

A satellite-style map of the Asia-Pacific region, showing the continent of Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Pacific Ocean. The map uses a color gradient from green (lowlands) to brown (highlands) to represent terrain. The text 'NATO and the Asia-Pacific' is overlaid in white.

# NATO

## and the Asia-Pacific

NATO ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR L'OTAN



FALL 2020

# NATO and the Asia-Pacific

**NATO ASSOCIATION OF CANADA**

**ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR L'OTAN**



The NATO Association of Canada  
*NATO and the Asia-Pacific*

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The NATO Association of Canada is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the idea that the transatlantic relationship between Canada, the United States, and the nations of Europe is of critical military, economic, and cultural importance to Canadians. The Association’s mandate is to promote a broader and deeper understanding of international peace and security issues relating to NATO.

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## Foreword

This year has been challenging for many of us at home and around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has added another layer of complexity to the ever-changing security environment and has underscored the importance of ensuring a strong and resilient NATO alliance in order to collectively address traditional and emerging threats to stability and peace.

During this unprecedented time, Canada remains dedicated to maintaining and strengthening our multilateral relationships with allies and partners, and understands the important role of NATO as a cornerstone of Canada's international security policy.

As a founding member of NATO, Canada recognizes the importance of trans-Atlantic unity for the safety and security of Canadians and our allies. We remain dedicated to NATO and a partner in European defence, and we are committed to upholding and promoting the values that make NATO possible—interoperability, cooperation, and coordination between our countries. That's why Canada has participated in every NATO mission since the Alliance was founded in 1949, a track record for which we are proud.

It is why our government has focused on investing into Canada's capabilities. In our Defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, we committed to increasing our investment in defence by more than 70 percent, as part of our fully-funded 20 year plan. This investment allows us to continue our meaningful contribution to NATO and its work around the world. From air policing in Romania or our leadership of the enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Latvia or Canada's two-year leadership of NATO Mission Iraq, Canada continues to step up.

This contribution is critical as the world returns to great power competition. We know that state actors like Russia and China are engaged in below-threshold activities which challenge the rules-based international order and pose security risks to NATO and its individual member states.

Canada recognizes China's importance in global affairs, including in international security. We encourage China to be a responsible international player promoting the rules-based international order and the lawful conduct of freedom of navigation and overflight, as well as respecting human rights and minorities.

The international community must remain steadfast in its resolve to uphold the rules-based international order. The Alliance must safeguard the values upon which NATO was founded—individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It's also critical that we maintain our current international alliances, and remain open to forging new relationships based on mutual respect and the pursuit of the common goals of international peace and stability.

This is why it is important to hear diverse voices from outside of government. The papers presented by the NATO Association of Canada provide interesting views from academics and others from across Canada and around the world about the potential roles NATO could play in the Asia-Pacific, for instance.

Canada's position as a stable middle-power means we have to do more to safeguard and reinforce our partnerships that have defined global cooperation for the last 70 years. We know that these partnerships are vital to global stability and prosperity, and we will continue to build them with like-minded nations around the world.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan  
Minister of National Defence



## Introduction

The NATO Association of Canada is proud to present its Fall 2020 publication, *NATO and the Asia-Pacific*. It would be an understatement to note that since our last publication, *Disinformation and Digital Democracies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the world has changed. The COVID-19 pandemic has reached almost every corner of the globe, grinding local economies to a halt and severing the sinews of international trade. At the time of writing, millions have been infected with the virus and hundreds of thousands have died. This dire situation will likely continue to worsen until a safe and effective vaccine can be produced and, just as importantly, distributed. Though not products of the pandemic alone, reactionary nationalisms, dangerous conspiracy theories, and gaping economic inequalities are coming to the foreground with undeniable intensity. Heightened calls for racial justice, gender equality, and LGBTQ2 rights remind us that if NATO members are to achieve the organization's fundamental principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, we can and we must do better.

As its title suggests, the current volume explores NATO's relationship to the Asia-Pacific, an admittedly slippery geographical category that we define as encompassing the similarly malleable regions traditionally designated as East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania. As a region, the Asia-Pacific is diverse, populous, economically dynamic, and environmentally vulnerable due to the disproportionate impact of anthropogenic climate change throughout the area's coastlines and islands. While the full social and economic consequences of the current pandemic remain to be seen, many Asia-Pacific nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand have been singled out for international praise due to the effectiveness of their early responses to the spread of COVID-19. Just as NATO can serve as a useful model for multilateralism for regional partners, NATO has every bit as much to learn from its Asia-Pacific allies on issues such as public health, technological innovation, and environmental sustainability. Although breathless headlines about the 'rise of China' have become a daily fixture of the news cycle, the dynamics that will shape NATO's engagement with the Asia-Pacific region are complex and deserving of deep scholarly study.

The United States already lists several Asian countries among its major non-NATO allies, including Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, many of whom also share close strategic and economic links with other NATO members. Similarly, Australia and New Zealand share a close intelligence relationship with the US, the UK, and Canada through the Five Eyes agreement, and have made significant contributions to NATO initiatives such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself remains, of course, the site of NATO's major non-combat mission to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces within the context of intra-Afghan peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban.

Along the coastlines of the Indian Ocean, Chinese investment in commercial port development and other infrastructure projects has led some to accuse Beijing of neocolonialism and debt-trap diplomacy. Meanwhile, escalating tensions along India's borders with China on the one hand and Pakistan on the other have captured global attention in recent years, as has the steady accumulation of an increasingly sophisticated nuclear arsenal in North Korea under the authoritarian leadership of Kim Jong-un. Less commented upon but highly significant, island

nations such as Tuvalu, Nauru, Palau, and the Marshall Islands maintain a critical diplomatic role in disputes between Taiwan and China over the construction of artificial islands in the South Pacific. In summary, any attempt to understand the geopolitical context in which NATO currently operates that does not include a deep engagement with the Asia-Pacific will, by necessity, remain incomplete.

To that end, the current volume aims to provide measured, thoughtful, scholarly analysis that explores the past, present, and possible futures of NATO's relationship to the Asia-Pacific region. As an important aside, please note that this volume, as well as the contributions within, was compiled prior to the public launch on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 of the NATO 2030 Expert Group's Report: 'United for a New Era', so the findings of that report are not discussed here. In our opening piece, Dr. Joe Burton explains why the Asia-Pacific matters to NATO by providing an overview of growing Chinese and Russian influence in Europe and its consequences for the Alliance. Our next contributor, Dr. Philip Shetler-Jones, discusses the strategic inevitability of a NATO shift towards Asia, arguing that China's interest in Europe will make this necessary whether NATO members like it or not. Following this, Dr. Andrew Cottey argues that although NATO may not seem like the most obvious framework for engagement with China, strains in the US-EU relationship as well as the lack of institutional infrastructure within the G7 may leave the trans-Atlantic Alliance as the best multilateral forum for carefully engaging with China. The reconfiguration of global geopolitics being ushered in by Chinese programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are not limited to Eurasia, but are already having a major impact in Africa as well which, as Matthew Thomas shows, presents clear challenges for NATO's 2010 strategic plan, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*.

Shifting our focus to East Asia, Dr. Yee-Kuang Heng argues that engaging with Asia-Pacific partners can provide NATO members an option beyond the binary of China versus the US, and that issues such as trade, technology, and climate change provide firm ground upon which multilateral relations in the region can develop. Continuing with the theme of regional partnerships, Dr. Alex Tan regards maintaining the South China Sea as a global commons as key to the NATO 2030 goal of working with like-minded partners in the region. Dr. Wojciech Lorenz argues such an initiative could take the shape of a NATO-Pacific Forum, which could offer a highly visible and formalized coalition of joint interests and defence. Such a forum would have to work alongside the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which Dr. Sachiko Hirakawa demonstrates is currently caught in a geopolitical tug-of-war over the issue of engagement with Chinese-led regional initiatives such as the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Dr. Hirakawa argues that an effort by NATO to buttress Japanese efforts to shore up member countries and engage more closely with Taiwan could be crucial to maintaining the regional balance of power.

A deepening of bilateral ties can benefit from the lessons of the past. Drawing on the history of the Sino-Indian War of 1962, former Polish Ambassador to India, Dr. Piotr Klodkowski, explores the possibility of a future India-NATO alliance in response to increasingly combustible border relations between China and India. Taking a different perspective, Dr. Christine Lai takes up the thorny question of whether an "Asian NATO" is a possibility, arguing that such an organization is conceivable, but would be contingent on closer ties between existing NATO members and partners in the Asia-Pacific. Following this, our penultimate contributor,

Dr. Nicole Jenne, warns that a containment-style approach could lure NATO into a Thucydides Trap that would increase the likelihood of war with China, and instead advocates an approach focused on areas of practical cooperation such as maritime security, public health, and counter-terrorism.

In conclusion, Dr. Arif Bağbaşıoğlu warns that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed some of the limits of multilateral engagement, as well as a lack of solidarity between even friendly states. While previous NATO partnerships have paved the way for the integration of some Balkan countries into Euro-Atlantic institutions, the shape of NATO engagement in the Asia-Pacific will need a new strategy capable of charting a third path for prospective partners wary of taking sides in increasingly polarized US-China relations.

Taken together, these essays present a range of perspectives from some of the world's top experts on the topic of NATO's engagement with actors and institutions from across the Asia-Pacific region. The NATO Association of Canada asserts that multilateralism and cooperation remain the most effective tools at our disposal for meeting twenty-first century challenges such as climate change, pandemic disease, or armed conflict. We hope that these essays can provide a starting point for further dialogue towards this goal.



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**Dr. Piotr Kłodkowski** is a professor at the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations of the Jagiellonian University (UJ) in Cracow, and a former diplomat and the Ambassador of Poland to India (2009-2014) with diplomatic accreditations to Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. At present he is also a member of the Committee for Asia and Pacific at Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a member of the Advisory Board of “Muslim Perspectives” published by Muslim Institute (Islamabad/London). Piotr Kłodkowski is a UJ graduate; he also studied in Pakistan at the National Institute of Modern Languages in Islamabad and in the Republic of Ireland, at the University College Cork.

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**Matthew Thomas** is a Policy Analyst with the Government of Canada. Matthew has worked as a Governance and Stability Consultant with the United Nations in Rwanda, served as an executive of two Canadian non-profits, and conducted international research for the University of Toronto central administration. Matthew has been contributing to NATO Association publications since December 2018, with a particular focus on China and cybersecurity.

## Why Asia matters to NATO

Dr. Joe Burton

NATO Secretary General Jen Stoltenberg has recently indicated that NATO needs to get serious about the rise of China and work to rejuvenate the alliance's partnerships with a variety of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> The alliance is about to embark on a reconceptualization of its role in the world through the NATO 2030 process,<sup>2</sup> which may result in a new "Strategic Concept," NATO's key guiding document. The focus on Asia will no doubt feature in this process. The last "Strategic Concept" was produced in 2010 and helped to shift the alliance to a series of new and emerging threats, including cyber-attacks and threats from terrorism. But much has happened since then, including Russia's annexation of Crimea, the end of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, and of course, more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit Europe and America hard, with likely impacts on NATO's defence spending and capabilities.

In this context, NATO has an opportunity to rethink its partnerships in Asia and recognise more fully in its doctrine why Asia matters to NATO. NATO has been an organisation focused on collective defence in the North Atlantic area, but in a world where threats have little respect for territory and borders, the time is right to think more fully about the impact of Asian (in)security on NATO members. Three key dynamics

should be foregrounded in this process. First, China's continued rise clearly poses a strategic threat to NATO. That threat could be *in Asia* – there is at least the possibility that NATO could be drawn into an Asia-Pacific conflict, politically if not militarily. But China's aggression and coercive economic and digital activities also threaten NATO members *in Europe*. Second, the changing structural dynamics in global politics, including the rise of China, China's growing closeness with an aggressive and assertive Russia, and the continued impact of globalisation, particularly a growing connectedness between the Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions, precipitates a rethink of NATO's role in the world. In this context, the old conceptual division between 'in area' and 'out of area' NATO operations is increasingly bogus. Third, the opportunity is now there to rejuvenate NATO's Asian partnerships. South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, among others, want relationships with NATO, but the partnership mechanisms have atrophied since 2014, and this needs to change. Democratic allies are few and far between, and unless NATO wants to watch over a further deterioration in the rules-based international order, closer relations with these countries is vital.

### China's growing shadow in Europe

The Covid crisis appears to have originated in wet markets in Wuhan, China. Whether

<sup>1</sup> "Time to stand up to China, says NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg," *The Australian*, June 10, 2020 <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/the-times/time-to-stand-up-to-china-says-nato-chief-jens-stoltenberg/news-story/2c1e4800608709828a294f9a91359e8e>

<sup>2</sup> "Secretary General launches NATO 2030 to make our strong Alliance even stronger," *NATO*, June 8, 2020 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_176193.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176193.htm)

the Chinese government is responsible or at fault for the outbreak is, of course, debatable. Pandemics could emanate from anywhere on the globe and will likely be a more common feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as we face a warming planet. But the virus also clearly indicates why Asia matters to NATO. To put this into context, 9/11, an attack from a terrorist group sheltered by a central Asian state, caused almost 3000 deaths in a NATO country. In the NATO area, the number of casualties from Covid-19 is already over 600,000.<sup>3</sup> China's response to the virus has also been a cause for concern – the virus has been accompanied by a wave of disinformation emanating from China, the technological interference of pharmaceutical companies by Chinese hackers, and a campaign of obfuscation – secrecy in reporting of the impact of the virus within China itself. NATO can never defend against a virus with tanks and guns, but it has increasingly been involved in emergency response planning for a second wave of the virus.<sup>4</sup> The crisis has also shown how connected the Asia-Pacific and European security environments are, and presents the challenge of further redefining and refining the role of military organisations in the post-Covid era.

China's political, economic, and digital activities are also growing in Europe, and growing in assertiveness. In the digital marketplace, NATO members are showing much greater concerns about China's digital

infrastructure providers, and the debate around 5G technology has already caused a great deal of friction between NATO members, particularly among the UK and US. Chinese AI-enabled surveillance technology (including smart cities and policing) is now widely adopted in the NATO area, including facial recognition software, and Huawei is pushing hard for a role in new digital infrastructure in Europe.<sup>5</sup> The fear about backdoors in digital infrastructure that could be exploited by Chinese electronics providers is a real one and should be taken seriously. The level of cyber espionage committed by China in Europe and North America is already extreme, and could get worse in an era of 5G, Internet-of-Things, Artificial Intelligence enabled cyber operations, and advances in quantum encryption and decryption technologies. If NATO wants to continue to be secure against a growing range of digital vulnerabilities, it cannot afford to ignore these dynamics.

But it's not just in the technology space that China's influence is growing. In the Arctic, the Chinese are increasingly active, as melting sea ice provides new routes for trade.<sup>6</sup> In European universities, the influence of Chinese activism on academic freedom is a growing cause of concern, with numerous recent examples of Confucius Institutes acting as hotbeds of Chinese espionage, and recruiting Chinese students into the surveillance activities of the Chinese state.<sup>7</sup> China's economic relationship with

<sup>3</sup> "Total confirmed Covid-19 Deaths," *Our World in Data*, accessed December 15, 2020  
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/total-covid-deaths-region>

<sup>4</sup> Transcript of press conference delivered by Jens Stoltenberg, NATO, June 18 2020  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176561.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176561.htm)

<sup>5</sup> "Digital Divide? Transatlantic defence cooperation on Artificial Intelligence," Simone R Soare, *Institute for Security Studies*, March 2020

[https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFil/Brief%203%20AI\\_0.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFil/Brief%203%20AI_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> "Arctic Stress Test: Great power competition and Euro-Atlantic defence in the high North," Simone R Soare, *Institute for Security Studies*, June 2020  
<https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFil/Brief%209%20Arctic.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> "Belgian university closes its Chinese state-funded Confucius Institute after spying claims," Stuart Lau, *South China Morning Post*, December 11, 2019  
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/>

Europe is also increasingly coercive, as China has used its economic clout to buy up key markets in many European countries, and is using economic assistance to exert political influence in strategically important NATO members, including the Czech Republic, Portugal, Hungary and Greece.<sup>8</sup> The awful abuse visited on the Uyghur people by the Chinese state has also rung alarm bells in Europe, resurrecting a difficult normative and ethical dilemma – how to engage economically and diplomatically with a state that is committing cultural genocide.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, not all of these are challenges for NATO per se, and clearly NATO will need to continue to advance its partnership with the EU to adequately understand and respond to these hybrid threats. But at the same time, there is evidence that alliance leaders are becoming both more cognisant of the threat from China and more vocal in standing up to Beijing. Secretary General Stoltenberg recently said that China is “multiplying the threats to open societies and individual freedoms,” and argued that democratic countries need to join together to stand up to China’s “bullying and coercion.”<sup>10</sup> In a 21<sup>st</sup> century which will largely be defined by the rise of China, NATO cannot afford to bury its head in the sand when confronting the China challenge.

