this is against the interests of both countries and neither U.S. nor Turkish policymakers desire such an outcome. The question "Who lost Turkey?" may finally become relevant. Thanks to years of complacency in Washington and Ankara, Turkey's commitment to NATO has become questionable and it will take very strong political will on both sides to reverse the situation.

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