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NATO at 70
Refocusing for Change?
Policy Background Paper

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NATO is the most successful political-military alliance in history, and yet it is time to focus once again on the purpose of the transatlantic relationship that is at risk of whittling due to inertia and complacency. NATO's old quip "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" today it is evidently out of touch with reality. Russia is considered by some a potentially interesting partner; a part of the US public is not sure about staying in NATO; and after reunification, Germany has long since overcome its initial minority status.

From its inception until recently, NATO was an integral part of a rather coherent project centred on democracy, free market, and international cooperation up to the point of agreeing to an extensive body of international laws. The strong reference to the United Nations Charter has been, for good or for bad, a strong political lynchpin for an international rules-based order.

Part of these laws consisted of arms and proliferation control and disarmament treaties that, even if bilateral, had significant impact at a global level. While the enforcing mechanisms for these agreements are still around, the disregard for treaties seems to have become a convenient political and diplomatic tool in the eyes of different governments.

Moreover, NATO made impossible any great power violent confrontation in the space from San Francisco to Vladivostok, leaving indirect belligerence confined outside the area covered by the Mutually Assured Destruction deterrence practice and doctrine. Today, the discourse is seemingly returning to great power competition within NATO's area and near its borders. For the time being, article V contingencies are excluded, but hybrid and violent conflicts are occurring even inside Europe, and the lines separating deterrence from war are not always clear, especially vis-à-vis emerged regional and global powers (although China is never mentioned officially in major documents).

If one compares the political tenets of the 2010 Strategic Concept with the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration, a few points are clear. Firstly, there is a more nuanced will to closely cooperate with the UN and the EU. Secondly, both the commitment by NATO to create conditions for a nuclear-free world and to keep a credible NATO deterrent are considerably diluted. Thirdly, shared values within the community of the Alliance are upheld in principle, but not always applied in practice.

Interestingly, even 11 years ago, the Strategic Concept captured effectively many strategic trends that are still present: common defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. The latest

Summit Declaration adds to the broad picture: non-state actors, irregular migrations, hybrid attacks. But it also shifts the attention from technologies like laser, electronic warfare and space denial weapons to improvised explosive devices and NBCR diffusion and terrorist misuse or on the diffusion of cruise missile and UAV technologies.

On the other hand, the 2010 Strategic Concept stressed the importance of key environmental and resource constraints (health, climate change, water scarcity and increasing energy needs), while in 2018, most of these concerns are muted, with the exception of political or coercive manipulation through energy supplies.

Notably, in the Brussels Summit Declaration cyber defence is part of NATO's core task of collective defence. While an important development, in its political determination, this seems to overlook the possibility of entangling cyber security with nuclear deterrence, a concern that has been voiced at least by one major NATO member.

In conclusion, the Alliance needs more than incremental and ad hoc adaptation; it needs to reassess in depth its *raison d'être* in terms of transatlantic relationship and the probable strategic consequences of specific political choices. It should remain as the most important security provider in this fragmented and potentially dangerous environment. The transatlantic bond has proven on several occasions through seven decades to be a formidable added value to project security and stability.

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