[3041617/belgian-university-closes-its-chinese-state-funded-confucius](https://www.3041617/belgian-university-closes-its-chinese-state-funded-confucius)

<sup>8</sup> “China’s economic coercion,” Frank Mouritz, in *China’s Global Influence: Perspectives and Recommendations* (Hawaii: Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2019) <https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/11-Chinas-economic-coercion-mouritz.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “China Has Chosen Cultural Genocide in Xinjiang—For Now,” Kate Cronin-Furman, *Foreign Policy*, September 18, 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/19/china-has-chosen-cultural-genocide-in-xinjiang-for-now/>

## China, Russia and the changing security environment

China is not only active in asserting its power in Asia and Europe, and indeed more widely in other regions through its Belt and Road Initiative, but it is also forming a closer security relationship with NATO’s key historical adversary, Russia. The basic structural dynamic in the international system is laid bare by this new pattern of cooperation. The US is undoubtedly in relative decline within the international system and this process has been accelerated by the Trump administration’s chaotic and abrasive approach to alliance politics. The European area has also been rocked by populism, Brexit, and the backslide of democracy in some NATO members, including Poland, Hungary, and Turkey. Both Russia and China are trying to accelerate and exploit these processes through hybrid means, including cyber operations, disinformation, sponsoring of far-right groups, economic subversion and political and psychological warfare. If we are indeed sliding towards what former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has described as a new ‘light cold war,’<sup>11</sup> it is taking place in a globalising security environment characterised by transnational threats, including climate change, terrorism, and the emergence of a post-truth environment facilitated by new digital information and communications technologies.

<sup>10</sup> “Nato chief urges nations to stand up to ‘bullying’ as China power rises,” *Financial Times*, June 8, 2020 <https://www.ft.com/content/e05f45fb-49a8-4798-befc-1052080e45cd>

<sup>11</sup> “West faces ‘light Cold War’ with China, Blair’s institute says,” Guy Faulconbridge & Axel Threlfall, *Reuters*, June 24, 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-blair-china/west-faces-light-cold-war-with-china-blairs-institute-says-idUSKBN23V2OH>

In the context of these dynamics, there has never been a more important time for strong security cooperation between the United States and Europe. A unified transatlantic area within an increasingly multipolar environment, founded on shared interests and values, is arguably more vital to global peace and stability than ever before. China and Russia's new axis of illiberalism needs to be challenged and doing so provides further grounds and justification for NATO to recreate its partnerships with like-minded Asian countries, to work to contain new threats from both of these actors, and to push back against them in existing international organisations and structures. China and Russia have shown a tendency to take advantage of efforts to cooperate with them – the hammer blow dealt to detente with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, for example, and the stories that Russia has paid militants there to kill US (and allied) soldiers are just two examples. But the relationship between China and Russia is not a given and has been artfully exploited by Western leaders in the past, such as Nixon's role in the Sino-Soviet split. If China and Russia do continue to coordinate their activities in opposition to NATO members interests, the alliance will need to respond more assertively itself.

### **NATO's global partners in Asia**

NATO already has an established platform for engaging with like-minded countries in Asia – the Partners across the Globe (PaG) initiative. The war in Afghanistan, a central Asian republic, was the catalyst for the partnership, which consists of close cooperation agreements between NATO and

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Pakistan, Iraq, Mongolia and Afghanistan. Colombia is the most recent addition (2018). NATO of course is a transatlantic alliance, but one of the most significant features of its changing role after the end of the Cold War has been the formation of partnerships which have gone hand-in-hand with a growth of its membership.<sup>12</sup> Through this process NATO has emerged as a global security provider, and the partnerships have helped countries which are developing their military doctrine and capabilities interact with the world's preeminent military alliance.<sup>13</sup>

But the partnerships have had a great deal of benefit for NATO too. In Afghanistan for example, the contributions made by NATO partners have outweighed the contributions made by some NATO members. Both Australia and New Zealand had more troops per capita in Afghanistan than most NATO countries, and sustained more casualties too. These countries aren't just useful to NATO because they balance China, as they also bring real expertise to the table. South Korea is a leading state in the fight against nuclear instability, and Australia and New Zealand form an important Southern Pacific part of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, which has become even more strategically important in the wake of Covid-19. The countries have also contributed to a variety of other NATO missions, including peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the Operation Ocean Shield mission, which led to a rapid decrease in instances of piracy off East and Southern Africa. Indeed, the importance of these countries in upholding the global maritime commons has also been recognised in the halls of power at NATO, and they are

<sup>12</sup> As well as the PaG, there is the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), the Partnership for Peace and bilateral cooperation agreements with a host of other countries.

<sup>13</sup> Joe Burton (2018) NATO's "Global Partners" in *Asia: Shifting Strategic Narratives, Asian Security*, 14:1, 8-23, DOI: [10.1080/14799855.2017.1361728](https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1361728)

influential countries – both politically and strategically – in cyber security too. NATO would do well to re-establish and rejuvenate the PaG, invite new members to join, and use the platform to craft a new strategy of engagement with Asian states.

## **Conclusion**

There are of course reasons why a NATO role ‘with’ or ‘in’ Asia is problematic, and there are myriad political and economic challenges for the alliance if it wants to recognise Asia more fully in any new strategic doctrine. The memory of European colonialism in Asia is still strong, and there is little appetite for any NATO military presence in the region – something that would no doubt be seen as an escalation of tensions. Back in Europe, there are also differences in threat perceptions around China. The eastern NATO states are of course far more worried about Russia and would prefer NATO resources to flow into their defence, while the Mediterranean NATO states are more concerned about the southern flank and instability in the MENA region. There are also going to be substantial budgetary challenges for NATO to project power beyond its region. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis, pressure on defence budgets will be even greater than they have been. If a Biden presidential administration emerges later this year, moreover, it could be one that heals the rifts that have emerged, but there are also some long standing tensions between the US and Europe which won’t disappear and will be much worse if President Trump wins another term in the White House. Forging a common position within the alliance on Asia will be challenged by all of these dynamics. Nevertheless, if NATO does not take Asia seriously, and

recognise the interconnectedness of the two regions, it could slide into irrelevance. Asia will define the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and NATO needs to think long and hard about how it will redefine NATO.

# NATO may not be interested in Asia, but... : The strategic inevitability of NATO's turn to the Asia-Pacific

Dr. Philip Shetler-Jones

*"...what we see is that the rise of China is having an impact on our security, partly because China is coming closer. We see them in the Arctic, we see them in Africa, we see them investing heavily in critical infrastructure, also in Europe. We see them in cyberspace and we also see that decisions by China and Chinese investments in new modern military capabilities have direct consequences for us."* NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 7 August 2019, at the Lowy Institute, Sydney Australia.<sup>1</sup>

*"We recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance."*<sup>2</sup> Declaration of London Summit 4 December 2019

*"The rise of China is fundamentally shifting the global balance of power. Heating up the race for economic and technological supremacy. Multiplying the threats to open societies and individual freedoms. And increasing the competition over our values and our way of life. NATO 2030 is about how we adapt to this new normal."*<sup>3</sup> NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 8 June 2020, Brussels.

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<sup>1</sup> 7 August 2019 Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Lowy Institute (Sydney).  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_168351.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_168351.htm)

<sup>2</sup> London Declaration, 4 December 2019  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 -

## Introduction

In December 2019, NATO agreed to address the consequences — including both risks and opportunities — of the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Arguments for NATO looking 'out of area' have faced the rebuttal that the Alliance should not be distracted from its fundamental task: the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area. This debate<sup>4</sup> has followed a similar script from the early 1990s, when the phrase 'out of area or out of business' was coined. Skeptics cite the geographic framing in articles of the founding treaty that delineate armed attack, while advocates of a broader vision respond with their interpretation of the purpose of the alliance, and the methods of achieving it that are not so constrained. It ran through from the Balkans deployments and the phase of enlargement, to the great geographic leap to Afghanistan in 2001, and now recurs in discussions about what NATO should do about the rise of China.

But this time there is something different. Previously, arguments for looking 'out of area' could be framed as somewhat discretionary. Alliance action beyond the borders of NATO members offered an

Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world, 08 Jun. 2020.  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)

<sup>4</sup> 'Reinventing NATO (yet again) politically', Ronald D Asmus 2005  
<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue2/english/analysis.html>

opportunity to address a neighbouring problem, to expand its local zone of peace and freedom, or to undertake a ‘one-off’ engagement to cement alliance cohesion (after 9/11). But the current discussion is driven by a completely new dynamic. It is not about whether or not NATO should go to Asia, but rather what to do now that Asia has come to NATO, and the consequences of that fact for individual allies and for the Alliance’s ability to share a common security. This article argues that responding to these challenges is not a choice, but rather a strategic inevitability that will trigger a demanding re-examination of how NATO fits into the wider world.

### **Why is it different this time?**

Three factors differentiate the current situation from past debates about NATO’s area of activity: the trajectory of USA-PRC relations, the Russia-PRC alignment, and the extension of the influence of the PRC into the Euro-Atlantic space.

First, President Donald Trump has oriented his country’s national security strategy to confront the PRC in strategic competition, and his administration has enacted tough policies that seem designed to blunt or roll-back the extension of power and influence the PRC has achieved through trade and investment. The situation is similar to a Cold War. At the same time, this president — perhaps the biggest skeptic in NATO’s history — has set NATO a test of relevance to US interests. So even though one might expect NATO to be enlisted in a Cold War against the PRC, perhaps due to a lack of

enthusiasm for multilateral approaches, this has hardly happened. An exception is the issue of 5G technology, where US Secretary of State Pompeo warned in 2019, “We have made clear that if the risks [of Chinese digital infrastructure within the alliance] exceed the threshold for the United States, we simply won’t be able to share that information any longer.”<sup>5</sup> But this may be just the beginning.

The second factor is the way NATO’s traditional adversary — Russia — has moved closer to the PRC in the period following its 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Increasingly isolated, Russia is forced to rely more heavily on economic, security, and diplomatic relations with Beijing. As the US moves (and encourages others to move) to economically and technologically ‘de-couple’ from the PRC, a degree of isolation will raise the importance of the PRC-Russia relationship for Beijing as well.

This PRC-Russia partnership — not yet a formal alliance even though President Putin has used that word from time to time<sup>6</sup> — affects NATO on several levels. On the strategic level, support Russia receives from the PRC makes it more resilient against the measures NATO allies might employ to influence or deter Russia. However, there is scant evidence of Russia and the PRC coordinating policy in a systematic way. For example, the PRC and Russia have no common front against US or European sanctions. Yet their partnership is something NATO has to reckon with. For one thing, it has begun to have destabilising effects on Euro-Atlantic solidarity. President Macron of France suggests the West is to blame for

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Pompeo calls on NATO to adapt to new threats from Russia, China’ *Reuters*, David Brunnstrom, Lesley Wroughton 4 April 2019 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nato/pompeo-calls-on-nato-to-adapt-to-new-threats-from-russia-china-idUSKCN1RG1JZ>

<sup>6</sup> ‘Russia-China Strategic Alliance Gets a New Boost with Missile Early Warning System’ *The Diplomat*, October 25 2019, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan <https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/russia-china-strategic-alliance-gets-a-new-boost-with-missile-early-warning-system/>

driving Russia into Chinese arms and that Europe would have more chances to exert its 'strategic autonomy' against a world dominated by the USA and China if there were a 'common front' between the EU and Russia.<sup>7</sup> The spectre of a Russia-China alliance is being used, for a variety of reasons, as a rhetorical scare tactic, and in a way that hardly favours NATO solidarity.

On the military technological level, a partnership with the PRC offers Russia access to investment and a defence export market that can sustain its status as one of the leading producers in high-tech areas such as missile defence and hypersonics, making PRC defence policy evolution a NATO interest. During his 2019 visit to Australia, the NATO Secretary General suggested "[o]ne of the reasons why Russia started to violate [the INF] treaty and deploy new intermediate-range missiles in Russia... was that China had developed these kind of weapons and deployed many of them. China was not or is not bound by the INF Treaty, so the deployment of Chinese weapons triggered the deployment... or at least contributed to the deployment of similar weapons in Russia, which then led to the demise of the INF Treaty, with direct impact on us."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 27 August 2019, President Macron "I also think that pushing Russia away from Europe is a major strategic error, because we are pushing it either toward isolation, which heightens tensions, or toward alliances with other great powers such as China, which would not at all be in our interest... to rebuild a real European project in a world that is at risk of bipolarization, to succeed at forming a common front between the EU and Russia, it is vital to think of those concentric circles that are structuring Europe and creating a new relationship with Russia." <https://lv.ambafrance.org/Ambassadors-conference-Speech-by-M-Emmanuel-Macron-President-of-the-Republic>

<sup>8</sup> Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Lowy Institute (Sydney), 7 August 2019

But the third and most important factor is that the PRC has come closer to Europe. The NATO Secretary General likes to point out how the PRC has approached the Atlantic region via the Arctic, Africa, and global cyber space, but for many, it is through economic channels that Chinese presence is felt most strongly. In the words of Laura Speranza, director for trans-Atlantic defence and security at the Center for European Policy Analysis: "Over the past decade, Chinese companies have invested billions of dollars throughout Europe—buying up critical infrastructure and increasing Beijing's political clout across the continent."<sup>9</sup> Under Chairman Xi Jinping, the PRC has brazenly wielded economic power for political ends, with examples such as the restrictions of rare earth exports to Japan in the context of a territorial dispute,<sup>10</sup> and the exclusion of South Korean company Lotte because the company permitted the deployment of elements of the US missile defence system on the golf resort it owns.<sup>11</sup> NATO's strategic partner Australia was left in little doubt about this when its call for an international inquiry into the origins of Covid-19 were met with the response that its imports to the PRC might suffer if patriotic

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_168351.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_168351.htm)

<sup>9</sup> 'China Is NATO's New Problem', Lauren Speranza, *Foreign Policy* July 8, 2020

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/08/china-nato-hybrid-threats-europe-cyber/>

<sup>10</sup> "Amid Tension, China blocks vital exports to Japan", *New York Times*, September 22nd, 2010. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/business/global/23rare.html>

<sup>11</sup> China ends sanctions on Lotte two years after South Korean retailer cedes land to US missile defences" Lee Jeong-ho, *SCMP*, 2nd May 2019 <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3008576/china-ends-sanctions-lotte-two-years-after-south-korean>

Chinese no longer wished to buy their products.<sup>12</sup>

Few now disagree that under Chairman Xi's leadership the PRC has moved from peaceful rise to a more overt pursuit of regional and global ambitions, as summed up in a recent article by former US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Kurt M. Campbell and Mira Rapp Hooper: "China Is Done Biding Its Time."<sup>13</sup> The evidence offered for PRC aggression has grown over the last 18 months from the hostage-taking of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor (apparently a direct response to Canada's detention of Huawei's CFO, Meng Wanzhou,) <sup>14</sup> to the imposition of new security laws in Hong Kong, the sinking of Vietnamese fishing boats, threats to trade with Australia and violent incidents on the line of control with India.

As some Canadians may already have concluded from the case of Meng Wanzhou, in this type of confrontation, neutrality does not seem to be an option. Beyond what that case shows, the 'full spectrum' (military, economic, political, technological) nature of the US-China rivalry makes it highly unlikely that allies will be able to stand aside. Supply chains and scientific research networks laid down in the globalised 'post-ideological' decades after the 1990s are being reviewed with a military-strategic lens, through which interdependence and open research collaboration shows up as a vulnerability to

be exploited. 'De-coupling' is dividing the global economic and technological landscape into two systems.

Finally, looking at it from the other side, if you are in America's cross-hairs, then breaking off, or at the minimum, neutralising its allies is merely strategic common sense. Some have already concluded that "China is likely to divide the Western Alliance because in a confrontation with the United States, China will want to weaken the United States by isolating it from as many of its allies as possible."<sup>15</sup>

### What next?

Given the above points, it should not be surprising that the North Atlantic Council has accepted the inevitable and have begun to think collectively about how to respond. In December 2019, it launched a consultative process — "NATO 2030" — led by a panel of ten experts to help it anticipate what the Alliance may look like in ten years and deliver recommendations to "reinforce Alliance unity, increase political consultation and coordination between Allies, and strengthen NATO's political role."

What questions will NATO 2030 have to address? One is the risk to NATO as US-China competition draws alliance interests apart due to the change of US focus from the Atlantic area to the Pacific, while some of Europe's NATO Allies take a 'non aligned'

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<sup>12</sup> "Australia angered China by calling for a coronavirus investigation. Now Beijing is targeting its exports" Ben Westcott, *CNN* May 27th 2020. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/26/business/china-australia-coronavirus-trade-war-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Kurt M Campbell and Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Foreign Affairs* July 15 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-07-15/china-done-biding-its-time>

<sup>14</sup> "China says Kovrig, Spavor may be freed if Canada ends Meng Wanzhou case", Sean Boynton, *Global News*, June 24, 2020

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7105816/china-kovrig-spavor-wanzhou-intervention/>

<sup>15</sup> 2016 'NATO's New Role: The Alliance's Response to a Rising China', Zinaida Bechná Bradley A. Thayer. *Naval War College Review*, Volume 69 Number 3 Summer 2016, Article 6 <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1162&context=nwc-review>

position or even seek to improve relations with China. A second challenge is adapting the Alliance for the ‘full spectrum’ confrontation, which will require new muscle mass for dealing with areas like trade, investment, and science that have not formerly been ‘core’ alliance issues. How well equipped is NATO to enter fields where other institutions like the European Union, NAFTA or even Asia Pacific economic institutions (such as the CPTPP) hold the competency, legal standing, and experience? The newly opened US-EU dialogue on China may help with NATO-EU coordination but charting an alliance course will be complicated by the parallel adjustment of US trade policy in the Trump era.

As for making the alliance ‘more political,’ this echoes President Macron’s lament that NATO is ‘brain dead’ when it comes to strategic coordination on allies’ policy regarding Iran, Syria and Libya. Now we may add Alliance policy toward the PRC to this list. Yet, while the United States clearly wants to confront the PRC, the present administration does not believe in multilateral cooperation to achieve its objectives.

This leads us to the third challenge, which is how NATO 2030 will address and incorporate NATO’s Asian partners. The Secretary General has stated, “As we look to 2030, we need to work even more closely with like-minded countries, like Australia, Japan, New Zealand and [South] Korea, to defend the global rules and institutions that have kept us safe for decades, to set norms

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<sup>16</sup> 9 June 2020 launch of NATO 2030 ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)), and Sebastian Sprenger, June 9 2020 “NATO chief seeks to forge deeper ties in China’s neighborhood” <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/06/08/nato-chief-seeks-to-forge-deeper-ties-in-chinas-neighborhood/>

and standards in space and cyberspace, on new technologies and global arms control, and ultimately to stand up for a world built on freedom and democracy, not on bullying and coercion.”<sup>16</sup> In thinking these thoughts, the NATO 2030 process fits into a wider pattern of discussions about how institutions should evolve to manage the implications of the PRC’s rise (e.g. expanding the Five Eyes to bring in Japan,<sup>17</sup> or setting up a ‘D-10’ group of democracies.)<sup>18</sup> NATO would need to identify and carve out a niche in an increasingly crowded field. However, when it comes to putting this into practice, what will Asian partners ask of NATO, and how prepared are NATO allies to meet their expectations?

## Conclusion

I have argued here that NATO is not weighing a choice as to whether to respond to China’s rise with a turn to Asia, but as China’s influence penetrates NATO’s space from multiple directions and at multiple levels, it is starting to face up to the inevitable consequences for the Alliance’s relevance and cohesion. Responding to this challenge is likely to draw the Alliance into a broader range of policy areas already thickly populated with institutional competitors armed with experience and expertise. To be successful, NATO will have to find its ‘niche’ as an operational or diplomatic platform that adds value for its members and Asian partners.

*This article is a personal opinion and does not represent the views of policy of the author’s past or present employers or organizations.*

<sup>17</sup> David Howell, *Japan Times*, June 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/06/30/commentary/japan-commentary/five-eyes-now-become-six/>

<sup>18</sup> “Time for the D10 to replace the G7?”, *ASPI*, James Rogers, 16 June 2020 <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/time-for-the-d10-to-replace-the-g7/>

## NATO and the China Challenge

Dr. Andrew Cottey

For the first time in NATO's history, China is high on the Alliance's agenda. In 2019, NATO engaged in an internal review of the challenges posed by China's rising power, resulting in a confidential report entitled *Understanding China Better*.<sup>1</sup> The report provided the background for the first ever substantive discussion of China by the leaders of NATO's member states at their London meeting in December 2019. The declaration from that meeting stated: '(W)e recognise that China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.'<sup>2</sup>

The London declaration represented a consensus-lite that NATO needs to address China's rising power and global ambitions, but also papered over differences amongst member states.<sup>3</sup> The United States (US) is now pressing for a more robust approach to countering Chinese power and this is unlikely to change, whatever the outcome of the November 2020 US presidential election. European NATO members recognise the challenges posed by China, but many are wary of confronting Beijing or being drawn into an escalating US-China rivalry, and still see China more as an economic opportunity

than a potential threat. Some European states also see the EU, rather than NATO, as the best vehicle for developing collective European policies towards China.

From the 1990s through the 2010s, the consensus in the US, Europe, Japan, Australia and other Western states was that engagement was the best strategy towards China.<sup>4</sup> China's increasing assertiveness over the last decade has sharply illustrated the limits of such engagement. The spectrum of potential China policies open to Western states now ranges from adaptation to the new reality of Chinese power; to a more conditional engagement policy; to a narrowly interest-based transactional policy; to robust countering of Chinese power combined with continued engagement of China; to a maximalist containment policy.<sup>5</sup> It remains to be seen which mix of these policies will eventually emerge and what role NATO may play in the larger context of Western relations with China. Against this background, this paper explores five ways in which NATO may play a role in responding to the China challenge: as a framework for transatlantic dialogue on China; by addressing China's growing reach in the Euro-Atlantic area; by developing a role in countering Chinese

<sup>1</sup> Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning, 'China Brought NATO Closer Together', *War on the Rocks*, 5 February 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/china-brought-nato-closer-together/>

<sup>2</sup> London Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019, para. 6, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Ringsmose and Rynning, 'China Brought NATO Closer Together'.

<sup>4</sup> James Shinn, Ed., *Weaving the Net: Conditional Engagement with China*, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, 'The Debate over US China Strategy', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 2015, Vol. 57, No. 3, pp. 89-110 and Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

power in Asia; by engaging China; and as part of a re-framed burden-sharing approach between the US and Europe.

### **Transatlantic dialogue on China**

If it has not already done so, China may soon equal – or even overtake – the United States as the world’s largest power. If one considers the combined economic and military power of the US, Europe, Japan, Australia, South Korea and other OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, however, the collective power of the West is likely to outweigh that of China for the foreseeable future.<sup>6</sup> The extent to which the West is likely to be successful in addressing the China challenge will depend to a great degree on how far it is able to develop and maintain united policies towards China - as the old maxim goes, ‘united we stand, divided we fall.’ As the largest centres of Western and democratic power, the US and Europe are central to this.

The Western consensus on engagement with China in the 1990s and 2000s emerged largely as a result of de facto convergence of policies, rather than any processes of policy consultation or collaboration. Now, Western governments face a more troubled relationship with China and more difficult choices. Absent more developed and institutionalised frameworks for policy coordination, the risk of policy divergence and an increasingly weakened hand vis-à-vis China is likely to grow. China, furthermore, is skilled at playing ‘divide and rule’ with other states, offering incentives to some and punishment to others depending on their compliance with Chinese interests.

NATO may not be the obvious or natural framework for transatlantic – or wider Western – policy coordination on China. NATO is a defence alliance with a still heavily Euro-Atlantic focus. The China challenge is economic, political and technological as much as, if not more than, it is military. NATO is geographically very distant from China and Asia. Given the broad – especially economic – nature of the China challenge, the European Union-United States relationship might seem to be the most appropriate framework for transatlantic policy dialogue and coordination on China. Over the past decade or so, however, the EU-US relationship has become increasingly weakened. This trend pre-dates US President Donald Trump’s antipathy to the EU: the last EU-US summit was held in 2014 and President Barack Obama was sceptical of the value of high-level EU-US meetings. The Group of 7 (G7) might also be a framework for Western policy coordination on China, but the G7 lacks an institutional infrastructure and is highly dependent on whichever member chairs the group in any given year. Another potential framework is the proposed D-10 group of leading democracies, but so far the D-10 is a largely an idea rather than an established institution.<sup>7</sup> NATO, therefore, may be one of the best available frameworks for transatlantic (and wider Western) dialogue and coordination on China policy: NATO has strong institutional underpinnings, and in past decades it has proven flexible in adapting to a changing agenda and through its partnerships it can bring in important non-members such as Sweden, Finland, Australia and Japan. Some European allies may be wary of using NATO in this way, but the time

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<sup>6</sup> G. John. Ikenberry, ‘The rise of China and the future of the West: Can the liberal system survive?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1, 2008, pp. 23-37.

<sup>7</sup> James Rogers, ‘Time for the D10 to replace the G7?’, *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy

Institute, 16 June 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/time-for-the-d10-to-replace-the-g7/>

may be ripe for NATO to develop an ongoing and substantive dialogue amongst its members about how best to address the China challenge.

### **China in NATO's neighbourhood**

Until recently, the idea of China playing a significant role in NATO's Euro-Atlantic neighbourhood might have seemed unlikely. The growth of Chinese economic power, however, has given China growing influence in Europe, not only as a trade partner but also via investment, in particular through the Belt and Road Initiative. Huawei's role as a global market leader in 5G telecommunications technology has raised questions about the security implications of including Huawei in European 5G networks, with divisions between the US and Europe, as well as amongst European states.<sup>8</sup> Since the late 2010s, further, China's presence in the Euro-Atlantic region has begun to include a military dimension in the form of naval operations and exercises in the Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic, both independently and in conjunction with Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Given the new military dimension to China's presence in Europe, NATO can hardly ignore that presence. If nothing else, NATO naval and air forces will sometimes find themselves operating in close proximity to Chinese naval forces. Building on its experiences of

operating in proximity to Russian naval and air forces, NATO will need to develop an approach to China's military presence that combines defence of the alliance's legitimate security interests with efforts to avoid potentially dangerous incidents – this is unlikely to be easier with China than it is with Russia. More broadly, NATO has the potential to be a framework for its members to discuss the implications of China's growing footprint in the Euro-Atlantic region and how best to respond to the dilemmas it raises. NATO, for example, would seem to be a good vehicle for discussing the security implications of possible Chinese involvement in 5G networks and helping to nudge the alliance's members towards common approaches.

### **NATO in China's neighbourhood**

To date, NATO's presence in Asia has been limited, encompassing its operation in Afghanistan since the 2000s (which was relatively distant from the East Asian core of Asia), a 2005 humanitarian relief operation in Pakistan following a major earthquake in that country and partnerships with Asian states.<sup>10</sup> In the context of increased concern about China's power and ambitions, some observers argue that NATO should upgrade its partnerships with Asian and Pacific states, in particular Japan, Australia and South Korea and possibly also India.<sup>11</sup> Intensified ties with these states (and maybe other East

<sup>8</sup> 'The geopolitics of 5G: America's war on Huawei nears its endgame', *The Economist*, 16 July 2020, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/07/16/americas-war-on-huawei-nears-its-endgame>

<sup>9</sup> Alice Ekman, *China in the Mediterranean: An Emerging Presence*, Paris: Notes de l'Ifrri, February 2018, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ekman\\_china\\_mediterranean\\_2018\\_v2.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ekman_china_mediterranean_2018_v2.pdf), Julian Tucker and Mart Veliste, *China's Mixed Message in the Baltic?*, Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 28 August 2017, <https://isdpr.eu/chinas-mixed-message-baltic/>, and

Anne-Marie Brady, 'Facing Up to China's Military Interests in the Arctic', *China Brief*, Vol. 19, Iss. 21, 10 December 2019,

<https://jamestown.org/program/facing-up-to-chinas-military-interests-in-the-arctic/>.

<sup>10</sup> Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Korea are formal NATO partners and the Alliance has lower profile consultations with China, India, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

<sup>11</sup> India has been cautious about engagement with NATO and therefore may not be open to a formal partnership with the alliance. See David Scott,

Asian countries) could include more developed political consultations (including assessments of the impact of China's rising power), further efforts to strengthen military inter-operability and possibly crisis management exercises and planning.

A more radical option would be for NATO to engage in military exercises in East Asia, including even relating to hypothetical scenarios involving war with China. The South and East China Seas and Taiwan would be the obvious cases here. The US, of course, already has alliance (or alliance-like) commitments to Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan, a significant military footprint in East Asia, and engages in freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in the South and East China Seas. More recently, France and the UK have also undertaken FONOPs in the South and East China Seas, and are strengthening military ties with states such as Japan, India and Australia, and have engaged in bi- and multi-lateral exercises with the US and Japan. Other European states are, however, wary of engaging in FONOPs or other military exercises in East Asia and there is unlikely to be a consensus within NATO in favour of NATO military exercises in East Asia.<sup>12</sup>

NATO has options for strengthening its ties and activities in Asia, but this is likely to be an incremental process. China, further, is unlikely to welcome increased NATO involvement in its neighbourhood. The Alliance will therefore have to strike a difficult balancing act between strengthening ties with other Asian states and avoiding antagonizing China.

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<sup>12</sup> 'NATO and India: The politics of strategic convergence', *International Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2012, pp. 98-116.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Cottey, 'Europe and China's sea disputes: between normative politics, power balancing and

## Engaging China

In parallel with calls for strengthening ties with other Asian states, some analysts argue that NATO should upgrade its relations with China, in particular by creating a NATO-China Council similar to the NATO-Russia Council.<sup>13</sup> NATO and China have engaged in dialogues since the 2000s, including political consultations and military staff-to-staff talks, but these have been relatively low-profile. The argument for a NATO-China Council reflects the larger logic of engagement as a strategy: the hope that dialogue can help to establish common interests, avert conflicts and persuade one's partner to moderate their policies.

A number of factors probably militate against the establishment of a NATO-China Council. The experience of the last twenty years suggests that engagement has, at best, had a limited impact in promoting cooperation between China and the West. The NATO-Russia Council and wider NATO efforts to engage Russia did not prevent Russia's interventions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014. China may not be interested in the establishment of a NATO-China Council: whereas Russia welcomed the status implied by institutions such as the NATO-Russia Council, China may not feel the same need for international status affirmation and may view NATO as a potential part of US-led efforts to contain it. Rather than focusing on a high-profile political institution such as a NATO-China Council, NATO's efforts to engage China may be better served by focusing on operational level contacts to

acquiescence,' *European Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2019, pp. 473-492.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Pavel and Ian Brzezinski, 'It's Time for a NATO-China Council', *Defense One*, 21 August 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/08/its-time-nato-china-council/159326/>

avoid dangerous military incidents (in particular in seas and airspace where Chinese and NATO military forces may operate in proximity).

### **Burden-sharing: The China dimension**

The China question will also impact the transatlantic burden-sharing debate. For the US, if China is its central geopolitical concern, it will expect its European allies to assist it in addressing the China challenge. If the European allies are perceived to be failing to support it over China, pressure may grow to reconsider the US commitment to Europe. For the Europeans, increased US focus on China and Asia may trigger concerns about US disengagement from Europe. With the Covid-19 induced economic recession likely to put severe pressure on government budgets, burden-sharing will surely remain at the heart of NATO's challenges.

Two radical solutions to the burden-sharing debate might hypothetically be possible. One might be described as 'America takes care of China, Europe takes care of itself': this would involve the US reorienting its military forces more fully towards China and Asia and largely withdrawing from Europe. In return, Europe would increase its defence spending and military integration to enable it to defend itself without current levels of US support. The alternative would involve European states taking on a significantly greater role in Asia in order to share that burden with the US and its Asian allies. Such radical and explicit agreements on burden-sharing are unlikely to come to pass, but some of the dynamics implicit in these two scenarios may impact the debate within NATO in coming years. The China question is thus likely to add a

significant new dimension to the NATO burden-sharing debate.

### **Conclusion**

In responding to China's rising power and global ambitions, the world's democracies need to strike a balance between countering China and remaining open to cooperation with Beijing where that is possible on reasonable terms. The United States, Canada and their European allies share underlying common interests in relation to China. Success in responding to the China challenge will depend to a significant degree on how far the world's democracies can forge united policies. As a Euro-Atlantic alliance distant from Asia, NATO may not be the most obvious vehicle for responding to the China challenge, but it may be one of the most readily available institutions through which the US, Canada and Europe can begin to better coordinate their China policies and extend that coordination to Asian partners. NATO's role vis-à-vis China may be more back seat than front row, but if it can help its members and partners to develop common policies towards China, it may play an important part in addressing the central geopolitical challenge of the twenty-first century.

## **Belt and Road to Africa: Strategic considerations for NATO on China's power-plays in Africa**

**Matthew Thomas**

NATO's collective defence and global stability remit of *Active Engagement, Modern Defence* is facing challenges from the east. In December 2019, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged that the People's Republic of China has pivoted west towards the traditional NATO area of responsibility (AoR). Particularly, China has sought to increase its level of engagement with African countries, extending its economic, military, and cultural presence across the continent. This research paper presents the argument that China has been utilizing the coordinated efforts of its economic statecraft, military partnerships, and cultural initiatives to increase Chinese influence in Africa. These efforts are not inherently at odds with NATO's broader security goals for the region, but certainly pose strategic considerations for the Alliance and its approach to China, African countries, and China in Africa.

For the past decade, the People's Republic of China has been increasing its economic engagements, military presence, and cultural proliferation within Africa, in a coordinated effort to increase Chinese power, prestige, and legitimacy abroad as a global leader. This engagement was most visible through economic statecraft (investment, aid, and development in Africa) largely driven by Xi Jinping's flagship economic and diplomatic strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>1</sup> Having vested economic interests overseas precipitates the necessity for overseas security, necessitating a Chinese military buildup in Africa that is currently being observed through the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti,<sup>2</sup> UN peacekeeping operations,<sup>3</sup> and security partnerships with the African Union (AU).<sup>4</sup> Lastly, with the presence of Chinese economic and military elements comes a natural Chinese soft-power spillover.<sup>5</sup> This has been hastened and reinforced by Chinese cultural initiatives such as scholarly exchanges,<sup>6</sup> the spread of Mandarin across

<sup>1</sup> Morgan, Pippa. "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 3 (December 17, 2018): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09592-w>.

<sup>2</sup> Wang, Monica. "China's Strategy in Djibouti: Mixing Commercial and Military Interests." *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 13, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-strategy-djibouti-mixing-commercial-and-military-interests>.

<sup>3</sup> Benabdallah, Lina. "China-Africa Military Ties Have Deepened. Here Are 4 Things to Know." *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/07/06/china-africa-military-ties-have-deepened-here-are-4-things-to-know/>.

<sup>4</sup> Zheng, Sarah. "Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa." *South China Morning Post*, July 13, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3018414/beijing-security-forum-shows-how-chinese-military-takes-belt>.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, Pippa. "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 3 (December 17, 2018): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09592-w>.

<sup>6</sup> Breeze, Victoria, and Nathan Moore. "China Has Overtaken the US and UK as the Top Destination for Anglophone African Students." *Quartz Africa*, June 30, 2017. <https://qz.com/africa/1017926/china-has>

Africa,<sup>7</sup> the 10 000 villages project,<sup>8</sup> and the presence and relative dominance of Chinese media bodies within Africa.<sup>9</sup> This soft-power projection helps create socio-cultural conditions more favorable for Chinese interests and suitable for Chinese firms. The arguments presented will analyze each of these categories of engagement (economic, military, soft power) and provide details on the specific initiatives therein which contribute to this extension of influence.

Regarding China's economic statecraft in Africa, this paper will examine the validity of the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative, clarify the blurred lines between Chinese aid and investment, analyze China's new debt sustainability regime, and contrast the broader differences between the Washington and Beijing consensuses, with their respective potential impacts on the attitudes of African populations. Evidence presented in this paper indicates that despite popular opinions, there is little evidence to suggest that China's economic statecraft in Africa constitutes a "debt-trap". This is the fundamental mischaracterization of Chinese economic statecraft in the West: that it is entirely exploitative, to the ultimate detriment of the host country's economy, and that it erodes Chinese soft power in the region

through its unpopularity. In fact, the opposite is often true (particularly among African elites),<sup>10</sup> with China using its economic statecraft as a method for generating influence and soft power on the continent. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has indicated that its economic and security goals in Africa are linked, with the intention of greater economic engagement being in part to promote "mutual assistance in security", an increase in the "representation and voice" of non-Western countries, and "solidarity and coordination in international affairs."<sup>11</sup>

China's military cooperation on the continent will be examined with respect to China's ambitions for a blue-water navy, overseas hard power projection, and their integrated approach to defense partnerships, conflating economic and strategic interests. The CCP has indicated plainly their intention to develop a blue-water navy. To this point, President Xi's speech to the 12th Party Congress was titled: "Let us continue focusing on maritime affairs and spare no efforts to secure more achievements in the construction of a maritime great power," and featured calls to develop a blue-water capacity, in order to both protect Chinese interests and project Chinese power abroad.<sup>12</sup>

[overtaken-the-us-and-uk-as-the-top-destination-for-anglophone-african-students/](https://www.dw.com/en/kenyans-are-saying-ni-hao-as-chinese-language-learning-booms/a-43720452).

<sup>7</sup> de Vries, Eva. "Kenyans Are Saying 'Ni Hao' as Chinese Language Learning Booms: DW: 14.05.2018." *Deutsche Welle*, May 14, 2018.

<https://www.dw.com/en/kenyans-are-saying-ni-hao-as-chinese-language-learning-booms/a-43720452>.

<sup>8</sup> Mu, Xuequan. "Chinese Company Completes China-Aided Digital TV Project for 1,000 Nigerian Villages." *Xinhua*, October 30, 2019.

[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/30/c\\_138513340.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/30/c_138513340.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Kaiman, Jonathan. "China Has Conquered Kenya: Inside Beijing's New Strategy to Win African Hearts and Minds." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, August 7, 2017.

<https://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-africa-kenya-20170807-htmstory.html>.

<sup>10</sup> "L'analyse En Ligne - Round 6." *Afrobarometer*, 2015. <http://afrobarometer.org/fr/analyse-de-donnees-en-ligne/l'analyse-en-ligne>.

<sup>11</sup> Morgan, Pippa. "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 3 (December 17, 2018): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-09592-w>.

<sup>12</sup> 习近平：进一步关心海洋认识海洋经略海洋，推动海洋强国建设不断取得新成就”，12th National People's Congress, People's Republic of China, *Xinhua*, 31 July 2013. (Xi Jinping: "Let us continue focusing on maritime affairs and spare no efforts to

Moreover, evidence in this report suggests that China has attempted to harmonize the delivery of their commercial and military partnerships across Africa;<sup>13</sup> essentially, where economic interests lie, military interests follow. With greater economic investments, there is a need for greater security to safeguard these investments, in turn creating safer conditions for further investment. Notable examples include the construction of China's first overseas naval base in Djibouti,<sup>14</sup> and the establishment of the China-Africa Defense and Security Forum.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, China's cultural initiatives in Africa will be scrutinized, including analysis of Chinese media conglomerate dominance, the role of Confucius Institutes, and Chinese scholarship programs and university recruitment. At the Johannesburg Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in 2015, the Chinese government pledged to provide satellite television access for 10,000 African villages, delivered via Chinese media conglomerates including StarTimes. While improving the quality of life for millions of Africans by providing access to digital telecommunications infrastructure and programming, this quality of life comes with the cost of mass-projected Chinese state sponsored messaging in many African households. More critically from a collective security perspective, by funneling these development funds for 10,000 villages through Chinese company StarTimes, China has ensured that StarTimes is poised to

dominate the African media market of 1.2 billion people.<sup>16</sup> These cultural/soft-power initiatives add a third component to China's harmonized delivery of economic statecraft and military partnerships; increased Chinese presence in Africa via economic projects and military operations on the continent naturally lead to some degree of cultural spillover and familiarity, which is hastened by deliberate attempts to expose African populations to Chinese education and language. Moreover, educational exchanges allow African students to study in China, develop professional networks in China, learn Mandarin, and then return to their own communities with these tools at their disposal.

Alongside the deterioration of American and other NATO-aligned countries' influence in Africa, China has been establishing its own channels for developing influence. Presented throughout this paper, these influence-generating activities coordinate across sectors (economic, military, cultural) to deliver on a central strategic goal: the development of Chinese influence in Africa, and the presentation of China as a global leader within Africa and beyond.

However, the question remains whether China will be a responsible world leader, upholding the principles of a rules-based international order. China is not likely to support the proliferation of democratic governance, rule of law, and freedom of speech—principles upon which NATO was

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secure more achievements in the construction of a maritime great power.”)

<sup>13</sup> Wang, Monica. “China's Strategy in Djibouti: Mixing Commercial and Military Interests.” Council on Foreign Relations, April 13, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-strategy-djibouti-mixing-commercial-and-military-interests>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Zheng, Sarah. “Security Forum Shows Chinese Military's Route to Africa.” South China Morning

Post, July 13, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3018414/beijing-security-forum-shows-how-chinese-military-takes-belt>.

<sup>16</sup> Marsh, Jenni. “How China Is Slowly Expanding Its Power in Africa, One TV Set at a Time.” CNN. Cable News Network, July 24, 2019.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/23/business/startimes-china-africa-kenya-intl/index.html>.

founded and created to defend.<sup>17</sup> As China rises, a common purpose and unity within the Alliance becomes ever more important. To that point, the crucial issue to consider is China's intent and how it will use its newfound power and influence.

## NATO and China

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) 2010 Lisbon Summit, a new doctrine of *Active Engagement, Modern Defence* was introduced as a strategic concept for NATO defence. The summit and doctrine were intended to reaffirm NATO's commitment to collective defence, as outlined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. More than that, it was intended to reorient NATO's priorities in a new and rapidly changing geopolitical context, wherein NATO was looking to take an active role in security and stability both within and beyond its traditional AoR.<sup>18</sup> In adopting *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, Alliance members agreed that NATO had a responsibility to manage international crises that may impact the Alliance, and to facilitate cooperative security with non-NATO countries, so as to mitigate international instability.<sup>19</sup>

More recently, NATO has been facing challenges with regards to both internal unity

and external rivals. Days before the December 4, 2019 London Declaration was signed, NATO Sec. Gen. Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged for the first time the challenges and opportunities posed by China's rise, while also noting that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has pivoted West toward traditional NATO AOR. Specifically, Stoltenberg remarked that: "China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an alliance," and, "China is coming closer to us in the Arctic, in Africa, investing heavily in our infrastructure in Europe, in cyberspace."<sup>20</sup> While Stoltenberg also asserted that NATO did not want to make a rival out of China, it is difficult to ignore Chinese bullish behavior in the South China Sea,<sup>21</sup> their robust partnership with Russia,<sup>22</sup> NATO's former primary rival, as well as many suspected European and American cyber exploitations, accused of attempted intellectual property theft.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, with Italy having joined China's flagship economic and diplomatic program, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), there is an increased risk of factionalism within the NATO alliance itself.<sup>24</sup> While the relationship between the NATO alliance and a rising China is not inherently adversarial, it is one which requires strategic consideration and analysis. This paper presents such an

<sup>17</sup> Kempe, Frederick. "NATO's China Challenge." Atlantic Council, December 9, 2019.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/natos-china-challenge/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization." Lisbon: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2010.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_82705.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_82705.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Nato to Formally Recognise China 'Challenges' for First Time." South China Morning Post, December 4, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3040457/nato-formally-recognise-china-challenges-first-time>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Kempe, Frederick. "NATO's China Challenge." Atlantic Council, December 9, 2019.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/inflection-points/natos-china-challenge/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Eijk, Femke van der, and Angela Pandita Gunavardana. "The Road That Divided the EU: Italy Joins China's Belt and Road Initiative." European Law Blog (blog), June 25, 2019.

<https://europeanlawblog.eu/2019/06/25/the-road-that-divided-the-eu-italy-joins-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

analysis with regards to China's growing influence in Africa, closer to the traditional NATO AoR, and how this influence may impact NATO in Africa and beyond.

Many policymakers have warned of the risks of Chinese engagement in Africa to NATO and U.S. strategic interests. One such risk is the hypothetical shifting of the world order from an environment favorable for liberal democracies to a more Sinocentric world, wherein China commands greater influence and respect in Africa (and within the African voting bloc) as a world leader than NATO, and NATO-aligned countries. With this influence and respect comes a privileged position in trade, military partnership, and many other aspects of international relations. These observations, however, mischaracterize the objectives of Chinese engagement on the continent as inherently malicious. From this mischaracterization, NATO-aligned nations have been misguided in their response to China's growing impact in Africa. Viewing the struggle for influence on the continent as zero-sum, the U.S. in particular has responded to the Chinese engagement not with increased engagement of their own, but with an attempt to curtail and contain China in Africa. This strategy may be successful in containing Chinese economic, military, and cultural influence, but does nothing to address the decay of NATO-aligned influences in Africa and will likely lead to poorer economic outcomes for African countries as a result.

While not inherently detrimental to the NATO alliance, there remain strategic considerations for NATO regarding China's increased presence in Africa. Specifically, these considerations within the Sino-African context include understanding better China's economic statecraft, military presence and ambitions, and exertion of soft power. This

paper will examine these considerations at length and argue that the objective of this engagement is to present China to Africa and the world as a great power, capable of global leadership. In addition, this paper will theorize the potential high cost to NATO and the West of inaction, and present recommendations based on this analysis.

*The full report is available for download in the Special Publications section of the NATO Association of Canada website.*

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the Government of Canada.*

## Enabling NATO's engagement with like-minded partners in the Asia-Pacific

Dr. Yee-Kuang Heng

In recent years, NATO has undeniably been turning its strategic gaze further eastwards beyond Russia, towards China. Individual NATO members already maintain some military and security presence in the Asia-Pacific, although these are not NATO missions; nor are they necessarily targeted at China per se. Besides the US Navy's Seventh Fleet and US Indo-Pacific Command, the Royal Canadian Navy's Operation Projection, for instance, seeks to maintain a persistent maritime presence, past deployments included frigates HCMS *Regina* and *Ottawa*. The British Royal Navy in 2018 maintained a near-unbroken presence for the first time in 5 years, with plans to deploy its new flagship HMS *Queen Elizabeth* aircraft carrier to the South China Sea. France perfectly timed the arrival of its flagship carrier *Charles de Gaulle* in Singapore in 2019 to coincide with the regional Shangri-La Dialogue. French territories are dotted around the region and Paris has its own Asia-Pacific Strategy. Whereas Lord Ismay once reportedly mused that NATO was 'to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down', the alliance now has to figure out where and how the Chinese figure within its *raison d'être*. NATO's potential role in Asia has

implications for long-standing discussions about its purpose as a collective defence, a collective security function or both.<sup>1</sup> This paper proposes that a more recent interpretation of NATO's reconfiguration as a "security risk management organization" may allow it to engage on the basis of "risk management" with regional partners.<sup>2</sup>

When marking the 70th anniversary of NATO, US Vice President Mike Pence referred to a new geographic domain for the alliance: "By working together, we can maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific where independent nations boldly pursue their own interests".<sup>3</sup> Assistant Secretary of Defense Randall Schriver also stated: "We are stepping up our engagement with European and NATO allies, such as the United Kingdom, France and Canada, with whom we share enduring interests in the Indo-Pacific region".<sup>4</sup> The NATO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary London summit of 2019 was the first time the rise of China and its implications were recognized in a summit declaration. NATO's former Chief of Policy Planning made similar arguments that "if NATO did not go to the Asia-Pacific, the region would come to NATO."<sup>5</sup> NATO Secretary General Jens

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rupp, 'NATO 1949 and NATO 2000: from collective defense toward collective security', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 23 Issue 3, 2000, pp.154-176

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Morgan, 'Strategy in Flux: NATO's adoption of risk management and the elaboration of a new framework of command and control', *Defence Studies*, Vol. 15 No.1, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by Vice President Mike Pence, "NATO engages: the Alliance at 70," Washington, DC, 3 April 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Bruce Vaughn, Derek Mix & Paul Belkin, "France, the United Kingdom, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP): issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, 20 December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Fabrice Pothier, "Five challenges that NATO must overcome to stay relevant", *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 4 April 2019,

<https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/04/five-challenges-for-nato>, accessed 09 July 2020

Stoltenberg however qualified that: “There’s no way that NATO will move into the South China Sea but we have to address the fact that China is coming closer to us, investing heavily in infrastructure... We see them in Africa, we see them in the Arctic, we see them in cyber space and China now has the second-largest defense budget in the world.”<sup>6</sup> The NATO chief interestingly described the shift towards Asia-Pacific as “not about a *global presence*, but a *global approach*.”<sup>7</sup> Naval vessels operating in the South China Sea under NATO command do not seem likely, at least under Stoltenberg’s formulation. Working with regional partners to tackle shared risks that have worldwide interconnection of national interests may be a more viable means enabling NATO’s “global approach” to make an impact.

### Global NATO in the Asia-Pacific?

China may be increasingly perceived as a challenge, but NATO has looked towards the Asia-Pacific before in search of solutions and partners. With the “partners across the globe” initiative, NATO initiated partnerships with Asia-Pacific countries as part of what Bush-era administration officials dubbed “global NATO” during the Riga Summit in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Japan, Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand (NZ) and Australia belong to this initiative. Australia is one of the top non-NATO troop contributors to NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan, alongside ROK, NZ and Singapore. Australia, NZ, ROK and Japan participate in NATO’s Interoperability

Platform (IP) to further enhance interoperability for NATO-led missions. NATO has also launched several projects outside NATO territories through its efforts at “Projecting stability through cooperation.”<sup>9</sup> NATO has consulted with Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia on maritime piracy and countering narcotics in Afghanistan, although these countries do not belong to a specific bilateral program.

### Convergence of interests with like-minded Asia-Pacific countries

NATO’s desire to play a role in the Asia-Pacific is well-aligned with sentiment in the region that suggests a growing discomfort *both* with the rise of China and the US under Donald Trump, according to the “State of Southeast Asia 2020” report published by Singapore’s Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. The region is searching for actors that may help increase strategic flexibility and diversify options beyond a binary US-China choice. As a maritime domain, the Asia-Pacific also shares interests in maintaining maritime sea lines of communication and seaborne trade with the North Atlantic region. Japan’s move towards embracing a wider range of non-US centric security and defence partnerships may also have implications for NATO. Tokyo after all is NATO’s longest-standing partner outside Europe. PM Shinzo Abe became the first sitting Japanese PM to address the NATO Council in 2014. Japan has convergent interests in maritime security: its Maritime

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Holly Ellyatt, “China is ‘coming closer’ but we don’t want a new adversary, NATO chief says”, CNBC News, 2 December 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/12/02/jens-stoltenberg-rising-power-china-must-be-addressed-by-nato.html>, accessed 09 July 2020

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Sebastian Sprenger, “NATO chief seeks to forge deeper ties in China’s neighborhood”, *Defence News*, 08 June 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2020/06>

[/08/nato-chief-seeks-to-forge-deeper-ties-in-chinas-neighborhood/](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm), accessed 12 July 2020

<sup>8</sup> Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, ‘Global NATO.’ *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 5, 2006, p. 110

<sup>9</sup> NATO, “Partnerships: projecting stability through cooperation”, 12 June 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_84336.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm), accessed 23 June 2020

Self-Defence Force has trained with NATO vessels in Europe and designated a liaison officer to NATO Maritime Command.

NATO has massive experience in capacity-building and training of local forces in Iraq, as well as support for the African Union in Somalia. NATO naval task forces have also worked on counter-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. Since 2014, NATO's Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) Initiative provides assistance to partners in various fields when requested. However, many Asia-Pacific countries prefer to be circumspect as they develop new security partnerships, careful not to suggest China directly as the reason and target. NATO's post-Cold War reconfiguration into "the world's premier security risk management organization"<sup>10</sup> suggests potential means of engaging the Asia-Pacific. In a joint op-ed with insurance giant Lloyds of London, then-NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen claimed that NATO was now 'in the business of anticipating and managing risks' for its member states.<sup>11</sup> Two such risks are discussed below.

### **The technology-security nexus**

Using its Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme, NATO may be well-placed to work with the Asia-Pacific in managing risks arising from the technology-security nexus. Concern over fake news is rising together with the use of AI Twitter bots and social media for misinformation and

foreign media manipulation, for example. Fact-checking initiatives by journalists and civil society groups such as CekFakta Indonesia may welcome new partners. Jen Stoltenberg has flagged up Chinese investment in 5G critical infrastructure as an issue of alliance concern. Many NATO member states also share concerns with Asia-Pacific countries about 5G technologies and the US-China tech war. Singapore's main mobile phone providers have chosen Nokia and Ericsson for its 5G infrastructure, with smaller parts for Huawei. Australia and Japan have excluded Huawei entirely. Japan's concerns over cyber-security are seen in its contribution of an expert to NATO's [Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence](#) (CCDOE). Cooperation in cyber-defence has also emerged as an important plank of the new Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme signed in August 2019 between Australia and NATO. Australia has suffered serious cyber-attacks by a "persistent threat actor." NATO's CCDOE based in Estonia could contribute more a decade's worth of experience in cyber-defence. As Secretary-General Stoltenberg stated during his visit to Japan, "defence is no longer about just looking at a map and deciding where to place armies. It's also about countering misinformation. Protecting infrastructure. Making our societies resilient to attack."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Morga, 'Strategy in Flux: NATO's adoption of risk management and the elaboration of a new framework of command and control', *Defence Studies*, Vol. 15 No.1, 2015

<sup>11</sup> Lord Levene and Anders Rasmussen, "Piracy, cyber-crime and climate change – bringing NATO and insurance together", *The Telegraph*, 30 September 2009, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/comment/6247862/Piracy-cyber-crime-and-climate-change-bringing->

[NATO-and-insurance-together.html](#), accessed 01 July 2020

<sup>12</sup> "The geography of danger has shifted", Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Japan National Press Club, Tokyo, Japan [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_148125.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_148125.htm?selectedLocale=en), 31 October 2017, accessed 09 June 2020

## The climate change-conflict nexus

The 2014 Wales summit declaration warned that climate change might shape the future security environment in areas of concern to NATO. The Asia-Pacific is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world arising from extreme weather events and climate change, with much of its population living along the coastlines. Japan has suffered severe damage from torrential rainfall and mudslides, while Australia has endured bushfires and drought. Singapore and Indonesia face rising sea levels. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) already engages with Japan, Australia, ROK and NZ. Regional organizations such as the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) may be another crucial partner. The potential climate change-conflict nexus also comprises interconnected risks such as newly emerging infectious diseases and food security. Here, NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division (ESCD) which assesses climate change, may well work with Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures to perform horizon scans of "black swan" interconnected and overlapping security challenges. How to maintain food supply chain resilience in the face of climate change or COVID disruption is also of concern to ASEAN and partners such as Japan, ROK and China.

## Challenges and prospects

As a military alliance, it is unlikely that NATO can spare the combat power and resources to project a sizable military presence in the Asia-Pacific. NATO has its hands full already. The Russian threat has

resurfaced with a vengeance, together with Cold War-redux NATO exercises in response. For instance, DEFENDER-Europe 20 tested alliance ability to surge combat forces from the continental US mainland in response to an attack. This saw the largest deployment of U.S.-based troops to Europe in more than 25 years. There are also internal dissensions from President Trump's complaints about burden-sharing to President Macron declaring NATO "brain dead". French and Turkish naval vessels have also faced off against each other off the coast of Libya. NATO member Italy has signed onto China's Belt and Road Initiative. These differences are of course not new to NATO throughout its history. In the 1960s France withdrew under Charles De Gaulle, first its naval forces from NATO Mediterranean Command and eventually from the NATO integrated military command structure.

NATO's growing concern over China is part of what US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calls "a trans-Atlantic awakening" on how to better respond to China, not just in NATO councils.<sup>13</sup> The European Union has also proposed a formal US-EU dialogue on China, and described China as a "systemic rival" for the first time. NATO's gaze towards China will find a receptive audience in the Asia-Pacific. However, the alliance has to tread delicately and subtly engaging with partners who do not want to be seen as blatantly taking sides. Rather than military presence which Secretary General Stoltenberg has discounted, NATO may cooperate with partners on managing shared risks. The technology-security nexus and climate change-conflict nexus both have wide resonance within the region. NATO has accumulated experience and knowledge in these fields. Lessons

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Robin Emmott, "U.S. and EU must face down China together, Pompeo says", *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pompeo-eu/us-and-eu-must-face-down-china-threat->

[pompeo-says-idUSKBN23W2KA](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pompeo-eu/us-and-eu-must-face-down-china-threat-), 26 June 2020, accessed 01 July 2020

learned from Asia-Pacific partners may in turn help NATO address its own challenges in the North Atlantic region. As a premier security risk management organization, NATO has valuable cards to play.

## **Can distant water douse fire? NATO in the geopolitics of the South China Sea Region**

**Dr. Alexander C. Tan**

### **Introduction**

As an Atlantic alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a collective security organization with a primarily European and Atlantic theater of operational focus. At the height of Cold War 1.0 – the US-USSR rivalry – NATO was not only the sharp and pointed end of the West’s engagement with the Warsaw Pact and the anti-communist confrontation, it was an important institution that brought North America and Western Europe together.<sup>1</sup> With the demise of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s, NATO underwent significant transformations in response to the new operational environment. From a 16-member organization, NATO expanded to 30-member countries to include 14 Eastern European states (10 of which are former Warsaw Pact members). More importantly, with the Cold War 1.0 effectively over, NATO in the decade of the 1990s was thrust into a drastically different operational environment and needed to reorient the organization in the midst of a disintegrated USSR and Yugoslavia. In a way, NATO became less of a defensive shield against external attacks on Western Europe and converted into a ‘policing’ organization that enforces and protects the Western alliance’s view of the world order. Fast forward to 2020, NATO is now challenged to redefine itself lest it becomes irrelevant in the onslaught of China’s rise, the

US’ America First doctrine, and Russia’s mischief.

In unveiling NATO 2030, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg clearly noted the security implications of the disruptive ascendance of China to the Atlantic alliance as “the rise of China is fundamentally shifting the global balance of power.”<sup>2</sup> He goes on to state that “we see China coming closer to us...[therefore] we need to do that, we’re working together with partners, not least in the Asia Pacific, including Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, which are very close and like-minded partners to NATO.” This vision statement is both aspirational as it is operational. Yet, it begs the question of whether NATO will engage China in the European theater of operations or engage in the Asia-Pacific backyard of China. In this short essay, I consider the latter with particular focus on NATO in the geopolitics of the South China Sea (SCS).

### **South China Sea**

Many observers point out that the South China Sea (SCS) is the next central flashpoint that has the potential of pitting superpowers into open conflict. A body of water that has connected the countries of East and Southeast Asia through centuries of trade and human movement, it has become a hot arena of contending sovereignty claims – by China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines,

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<sup>1</sup> Stoltenberg, Jens. “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world.” June 8, 2020.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

and Taiwan – since oil was predicted to exist in vast quantities in 1968.<sup>3</sup>

Countries with no sovereignty claims in the SCS have always insisted on the freedom of navigation of this important sea lane of communication, thereby reinforcing the global common status of the SCS.<sup>4</sup> However, since the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08, China has been asserting its historical but controversial claims with its pointed sabre – the PLA Navy. And despite the July 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration against China’s nine-dash line claims in the SCS,<sup>5</sup> China has continued building on the artificial islands,<sup>6</sup> militarizing their outposts, engaging in anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) actions, and planning to establish an air defense identification zone (ADIZ).<sup>7</sup> China’s activities, together with actions of other claimant countries, have noticeably increased tensions<sup>8</sup> in the SCS and clearly undermine

the long-held understanding of the SCS as a global common.

Indeed, “China’s geopolitical rise and its increasing projection of power are stark proof that the international balance of power is beginning to shift.”<sup>9</sup> This power shift is most evident in the SCS and the global/regional implications are stark as China is better able to enforce its nine-dash line claims through military means, e.g. A2/AD and SCS-ADIZ. More importantly, China’s actions and forward posture clearly denigrates the SCS as a global common, changes the status quo, and turns the SCS into a Chinese lake.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely this second point – SCS as a global common – that has repercussions beyond the Asia-Pacific region. As of 2016, over US \$3.3 trillion worth of trade was moving through the SCS.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the trade volume of the six largest NATO

<sup>3</sup> Snyder, Craig. "The Implications of Hydrocarbon Development on the South China Sea." *International Journal* 52, no. 1 (1996): 142-58. Accessed July 8, 2020. doi:10.2307/40203175.

<sup>4</sup> The US in early July 2020 sent a naval task force that included two aircraft carriers to conduct freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea. See Jakes, Laura “With Beijing’s military nearby, US sends two aircraft carriers to the South China Sea.” July 4, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/04/us/politics/south-china-sea-aircraft-carrier.html>

<sup>5</sup> Panda, Ankit. “International Court Issues Unanimous Award in *Philippines v. China* Case on South China Sea.” *The Diplomat*, July 12, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/international-court-issues-unanimous-award-in-philippines-v-china-case-on-south-china-sea/>

<sup>6</sup> China reported that it found freshwater source in the artificial island in the South China Seas. See Chen, Stephen. “Freshwater reservoir found at one of Beijing’s artificial islands in the South China Sea.” June 28, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/print/news/china/science/article/3090761/freshwater-reservoir-found-one-beijings-artificial-islands-south>

<sup>7</sup> There are no guarantees that China will never establish an SCS ADIZ. See Siow, Maria. “Chinese

think tank rejects reports of planned South China Sea air identification zone.” *South China Morning Post*, July 10, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3092650/chinese-think-tank-rejects-reports-planned-south-china-sea-air>

<sup>8</sup> “Vietnam protests Beijing’s sinking of South China Sea boat” *CNBC* April 4, 2020.

<https://www.cnbcm.com/2020/04/04/vietnam-protests-beijings-sinking-of-south-china-sea-boat.html> ;

Gotinga, JC. “Chinese warship targeted Philippine Navy vessel in West PH Sea – AFP.” April 23, 2020.

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/258783-afp-says-chinese-warship-targeted-navy-vessel-west-philippine-sea-april-2020>

<sup>9</sup> Legarda, Helena and Meia Nouwens. “NATO needs a China policy.” *The Diplomat*, July 18, 2019.

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/nato-needs-a-china-policy/>

<sup>10</sup> Pejsova, Eva. “The South China Seas commons: behind and beyond the sovereignty disputes.” European Union Institute for Security Studies Issue Alert 30 (June 2014); Erickson, Andrew S. “Keeping the South China Sea a peaceful part of the global commons.” *The National Interest*, July 28, 2015.

<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/keeping-the-south-china-sea-peaceful-part-the-global-commons-13437>

<sup>11</sup> China Power Project-CSIS. “How much trade transits the South China Sea?”

economies – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, UK, and the US – passing through the SCS added up to over US \$770 billion in 2016.<sup>12</sup> The SCS, as a global common, connects the Asia-Pacific to Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and is thus a vital factor to the economic prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world. NATO then, as an important vanguard of the rules-based international order, has a significant role to play in maintaining the status quo of the SCS as a global common.

### **Can distant waters douse fire?**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO has participated in many operations beyond its Atlantic region – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and the counter-piracy Operation Ocean Shield, for example. Yet, while it may seem that ‘distant waters may not douse fire’ in the geopolitics of the SCS, in an interconnected and globalized world, if a bushfire should start in this distant place then the flames can certainly engulf Europe. As Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg notes “we see China coming closer to us...China is changing the global balance of power...and NATO has to address the security consequences of China’s rise.”<sup>13</sup> One very unequivocal arena where all these concerns converge is the global common that is the SCS and the clear threat to that status.

The SCS is where China’s core interests and NATO’s collide. It is in China’s interest to ‘privatize’ the SCS while NATO’s priority is to maintain it as a global common. Under the existing rules-based international order, NATO’s active role in the protection of the global commons is not without precedent.

<https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Stoltenberg, Jens. “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world.” June 8, 2020.

Operation Ocean Shield – began in 2009 – is where NATO committed significant naval assets to the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean in a counter-piracy operation to protect trade routes and maintain the safety and smooth operations of these maritime global commons. In the SCS, NATO is not a disinterested party.

If the NATO 2030 vision is to be realized, especially that of addressing the security consequences of China’s rise, the critical next steps for the Atlantic alliance are to define the SCS as a core interest; to align the military-security dimension with the politico-economic dimension; and then to lead and act in concert with partners in the region in vigilant maintenance of this maritime global commons. These steps are essential in order for NATO to fully and effectively address the disruptive ascendance of China but more importantly ensure that NATO remains relevant as a collective security organization.

If Operation Ocean Shield is an indication that securing global commons is one of NATO’s core interests, then, by extension the SCS is a core interest as well. A significant amount of trade from NATO member countries passes through the SCS to the dynamic markets of the Asia-Pacific.<sup>14</sup> Both the Indian Ocean and the SCS are vital trade routes that connect the Atlantic to Asia as well as the Pacific to Africa. It is nonsensical for NATO to expend resources to maintain the Indian Ocean as a global common only to abstain and allow the SCS to be unilaterally turned into a ‘private lake.’ Clearly, it is within NATO’s core interest to secure the global commons status of the SCS as

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)

<sup>14</sup> China Power Project-CSIS. “How much trade transits the South China Sea?”

<https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

international law and an international court ruling are unequivocal on this issue.<sup>15</sup>

As a core interest, security issues are intertwined with politico-economic issues and in order to be effective the perspectives and politics of NATO, EU, and non-EU NATO members must align properly. ASEAN's experience can serve as a warning when members' perspectives and politics do not align as China can exploit differences in the politico-economic arm and undermine the effectiveness of the military-security establishment. As Secretary-General Stoltenberg calls for "NATO to be used more politically...as well as having the political will to use NATO,"<sup>16</sup> the *EU-China Strategic Outlook 2019* and NATO 2030 vision are steps in the right direction of aligning NATO and EU positions in addressing China's rise.

Lastly, NATO is a critical non-resident actor as a defender of global rules and institutions in the geopolitics of the SCS. Currently in the SCS, this role largely falls on the US and Australia (to a limited extent) through their FONOPS. NATO must quickly realize that it is a pivotal actor whose participation boosts, elevates, and reinforces the global commons status of the SCS. In addition, NATO's engagement in the SCS re-equilibrates the regional balance of power that is dangerously tilting towards an actor determined to

undermine the existing regional order with its increasing A2/AD capability.

In this dynamic environment, time is of the essence and NATO must act now before China's aggressive action "changes facts on the ground, [and] presents [the world] with a *fait accompli*."<sup>17</sup> As a collective security organization, NATO must be pro-active in establishing formal mechanisms with 'like-minded countries like Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea...to defend the global rules and institutions'<sup>18</sup> in the SCS and Indo-Pacific. This formal mechanism in the SCS do not have to be a new creation as it can easily be integrated into existing structures such as the Indo-Pacific command, QUAD, and other defense arrangements in the region. NATO must help lead in this collective action by including countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as they have significant stake in the stability of their SCS neighborhood. Likewise, Ian Brzezinski in a recent essay in the *New Atlanticist* recommends several actions that NATO can undertake including establishing a NATO-China council, an Indo-Pacific center of excellence to integrate in NATO's command structure, a small Indo-Pacific military headquarters, and conducting its own operations and exercises in the region.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Erickson, Andrew S. "Keeping the South China Sea a peaceful part of the global commons." *The National Interest*, July 28, 2015.

<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/keeping-the-south-china-sea-peaceful-part-the-global-commons-13437>

<sup>16</sup> Stoltenberg, Jens. "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world." June 8, 2020.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Haidar, Suhasini. "India-China ties will be reset after LAC stand-off, says former NSA Shivshankar Menon." *The Hindu*, July 11, 2020.

[https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-china-](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-china-ties-will-be-reset-after-lac-stand-off-says-former-nsa-shivshankar-menon/article32049764.ece?homepage=true)

[ties-will-be-reset-after-lac-stand-off-says-former-nsa-shivshankar-](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-china-ties-will-be-reset-after-lac-stand-off-says-former-nsa-shivshankar-menon/article32049764.ece?homepage=true)

[menon/article32049764.ece?homepage=true](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-china-ties-will-be-reset-after-lac-stand-off-says-former-nsa-shivshankar-menon/article32049764.ece?homepage=true)

<sup>18</sup> Stoltenberg, Jens. "Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world." June 8, 2020.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Brzezinski, Ian. "NATO's role in a transatlantic strategy on China." *New Atlanticist*, June 1, 2020.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-role-in-a-transatlantic-strategy-on-china/>

So can the distant waters douse fire? NATO's objective should and must be the prevention of a 'fire' from breaking out in the SCS in the first place. NATO certainly has the capability and capacity to do so. In concert with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region, NATO can defend and secure global rules, norms, and institutions in these parts of our interconnected world. But it must act now in order to be effective and remain relevant in this dynamic and ever-evolving environment in the geopolitics of the South China Sea.

## A NATO-Pacific Forum could be key to collective defence in Asia

Dr. Wojciech Lorenz

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) currently faces one of the greatest challenges in its history. With the rise of China, the United States is confronted with a rival power who can challenge the US' ability to defend interests pertaining to the current rules-based international order. If China dominates, the subsequent American threat perceptions and political discourse will have inevitable repercussions for NATO, and European allies will have to take a bigger responsibility for the security of Europe and its neighbourhood. At the same time, NATO will have to be able to share some of the risks and costs of strengthening the global security order challenged by China. Should it be unable to do so, the relevance of the Alliance for the United States may diminish, which can have negative consequences for NATO with the US limiting its contribution to collective defence, the main binding force of the Alliance. Therefore, one should not ask whether NATO needs to adjust to the rise of China, but rather how it should do so.

### The foundations of the Alliance

NATO was originally created in response to the fear that a weakened and unstable Europe following World War II could be easy prey for the communist ideology of the USSR, undermining America's ability to compete with its Soviet rival. This threat created a platform of common interest between Western Europe and the US and Canada. The US offered security guarantees to its allies, which entailed some costs and risks but also

brought multiple benefits. Washington could influence the development of the military potential of the allies, spreading the costs and risks of deterrence and defence. In protecting Europe from Soviet pressure, the US could also compete with the USSR globally. It soon became clear that although the Soviet Union came out of the World War II as a major power, it was not a peer rival for the US.

While the USSR managed to develop a nuclear capability that limited America's ability to use nuclear weapons for political pressure due to the risk of so-called Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the United States maintained technological superiority and the ability (at least in theory) to control escalation in case of conflict. The USSR also proved much weaker economically in the long-term, with the performance of the Soviet economy averaging at 50% that of the US. As a result, the USSR was unable to offer an attractive alternative to the idea of a "free world" based on democracy and capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

The US, with the support of like-minded countries, has laid a foundation for the modern international system based on the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank, while US military power has served as a custodian of the global commons. Its ability to defend interests and allies globally encouraged a number of states to look for US security guarantees. Although NATO was a collective defence organization, there was a constant pressure on broadening NATO's role, so it would be able to

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<sup>1</sup> A Comparison of the US and Soviet Economies: Evaluating the Performance of the Soviet System, Directorate of Intelligence, October 1985.

[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000497165.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000497165.pdf)

coordinate its political response to threats, which came from outside of the Euro-Atlantic area. The discussion about the scope of NATO's mission sometimes resulted in serious disagreements between members, which led to attempts to limit US military contributions to European security.

### **New strategic realities**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US and NATO enjoyed a three-decade long period without a risk of conflict between major powers. During this period, the US became by far the strongest military power and helped enlarge the area of stability and prosperity in Europe by expanding NATO. With the support of its allies, it focused on the fight with international terrorism, while Russia and China have gradually improved their military capabilities and other instruments of power.

Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has modernized its nuclear potential, which it uses as a psychological and political tool to threaten the West with the risk of military confrontation and escalation to the nuclear level. During a conflict with the Alliance it could use advanced military capabilities to delay or discourage NATO collective defence mission on the territory of new member states. But even during peace, it uses hybrid warfare tactics (a mixture of political and military tools, supported with disinformation and cyber activities) to weaken the West politically. The ultimate Russian goal is to recreate a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space and a

buffer zone of diminished security on the territory along NATO and the EU's eastern borders. If such pressure turned into a military confrontation, NATO would have to either go to war to reestablish the status quo or lose credibility.

At the same time, US security experts indicate that it is China who poses a real strategic challenge for the US.<sup>2</sup> A rising global power, China presents risks and threats for the US and its allies in strategic, normative, political, economic, and military dimensions. In the normative dimension, China is an open rival of democracies. It is based on a one-party, authoritarian political system, largely sealed from outside influence by strict censorship of information. In a 2019 Defence White Paper, China openly stressed its intention to build a global security architecture based on Chinese values and cooperation models (such as an illiberal political system and state capitalism), which are presented as more effective than Western liberal democracy and the free market.<sup>3</sup>

In economic terms China is the only comparative rival of the US. Depending on the estimates, China overtook the U.S. as the world's largest economy in 2014, with more conservative estimates indicating that it still needs two decades to reach this point.<sup>4</sup> Its economic clout and various states' dependency on Chinese cooperation gives Beijing significant leverage. These tactics have already been used to intimidate Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic and Canada, who have tried to criticise China for human rights

<sup>2</sup> Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain. Defending America in Future High Tech Warfare*, Hachette, New York 2020.

<sup>3</sup> J. Szczudlik, "'New Era' in China's Defence Policy," *PISM Bulletin*, 122, 27 August 2019; [https://pism.pl/publications/New\\_Era\\_in\\_Chinas\\_Defence\\_Policy](https://pism.pl/publications/New_Era_in_Chinas_Defence_Policy), for the full text of the 2019 defence white paper, see: "China's National Defense in the

New Era", Andrew S. Erickson, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2019/07/full-text-of-defense-white-paper-chinas-national-defense-in-the-new-era-english-chinese-versions/>

<sup>4</sup> "China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States," *CRS Report*, 25 June 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>

violations or infringe China's interests in other ways.

China's Belt and Road Initiative – a massive infrastructure development project between China and the rest of the world, offers many opportunities for investments but will further increase Beijing's leverage. The project will help secure access to markets and strategic resources, making China a dominant player in Eurasia, Africa, and potentially even in the Arctic.<sup>5</sup> China's growing economic power and political influence is visible at the UN, where China already wields influence over the G77, a group of 134 developing countries in the UN General Assembly comprising almost 70% of the organisation's members. The support of this voting bloc makes it almost impossible to pass a resolution which would be against China's core interests.

China's economic and political influence is supported by its growing military capability. Since the beginning of 1990, China has been transforming its armed forces, preparing for a conflict with the US. Its powerful navy, modern weapons systems and artificial islands in the South China Sea augment control over the key maritime route responsible for 20 percent of global trade.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese government has created an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) bubble in its "near seas" where it can defeat the US or threaten it with unacceptably high losses. China also has ambitions to develop power projection capabilities beyond its neighbourhood and plans to become the world's technology superpower. With a

technological edge over the US, EU, and NATO, it would further undermine their ability to defend their sovereignty and interests in regional and global dimensions. China's ability to challenge the rules-based international order with political and military tools is augmented by their strategic partnership with Russia<sup>7</sup>, which can have direct negative security implications for NATO. China and Russia share a common goal of weakening the US position and Western cohesion, and by doing so, improve their chances to initiate a change in the international system. They also share goals of establishing spheres of influence in their neighbourhoods, where they would be able to exert political and military pressure in defence of their interests. The two rising powers strengthen both political and military cooperation through joint manoeuvres in the South China Sea, the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea.

There are several scenarios in which China could challenge the vital interests of the US and undermine the stability of other NATO states. By gradually augmenting its control over the South China Sea, China undermines freedom of navigation in the global commons. It might also have a physical ability to block the sea route, which is important for US and Europe and vital for American allies and NATO partners – including Japan and South Korea. China could also direct credible military threats to Taiwan, which could increase the risk of conflict. If there was a confrontation with the US, China could use all available tools (disinformation, cyber

<sup>5</sup> "China's Strategy in Africa," *Enerdata*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.enerdata.net/publications/executive-briefing/china-strategy-in-africa.html>

<sup>6</sup> China Power Team. "How much trade transits the South China Sea?" *China Power*, 2 August, 2017. Updated 10 October 2019. Accessed 5 August 2020. <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>

<sup>7</sup> U. A. Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Peoples Republic of China and the Russian Federation as Strategic Allies, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, June 2020, Accessed 13 September 2020, file:///C:/Users/Wojciech/Downloads/china\_and\_russia\_09.07.2020.pdf

activities, threat of economic sanctions) to exert political pressure on NATO member states and discourage them from offering any meaningful support for their American ally. There is also a risk of coordinated actions by China and Russia. During the Covid-19 pandemic both states used hybrid warfare tactics against the West. If they decided to strike in tandem this would greatly increase their political efficiency. In the case of a serious military confrontation with the West, both states can destroy satellites or paralyze military systems through cyber-attacks, which could limit the US and NATO ability to use military force and maintain credibility of nuclear deterrence. China could also deploy combat ships to the Baltic Sea or the Mediterranean, complicating Alliance military planning. Through its control of crucial infrastructure in Europe, including stakes in ports in Greece, France, Spain, Belgium, and Germany, it could limit US and Canada opportunities to send reinforcements to Europe. With such de facto partnerships, both states improve their chances of enforcing concessions through a threat of military confrontation. But even without such worst case scenarios, China's growing influence in Europe and its neighbourhood has already increased the vulnerability of a number of states to coercion, disinformation and political pressure. This undermines the political cohesion of NATO and the EU, and causes frictions between Europe and the US.

### **NATO's possible response**

A coordinated Western response to the rise of China seems inevitable. China is a threat to the current international rules-based order, which might be not perfect but arguably offers the most stable security mechanisms and greatest chances for prosperity for the largest number of states. This system has offered unprecedented stability for the last seven decades. The alternative model

proposed by China and Russia may improve the position of the authoritarian regimes but will worsen the prospects for many countries, including democracies, to maintain political stability and economic development. To meet such a challenge, the coordinated response will have to be provided by the US, EU, NATO and the alliance's like-minded partners.

NATO will have to strike a balance between remaining a collective defence organization, with its main mission limited to the Euro-Atlantic area and improving its ability to resist different dimensions of security challenged by China. Keeping collective defence as its core mission is fundamental for NATO's survival. At the same time, if NATO is unable to ensure a politically visible and viable response to China's rise, it may become difficult for US politicians to justify the growing investments in the Alliance's collective defence in Europe, which is crucial for the deterrence of Russia. In short, if NATO wants to survive as a collective defence organization in the treaty area, it will have to increase its ability to resist Chinese pressure, both in the Euro-Atlantic area and the Asia-Pacific. At the same time, because of geographical location and limited potential of European states it would be unrealistic to expect that NATO develops plans and capabilities for military operations in Asia-Pacific. This is neither feasible nor desirable. The response has to be mainly political. However, a lot can also be done in practical terms by strengthening defence and deterrence in space, information and cyber domains.

NATO has already taken a number of steps which could facilitate coordinated responses to threats coming from both Russia and China. Its cyber policy indicates that in the case of a devastating cyber-attack, the collective defence mechanism of Article 5 could be

invoked. New, updated guidelines for resilience should limit possibilities of investments in critical infrastructure by Chinese state-controlled companies. The 2019 space strategy can better prepare NATO for a crisis in which China and Russia could threaten the destruction of satellites.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, in the 2019 London Declaration, NATO stated that China poses both opportunities and challenges.<sup>9</sup> Such ambiguous political language is used to limit the negative consequences of admitting that China is a challenge. Nevertheless, for the collective defence alliance, a political statement of this sort creates additional pressure to adjust policies in areas where China's actions can have a negative effect on NATO's security. This may also create a chance for politically visible initiatives, which would demonstrate that NATO would contribute to this major, long term security challenge for the US.

To achieve such goals NATO will have to reconcile two interests, which can seem contradictory. First, it should not move to Asia-Pacific in a physical sense, (i.e. by demonstrating it is ready to defend the freedom of navigation,) even though its maritime strategy and invocation of article 4 (consultations) by a member state could open the way for coordinated actions during the crisis. Second, it should send a political signal that it is ready to support the rules-based system globally, including in the Asia-Pacific.

<sup>8</sup> NATO's approach to space, NATO, 27 April 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_175419.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_175419.htm), K. Paulauskas, Space: NATO's last frontiers, NATO, 13 March 2020, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/03/13/space-natos-latest-frontier/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the

This could be achieved in the framework of cooperative security, one of the three missions of the Alliance. NATO has partnerships with 40 states across the globe, with some of them sharing the same values and principles. The group of such partners includes Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. NATO could move its bilateral relationship (NATO+1) with those partners to the next level and launch a new multilateral format of cooperation (NATO+4), which could be branded NATO-Pacific Forum (NPF). The NPF would offer a high visibility political tool for the demonstration of common interests in defence of a rules-based order. The format could be limited to political consultations at the level of foreign ministers, and the heads of state and government. Such a strategic message directed to the US audience would help augment transatlantic bonds and limit the risk of a renewed debate about NATO's relevance. If there was a need to coordinate practical cooperation, NATO+4 could also be held at the level of chiefs of staff, and ministers of defence.

On the practical level, regular consultations would provide allies and partners with better situational awareness about evolving threats from both China and Russia, facilitating a coordinated response. This could be especially important to improve efficiency of response to hybrid warfare. NATO and its partners would be better prepared to use strategic communication and cyber-defence to coordinate their efforts in fighting malign activities, including disinformation.<sup>10</sup> The areas of possible cooperation could also include maritime security (all partners

North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm)

<sup>10</sup> NATO already has a robust policy of countering disinformation which is supported by NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence in Latvia. <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/>

supported NATO's anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden), missile defence, defence of space systems, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and possibly intelligence-sharing.<sup>11</sup> To promote practical cooperation partners from the Asia-Pacific could join selected NATO centres of excellence, including the ones focused on naval mine warfare (Belgium), cyber-defence (Estonia), strategic communication (Latvia), or countering hybrid threats (Finland).<sup>12</sup> NPF should be based on the principle of inclusiveness - it should remain open to all interested countries from the region, although they would have to subscribe to such aims as the defence of the rules-based order.

The NATO Pacific-Forum would not solve all the problems of the Alliance of sovereign states, who have often different threat perceptions, and different political and economic interests. The tensions between a military collective defence mechanism limited to the Euro-Atlantic area and the need to influence security in other dimensions and geographic areas has been a constant part of NATO's existence. But the Alliance managed to survive and enlarge (even though France and Greece left NATO military structures in the past) because it successfully used its political influence to adjust to the changing strategic environment of the post-Cold War world.

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<sup>11</sup> Australia and New Zealand have already close intelligence cooperation with the United States, Great Britain and Canada in the so called "Five Eyes" format.

<sup>12</sup> W. Lorenz, "Evolution of NATO Cooperation with its Partners: Opportunities and Challenges," *PISM*

*Bulletin*, 179, 21 August 2020,  
[https://www.pism.pl/publications/Evolution\\_of\\_NATO\\_Cooperation\\_with\\_Its\\_Partners\\_Opportunities\\_and\\_Challenges](https://www.pism.pl/publications/Evolution_of_NATO_Cooperation_with_Its_Partners_Opportunities_and_Challenges)

## Can Japan’s “high principle” diplomacy save ASEAN and Taiwan?

Dr. Sachiko Hirakawa

Japan and NATO are official, reliable allies, sharing common values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as well as strategic interests. Both parties are also actively working on IPCP (Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program). In East Asia, South Korea also holds NATO’s “partner across the globe” status. However, from Japan’s viewpoint, there are more prospective regional candidates, and there can be lessons for NATO in Japanese engagement with Taiwan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN.)

In recent years, China’s “major power” diplomacy threatens two of Japan’s important allies, ASEAN and Taiwan. Although not nation-states in an orthodox sense, they are still unique actors which independently pursue external relations in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan has nurtured a close relationship with both of them since the 1970s.

Both ASEAN and Taiwan have a great deal of trust in Japan. A survey from 1300 professional elites in ASEAN found that Japan is the most trusted major power in Southeast Asia, with 61.2% of the respondents expressing confidence in Japan to “do the right thing” to provide global public goods. The EU is the second (38.7%), followed by the US (30.3%) and China (16.1%).<sup>1</sup> Another survey taken in Taiwan revealed that Japan is substantially ranked as the public’s favorite nation (59%), distantly followed by China (8%) and the US (4%).<sup>2</sup>

Both are also Japan’s strategic partners, sharing common values. The ASEAN Charter clearly addresses its universal values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and people-oriented characteristics. Since the 1990’s, Asia’s oldest international organization has played a central role in coordinating extra-regional cooperation initiatives such as ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit. Additionally, Taiwan’s advanced civil society has been significantly integrated with regional socio-economic activities aimed at improving the lives of local people, despite political animosity with mainland China. The continued functioning of ASEAN and Taiwan is a measurement of the extent of the region’s liberal values. Both are important bellwethers that will be key to overcoming the barriers of nationalism and inflexible conceptions of state sovereignty.

However, China’s assertiveness since the 2010s has seriously weakened the long-term existences of ASEAN and Taiwan. Simply said, China seeks to divide ASEAN, and unify Taiwan with the mainland. China is restructuring the region into a more rigid sovereignty-centric international system. For example, Chinese-led regional institutions such as SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Mechanism in Asia) require a nation’s sovereignty as a membership prerequisite.

The crises of ASEAN and Taiwan are directly connected to Japan’s interests, as

<sup>1</sup> The State of Southeast Asia Survey Report 2020 (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEA\\_SurveyReport\\_2020.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEA_SurveyReport_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> “Nearly 60 percent of Taiwanese pick Japan as favorite country: survey” *Focus Taiwan*, (Nov 14, 2019) <https://focustaiwan.tw/society/201911140016>

Japan is best served by the liberal regional order. It is the logical conclusion for Japan, a pacifist trading nation with no natural resources. In fact, postwar Japan's strategic efforts to build a stable and prosperous "free and open" Asia including China seemed to be successful when Japan had been a leading regional economy, but these efforts declined when China replaced Japan in 2010 as the major regional economy. In order to reclaim the liberal trend in the region, Japan is propping up ASEAN and Taiwan, while carefully avoiding a direct confrontation with China.

### **Reinforcement of ASEAN's unity and centrality in the Indo-Pacific**

It is disappointing for Japan, a traditional "consultant" for ASEAN,<sup>3</sup> that China's economic initiatives such as the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment bank) have quickly captured ASEAN's heart. China and ASEAN signed a memorandum of understanding, and all countries of ASEAN joined as founding members of the AIIB in 2015. After learning that ASEAN countries had been rather frustrated at Japan's strict and bureaucratic Official Development Assistance (ODA) procedures, Japan reacted to defend a pro-Japan ASEAN. Prime Minister Abe promised more flexible ODA loans including supplying risk money, while emphasizing that Japan was willing to share sophisticated

technologies and knowledge of "Made in Japan" with ASEAN.<sup>4</sup> At the other conference, while introducing the Japanese proverb equivalent of "penny-wise and pound-foolish," he appealed to a philosophy of infrastructure of "the long-lasting or high-quality item even if the price is a bit higher."<sup>5</sup>

These Abe discourses eventually developed into the concept of "high quality infrastructure." Furthermore, taking advantage of hosting the Ise-Shima G7 Summit, Abe standardized Japan's counter-theory against China's BRI as an international norm.<sup>6</sup> In practice, Japan specifically took advantage of some of China's little failures and ASEAN's leaders' election opportunities to gain new infrastructure projects in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.<sup>7</sup>

Japan also sought to secure its interests through ASEAN in the field of politics and security. China's seductive approach to ASEAN started with the non-disputant countries of the South China Sea. In 2012, when Cambodia hosted for the first time in history, ASEAN failed to publish a joint statement because of disagreement on China's maritime expansion. Soon, leaders of claimants such as the Filipino President Duterte and Malaysian Prime Minister Najib were enticed by China's economic charm offensives. The 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration's judgment refuting China's

<sup>3</sup> Corey Wallace, "Japan's strategic contrast: continuing influence despite relative power decline in Southeast Asia," *The Pacific Review*, 32:5, (2019)

<sup>4</sup> Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on the occasion of the ASEAN Business & Investment Summit (November 21, 2015) [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201511/asean.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201511/asean.html)

<sup>5</sup> The Future of Asia: Be Innovative" - Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Banquet of the 21st International Conference on the Future of Asia (May

22, 2015)

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/ic/dapc/page1e\\_000042.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/ic/dapc/page1e_000042.html)

<sup>6</sup> G7 Ise-Shima Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment (May 27, 2016)

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/ecm/ec/page4e\\_000457.html#section4](https://www.mofa.go.jp/ecm/ec/page4e_000457.html#section4)

<sup>7</sup> Yang Jiang, "Competitive partners in development financing: China and Japan expanding overseas infrastructure investment," *PACIFIC REVIEW* (2019), VOL. 32, NO. 5

China fails to deliver the results the Indonesian leader needs to show voters, *Nikkei Asian Review*, February 14, 2018

territorial claims was belittled, which was extremely concerning to Japan.

In response, in November 2016 Japan started international defense cooperation with the entirety of ASEAN under the initiative of Japan's Ministry of Defense. The "Vientiane Vision" attempted to strengthen practical cooperation with ASEAN for three aims; (1) promotion and protection of freedom, democracy, and human rights, (2) consistency of rule of law, and (3) reinforcement of ASEAN's unity and centrality. Practically, Japan offered various supports for capacity building in ASEAN as well as promoting awareness of international law.

Meanwhile, Japan actively persuaded the US, Australia, and India to continuously support ASEAN-centric regional architecture. Anticipating China's criticism that this would be the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), potentially an "Asian NATO", Japan was careful to focus on socio-economic problems and to address the overall regional vision.<sup>8</sup> This strategy was in line with Japan's FOIPS (Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy), launched first by Abe in 2016. The Japanese Foreign Minister explained that ASEAN is at the heart of Japan's FOIPS, which seeks to promote rule of law at sea and build high-quality infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>

Japan wisely understood ASEAN's dilemma or its "neutralist impulses"<sup>10</sup> between the US

and China. Therefore, when Indonesia proposed ASEAN's own initiative in the Indo-Pacific,<sup>11</sup> Japan was relieved and willingly turned its initiative aims to ASEAN. Meanwhile, the Japanese government formally omitted "Strategy" from FOIPS in November 2018, to emphasize its focus on "international public goods" and avoid provoking China. In June 2019, when ASEAN published its strategy "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," Japan's government immediately announced their full support. Thus, Japan made efforts to maintain ASEAN centrality amid a new regionalization of the Indo-Pacific.

### Cautious approach to Taiwan

Japan's Taiwan policy is a form of diplomatic performing art informed by Japan's firsthand experience of the "Two Chinas" dilemma in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>12</sup> In 1972, after Japan switched to be a formal diplomatic partner to Beijing, Tokyo and Taipei exchanged special agencies to replace the formal consulates. The "private" agreements between the Interchange Association (Japanese side) and the Association of East Asian Relations (Taiwanese side) provided foundations to maintain the "people to people" relationship. Unique diplomatic techniques such as "separating politics and economics" and "private windows for socio-economic relations" enabled Tokyo, Beijing, and Taipei to co-exist under the "One China" principle. In fact, this "Japanese formula" was later

<sup>8</sup> Japan- Australia-India- U.S. Consultations, (June 7, 2018 in Singapore)  
[https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_002062.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002062.html).

Japan- Australia-India- U.S. Consultations, (Nov 11, 2018 in Singapore)  
[https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e\\_000099.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press1e_000099.html)

<sup>9</sup> "Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy is open to all, including China, Tokyo policy forum told" *The Strait Times* ,(Sep 13, 2018)

<sup>10</sup> David Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?", *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018) 94.

<sup>11</sup> Evan A. Laksmana, "Buck-passing from behind: Indonesia's foreign policy and the Indo-Pacific", <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/11/27/buck-passing-from-behind-indonesias-foreign-policy-and-the-indo-pacific/>

<sup>12</sup> Ryosei Kokubun, et al., *Japan-China Relations in the Modern Era* (Routledge, 2017)

followed by other countries including the US and became an international standard to deal with China and Taiwan.

Japan has carefully upgraded its “private” channel with Taiwan in a low-key mode since 2016 when President Tsai Ing-wen was first elected. Starting with the Japanese Foreign Minister’s public congratulation to Tsai’s victory, the Abe cabinet then sent incumbent Vice Minister of Interior Affairs and Communication to Taipei to attend a business event, marking a significant thawing from the 1972 diplomatic rupture. Chief Cabinet Secretary asserted this one-day roundtrip to be meaningful to deepen economic ties between the people of Japan and Taiwan. On the other side, the Tsai administration appointed former Vice Premier Chiou I-jen as President of the Association of East Asian Relations, and former Premier Frank Hsieh, as Representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in Tokyo. Selecting these major figures meant that Taiwan was ready to conduct quasi-diplomacy with Japan.

Eventually, a breakthrough happened. In 2017, the two representative agencies changed the names respectively into Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association (on the Japanese side) and Taiwan-Japan Relations Association (on the Taiwanese side). The previous names had been carefully chosen as a political compromise between Japan, Beijing, and Taipei in 1972. Due to China’s harsh suppression of Taiwan’s international presence, Taiwan could barely insert “Taipei” in their representative office names in foreign locations in the 1990s under President Lee Teng-hui. Yet, in 2017, Japan and Taiwan’s representative offices finally designated their national names.

The Japanese representative of the Association stated that the reason behind the

renaming was practical, solve an inconvenience; despite more than six million people crossing between the two countries every year, only 14% of the Taiwanese people knew the institution’s name because it had no indication of being related to Japanese-Taiwanese relations. The logic was carefully considered to avoid violating the essence of the 1972 formula, which Beijing accepted in principle. In emphasizing relations between the people, rather than the governments, of Japan and Taiwan, Japan is able to improve relations without explicitly provoking mainland China. At each step, Beijing was not silent, but also did little to stop the progress.

Additionally, for multilateral frameworks, Japan has recently been more actively supportive of Taiwan’s membership. The phenomenon is consistent with Japan’s growing confidence in regional and global socio-economic initiatives. For example, after the US withdrawal from TPP, Japan quickly coordinated to sign CPTPP (TPP-11) with the rest of the treaty’s members. Ever since, the Abe cabinet has been consistently favourable towards Taiwan’s wish to join the TPP/CPTPP, saying that Taiwan’s participation will contribute to regional prosperity.

During President Ma Ying-jeou’s pro-China period, Japan and Taiwan accumulated practical cooperation agreements in many areas, which largely substitute for one comprehensive bilateral free trade agreement (FTA.) Securing Beijing’s green light, Ma’s Taiwan also succeeded in signing bilateral FTAs with New Zealand and Singapore. Considering Taiwan’s equal membership with China’s in the WTO and APEC, Taiwan’s participation in the TPP/CPTPP should be technically justified unless there is Chinese political interference. Therefore, the Japan-initiated TPP/CPTPP, a coalition of

middle and small countries without the US and China's participation, might have a chance to formalize Taiwan's accession if a purely institutional approach with liberal values is cautiously adopted.

Another example is Taiwan's observer status at the World Health Assembly (WHA) of the WHO. Recently, Japan has been more critical of the WHO, not China, for its exclusion of Taiwan. Japan's argument emphasizes the human security aspect that no geographical bloc should be created for universal human health. For its conceptualization and coordination of human security, Japan had made such strenuous efforts that it is often called the "Japan brand" within the UN.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Japan is engaged with promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC,) and these efforts in active global diplomacy offers another approach to help Taiwan gain more membership in international organizations, as they are excluded due to China's political intervention.

Can Japan save ASEAN and Taiwan, and what can NATO learn from Japanese engagement? It all depends on whether Japan can skillfully exercise or manipulate appeals to high principles, such as liberal values or human rights, which no one can deny. For its successful achievement, three things are necessary. First is international trust in Japan to "do the right thing." Second is diplomatic wisdom or the performance art of not provoking China, allowing China to keep face, and preparing environments for China's pragmatic changes. Lastly, the global political climate is essential. Recent trends show that European NATO member countries such as the UK, France, Germany

are showing more interest in the dynamic Indo-Pacific region, which can reaffirm Japan's policies of "high principle" diplomacy.

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<sup>13</sup> Sachiko Hirakawa, "Reviewing the Twenty Years of Japan's "Human Security": From Elusive Theory to

Sharp Practice," *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* (Waseda University) No.39 (March 2020)

## **An India-NATO Alliance? Lessons from the Sino-Indian War of 1962**

**Dr. Piotr Klodkowski**

In the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Asia will most probably take centre stage in global politics. Although the United States and China are most likely to dominate in the new ‘Great Game’ in Asia for the next decade, other important players, especially India, may exert a serious impact on the process of redefining the regional and pan-Asian *Realpolitik*. One of the most serious challenges that Asian big players and global policy-makers may face in the near-future is constructing an effective security mechanism in South Asia, the most multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious region in the world, with a population of 1.8 billion. The region’s stability and prosperity largely depend on external factors and bilateral relations with neighbours and geographically (but not strategically) distant partners. A region with rich ancient traditions, South Asia’s 20<sup>th</sup> century history is worth studying to understand how its politics may unfold in the future. South Asia will soon become one of the key arenas of global policies and global businesses and is likely to determine the future of our world to a large extent. Last but not least, it is also a place where a risky regional confrontation with China may take a very dangerous direction.

### **The Indo-American-British alliance that never was**

Although history does not always offer the best explanations for future events, it may nonetheless help us understand the logic behind certain decisions and actions which in turn, could be replicated at another time. For example, a relatively obscure aspect of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 could have changed

the balance of power in Asia half a century ago. This war only lasted for one month and ended when Beijing quite unexpectedly declared a ceasefire instead of moving its victorious troops further to the south, towards Calcutta. It was a rather surprising decision, and for many years hardly any academic analysis could provide a fully satisfying explication. China withdrew its own soldiers from the already-conquered territories and occupied only a relatively small area of Aksai Chin which is not an extremely important strategic geopolitical position. This did not seem to be an ideal example of the *Realpolitik* that Chinese communists were allegedly pursuing in Asia. The cause of Chinese withdrawal, however, was not their propagated desire for peace and stability in South Asia, as we came to know fifty years later. It was a fear that China’s military and political threat would push India to become a partner or regional ally of NATO countries including the United States and the United Kingdom. That alliance was in fact very close to materializing by the end of 1962 or in 1963.

On October 20, 1962, China had attacked India on both flanks: in the east, Chinese troops invaded the Ladakh area which is a part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir; and in the west, they crossed the McMahon Line in the former NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Province, now Arunachal Pradesh). The Chinese easily defeated Indian troops in the border territories and were prepared to continue their blitzkrieg. It should be stressed here that Beijing has never recognized the McMahon Line as the international border between China and India and still claims Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh (former

NEFA) to be parts of Western and Southern Tibet respectively.<sup>1</sup>

India was militarily battered and politically humiliated. According to Indian Defence Ministry statistics, 1,383 Indian soldiers were killed, almost 4,000 were taken prisoner and 16,996 reported missing. These losses can be considered very small by the standards of modern warfare, yet the Chinese victorious blitzkrieg, as Ramachandra Guha concludes, must have been the most painful trauma in India's imagination; the trauma which still haunts every Indian government.<sup>2</sup> All in all, the defeat was a psychological and political drama rather than a geostrategic disaster. Ladakh (except Aksai Chin) and NEFA remained as a part of Indian territory as China abandoned its strategic plans to conquer the territories it had always claimed.

Bruce Riedel in his publication "JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War," suggests that India's implementation of the "Forward Policy" served as a major provocation to China in September 1962, and the main objective of Mao Zedong was to humiliate Nehru who was emerging as a leader of the Third World. Riedel refers to many documents which have been declassified in the United States quite recently but are likely still classified in India,<sup>3</sup> including the letters by the first Indian prime minister and India's founding father, Jawaharlal Nehru, to President John F. Kennedy and British PM, Harold Macmillan, as well as JFK's and Macmillan's responses to Nehru.

All these documents shed new light on the conflict and its possible implications. When India was losing its territory to China and suffering heavy casualties with every passing day, Nehru wrote to both Kennedy and Macmillan asking for military assistance. It is important to remember the political background of those times – India was following a policy of "Non-Alignment", having declared its "strategic distance" toward NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This philosophy of global political equidistance was designed generally to win popularity among many post-colonial countries in Asia and Africa, which were in search for their own ideological identities and their positioning on the global stage. Nehru and his National Congress government succeeded to some extent in ensuring India's favourable position throughout the postcolonial world, which became a source of anxiety for Beijing. But Nehru, having sought assistance from the leaders of the two most powerful NATO countries in 1962, undermined his (and India's) strategy and might have redefined the logic of building long-term alliances.

Ultimately the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) did not offer any real protection at the time of war, so in the world of *Realpolitik*, India was forced to identify the most reliable partners who would be able to stem the Chinese tide. In the letter of 19 November, Nehru very openly presented his requests, which looked more like demands, concluding with words that were not previously heard in communication with a NATO country:

*We are confident that your great country will in this hour of our trial help us in our*

<sup>1</sup> See: Tom A. Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, ME Sharpe, Armonk NY 1996, esp. pp.53-67 on the Simla Convention (1914) signed by representatives of Tibet and Great Britain while the Chinese representative repudiated it.

<sup>2</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi. The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Picador 2008,

p.336. Obviously Guha did not have access to Nehru's letters both to Kennedy and Macmillan while writing his book.

<sup>3</sup> See: Bruce Riedel, *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA, and the Sino-Indian War*, The Brookings Institutions, Washington 2015

*fight for survival of freedom and independence in this subcontinent as well as the rest of Asia. We on our part are determined to spare no effort until the threat posed by Chinese expansionist and aggressive militarism to freedom and independence is completely eliminated.*<sup>4</sup>

The message conveyed in the letter was clear: Nehru requested the U.S. president to join the war against China, just a decade after American forces had reached a ceasefire in the Korean War in which Beijing had actively participated. A similar letter was also delivered to the British prime minister.

Both recipients of Nehru's message responded positively. The United States and the United Kingdom were ready to assist India in its then and future struggle against Chinese aggression in South Asia. In the letter dated 10 December (after a ceasefire proposal was made by Beijing but met with scepticism in New Delhi), President Kennedy drafted a regional solution for India and Pakistan in the context of possible Chinese strategic plans:

*Prime Minister Macmillan and I reviewed the urgent problems caused by the Chinese threat to the subcontinent and what best we could do to strengthen India's defenses. On the particular problem of air defense, we propose to send at an early date a joint UK-US team for full explorations with you and your people.*

<sup>4</sup> Letter dated 19 November (pp. 2 and 3) with an attached message by S.K. Nehru (Ambassador of India to US), Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. India: Subjects: Nehru correspondence, 1962: JFKNSF-111-017. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; Electronic versions of declassified documents available at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKNSF> [accessed: 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

<sup>5</sup> *Outgoing Telegram*, 08721, December 22, Department of State; Papers of John F. Kennedy.

*We also discussed what the subcontinent can do to direct its energies more fully toward its defense. We were both greatly encouraged by the historic decision of India and Pakistan to take up in direct talks the great problems which separate you [...].*<sup>5</sup>

In another letter, the British prime minister echoed Kennedy's offer of support.<sup>6</sup>

The promise of future military assistance was paralleled by diplomatic activities. President Kennedy, who had already been in close contact with President Ayub Khan of Pakistan, likely played a decisive role in preventing a Pakistani attack on India. Both American and British leaders strongly encouraged Nehru to pursue diplomatic correspondence with Khan, and to start bilateral negotiations leading to more long-lasting peaceful solutions (which, unfortunately, was unsuccessful in the long term). This top-level diplomacy was effective, as might be concluded from the course of events: Pakistan did not invade Kashmir while India was deeply absorbed in the conflict with China, and the Chinese invasion did not ultimately destabilize the region of South Asia. Beijing, having learned about the possibility of a US-UK-India alliance, did not wish to face this military and political

Presidential Papers. National Security Files. India: Subjects: Nehru correspondence, 1962: JFKNSF-111-017. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; [accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

<sup>6</sup> *Incoming Telegram*, Unnumbered, December 24, Department of State; Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. National Security Files. India: Subjects: Nehru correspondence, 1962: JFKNSF-111-017. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum; [accessed: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

challenge that could bring about disastrous implications for its future strategic plans.<sup>7</sup>

### Political complexity in 21<sup>st</sup> century South Asia

This historical precedent of the “Indo-American-British Triangle” should be kept in mind when analysing the geostrategic situation in South Asia and the potential developments of regional scenarios. Advanced technologies and increased mobility of people have reshaped the social and economic landscapes, but unlike in Central and Eastern Europe, the politico-ideological map of this part of Asia and its geopolitical conditions have not changed significantly since the 1970s. India, led by Narendra Modi’s BJP government, may be more interested, as Parag Khanna suggests, in developing political meritocracy in a Singaporean fashion than preserving classical liberal democracy, but that does not eliminate the external challenges faced by the country.<sup>8</sup> India is more strategically focused on China than on Pakistan, and is building its conventional military capabilities accordingly. Pakistan is still strategically focused on India and perceives Indian conventional build-up as seriously threatening, so it is keen on developing its nuclear capabilities accordingly. All the players have quite complex relationships with each other. India is for China not only a

political and military competitor, but an economic partner as well, while Pakistan has been a political and military ally and recipient of Beijing’s politically motivated economic aid and investments.<sup>9</sup>

As Ahmed Rashid points out, many Pakistanis believe that if their relationship with the United States were to break down, lost economic aid could be replaced by China. Indeed, China is geographically close to Pakistan and has helped substantially with Islamabad’s nuclear weapons and nuclear energy programs; and it has provided the military with several billion dollars’ worth of heavy weapons at cut-rate prices. Not surprisingly, Pakistan calls China its “all-weather friend.”<sup>10</sup> China, according to Khanna, “whether under the slogan of ‘peaceful rise’ offered in the 2000s by President Hu Jintao or the more current ‘harmonious world’ used by Xi Jinping, is seeking to combine Ming Dynasty expansionism with Tang Dynasty cosmopolitanism.”<sup>11</sup>

In other words, China plans to create a world order in which its glorified principles and interests sit at the core, and Western dominance and hierarchy would gradually be replaced by some sort of parity among civilizations. However, Beijing will serve as the *primus inter pares*, at least in the first phase of this promoted Pan-Asian

<sup>7</sup> It is not entirely clear how the Chinese learned about this possible Indo-American-British Alliance. The only semi-official channel of regular communication between U.S. and China (they did not maintain official diplomatic relations at that time) was in Warsaw. These were Sino-American ambassadorial talks held on a regular basis from the late 1950s to 1970. Not much, however, is available in Polish archives while Chinese archives are closed to Western researchers.

<sup>8</sup> See Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2019, especially the chapter *Singapore: A Technocratic Role Model*, pp. 286 – 301 See also: Chatterji, Angana; Blom, Hansen, Thomas Blom; Jaffrelot, Christophe (ed.), *Majoritarian State*.

*How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India*, London 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Lamb, Sadika Hameed, Kathryn Mixon, *South Asia Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns. A Framework for U.S. Policy and Strategy in South Asia, 2014 – 2026*, [http://csis.org/files/publication/140116\\_Lamb\\_SouthAsiaRegionalDynamics\\_WEB.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/140116_Lamb_SouthAsiaRegionalDynamics_WEB.pdf) [accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

<sup>10</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Pakistan on the Brink*, Allen Lane, Noida 202, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian.*, p. 137.

transformation. Sooner or later, India will recognize it as a serious threat to its own interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.<sup>12</sup> For other regional players as well as for international policy-makers, India is perceived as a fundamental pillar of the Pan-Asian balance of power, whose serious weakening would ultimately lead to pan-continental destabilization and pave the way for further Chinese expansion. This sentiment is echoed in the statement made in July 2020 by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, that “the US is reviewing its global deployment of forces to ensure it is postured appropriately to counter the People’s Liberation Army, given the increasing threat posed by China to Asian countries like India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines”.<sup>13</sup> However, it should be noted here that Asia’s political complexity is ill-suited to a “Unipolar Moment” strategy, and a much more multinational and collaborative approach is needed.

### **Conclusion: Historical precedents offer lessons for the future**

There is no efficient mechanism for international security in South Asia. India, as the largest democracy in the world, should be interested in maintaining regional and pan-continental stability with reliable partners. The challenges of political/military expansionism, energy security or nuclear proliferation should compel New Delhi to look for additional frameworks which allow it to work closely with other regional powers.

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<sup>12</sup> See esp. Abdurrahman Utku Hacıoğlu, *The case for NATO’s global partnership with India*, NDC [NATO Defense College] Policy Brief, No. 03 – February 2020, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1419> [accessed: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020]

<sup>13</sup> Lalit K. Jha, *US reducing its troops in Europe to counter Chinese threat to India & others*, *Pompeo says*, *Diplomacy*, “The Print”, 26 June, 2020, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/us-reducing-its-troops->

NATO provides an instructive framework, one with more than six decades of experience in multinational military planning and cooperation.<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi may have critical views about Jawaharlal Nehru and his policies, but he should be reminded that history sometimes provides us with potential partners. When Nehru’s India was in real danger in 1962, two NATO members were prepared to offer military and political assistance, and their preparedness probably stopped further Chinese aggression, as well as preventing an Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir. History tends to repeat itself, and the diplomatic version of the proverb “a friend in need, is a friend indeed” may be the most succinct description for how India and NATO can move forward together.

[in-europe-to-counter-chinese-threat-to-india-others-pompeo-says/448947/?amp& twitter impression=true](https://twitter.com/ndc_nato/status/1274489474444444444) [accessed: 5 July 2020]

<sup>14</sup> I deal in a detailed way with the problem of India – NATO relations in my publication *The Issues of Political Security in South Asia and Its Implications for the EU and NATO*, “The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs”, vol.25, no. 3/2016, pp. 22-44.

# Is “Asian NATO” an oxymoron? Prospects of NATO’s political engagement and strategic alignment in the Asia-Pacific

Dr. Christina Lai

## Introduction

Since the end of WWII, the United States has established a hub-and-spoke system in East Asia and provided security commitments to its allies. The regional landscape in Asia differs from that of Europe, which features formal alliance relations.<sup>1</sup> However, starting in 2010, the security dynamics have changed significantly. China’s military presence in Asia and its frequent use of economic coercion against its neighbours have led to heated policy debates over whether a NATO-like institution would be an appropriate balancing strategy to counter China’s growing clout in Asia and beyond.

This article engages the previous literature on “why there is no NATO in Asia” from the 2000s and explores the possibility of a NATO-like organization in the Asia-Pacific during the era of the US-China rivalry. More specifically, it argues that a “NATO in Asia” is possible given certain conditions – for instance, an Asian NATO would be feasible only if NATO member states actively share their experience with policy leaders in the Asia-Pacific.

Several countries in Asia have begun to consider China’s military rise and assertiveness as a common threat to regional stability. As the great power struggle between the US and China intensifies over time, the changing nature of strategic conditions might lead to stronger advocates for, and eventually

the creation of, a NATO-like security institution in the Asia-Pacific region. More importantly, the formation of a NATO-like organization in Asia would mostly depend on how much a security threat China poses to the Asia-Pacific, but also on how NATO member states engage in substantive cooperation with Asian countries.

This study addresses the security issues of a NATO-like organization in the Asia-Pacific. First, it asks how a NATO-like alliance is feasible given the plethora of existing regional organizations. Second, it indicates how proactive engagement by NATO with Asian countries concerning China’s military rise would serve mutually beneficial strategies for both countries in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, it considers the prospects of the East Asian security order and how the NATO member states might contribute to routinized practices with policymakers in Asia.

## NATO’s engagement, not expansion, in Asia

Existing literature in international relations indicates that strong US leadership, an imminent threat from the Soviet Union, and shared democratic identities have led to the success of NATO’s longevity. During the early Cold War era, Western European countries had established high levels of trust and a commitment to safeguarding Western civilization, which allows them to form

<sup>1</sup> Acharya, Amitav. *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the*

*problem of regional order*. Routledge, 2014, pp. 21-22.

NATO to counter the communist Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> A normative perspective provides convincing explanations as to the absence of such a security organization in Asia. For example, Amitav Acharya argues that regional interactions and the history of colonization in Southeast Asia helped established the norm of non-intervention and the idea of sovereignty in the post-war era.<sup>3</sup> Acharya identifies how the norm against the regional collective defense in Asia constitutes a crucial element for multilateral settings in Asian politics.

From a constructivist perspective, the most important reason that a NATO-like organization could never work in Asia is because the countries in this region hold a diverse range of political values, views on regional integration, and perceptions toward a stronger China. However, a prospect theory combining risk assessment of material capabilities and the perceptions of external threats might contribute to a deeper understanding of alliance formation in Asia. States enjoy both risk-averse and risk-accepting strategies when facing different levels of external threats.<sup>4</sup>

Although NATO is unlikely to expand its geographic reach at this point, it is feasible for the member states to consider broadening its institutional purposes to address the possible security threats from China and Russia. NATO's limited approach to

engaging Asian countries cannot sufficiently address China's growing security presence in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, the European Union (EU) has officially identified China as an "economic competitor" in the pursuit of technological leadership and a "systemic rival," promoting alternative models of governance.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of debating whether there should be an expansion or reduction of NATO member countries, a more practical way to realize its role lies in active engagement with countries in the Asia-Pacific rather than expansion of membership. For example, the Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) program under the NATO mandate allows other states to develop closer ties with NATO member states. In 2014, the EOP included Australia, Jordan, and Sweden, and such cooperation fostered channels for information-sharing and political consultation.<sup>6</sup> Their participation set a great precedent for other Asia-Pacific countries to enhance cross-regional cooperation.

So far, the US stance remains unclear, as it prefers to implement an Indo-Pacific strategy to maintain its regional interests. The "Pivot to Asia" initiative proposed by the Obama administration seems to be at odds with President Trump's call for more burden-sharing with Japan and South Korea in East Asia.<sup>7</sup> However, this inconsistency should not be taken as an excuse for NATO's

<sup>2</sup> Hemmer, Christopher, and Peter J. Katzenstein. "Why is there no NATO in Asia? Collective identity, regionalism, and the origins of multilateralism." *International Organization* 56, no. 3 (2002): 575-607

<sup>3</sup> Acharya, Amitav. *Why is there no NATO in Asia?: The normative origins of Asian multilateralism*. Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> He, Kai, and Huiyun Feng. "Why is there no NATO in Asia?" revisited: Prospect theory, balance of threat, and US alliance strategies." *European*

*Journal of International Relations* 18.2 (2012): 227-250.

<sup>5</sup> "EU-China: A strategic outlook," European Commission to the European Parliament, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Full text available through <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> "Asia Whole and Free? Assessing the Viability and Practicality of a Pacific NATO," *Belfer Center at Harvard Kennedy School*, March 2020.

<sup>7</sup> "The Case for A Pacific Deterrence Initiative," *War on the Rocks*, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

reactive stance to more formal engagement in the Asia-Pacific. It is in NATO's interest to actively engage countries in the Asia-Pacific region and develop a coordinated strategy toward an increasingly assertive China.<sup>8</sup> NATO could serve as a policy forum to address China's increasing presence in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, so that European and Asian countries can openly discuss their security concerns and policy priorities.

More importantly, the "NATO experience" could offer insights for policymakers in the Asia-Pacific when contemplating the framework of a formal security alliance. For example, Deputy Secretary-General Rose Gottemoeller emphasized NATO's strategic partnership in the Asia-Pacific region during the formal NATO-Asia meeting.<sup>9</sup> NATO has maintained a network of cooperation in Asia, including political dialogues, information sharing, and professional training. More recently, Japan and Australia joined the NATO cyber-defense committee in 2018, and they both sought stronger ties with other European countries in countering state-sponsored cyber-attacks. They conducted drills based on the world's most advanced international exercise.<sup>10</sup> Cybersecurity has emerged as one of the crucial issues for Asian and European countries, as many have fallen victim to state-led attacks from China, Russia, and North Korea. A more coordinated response and international drills between NATO members and countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore might significantly increase their cost of action, and therefore deter states from launching future attacks.

### Asian NATO and China's assertiveness

China's assertiveness in the East China Sea and the South China Sea territorial disputes have created worry and suspicion among its neighbours towards Beijing's expansionist ambitions. At the same time, most of these Asian countries rely heavily on bilateral trade with China. This is the main reason why China's neighbours are reluctant to choose sides between the US and China, as they prefer to uphold positive relations with the two great powers concurrently. However, Beijing's economic coercion toward Japan, the Philippines, and Norway has significantly increased China's threat perceptions among Asian countries. While no single country alone, such as Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam, will be as powerful as China economically and militarily, a coordinated region-wide coalition would serve as more powerful leverage against China's capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

In the Cold War era, NATO was established to offer security commitments to countries in Europe and North America in countering the military threats from the Soviet Union, and later Russia after the 1990s. The security dynamics vary greatly in Asia nowadays, as China has become the world's second great power economically and militarily. From the Chinese perspective, NATO's engagement in Asia would greatly increase China's concerns that the US and its neighbours would form a security alliance to contain its rise. Beijing might even establish its preferred security institutions more rapidly to counter the US and its allies or increase its influences on Asian countries by providing more infrastructure projects via the Belt and Road

<sup>8</sup> "NATO Needs a China Policy," *The Diplomat*, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> "NATO Deputy Secretary General underscores importance of Asia-Pacific partnership," *NATO News*, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> "Big three cyberthreats bring Asia-Pacific and NATO allies closer," *Nikki Asian Review*, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> "Is an Asian NATO possible?," *The Diplomat*, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Initiative (BRI).<sup>12</sup> Escalating tensions might be underway between China and countries that support such an institution, but the collective effort toward an Asian NATO might encourage China's restraint with its neighbours and its benign posture toward the US.

If Asian countries were to form a NATO-like organization, it would probably be different from the NATO created in the context of the Cold War. For one thing, the threats from the Soviet Union are quite different from those of China nowadays. The degree of economic interdependence between China and Asian countries is far greater than that of the European counterparts with the Soviet Union in the Cold War era. China's military capabilities, geopolitical reach, and economic scale present a more complex challenge and opportunity for the United States and Asian countries. Furthermore, there are several regional institutions in the Asia Pacific (such as APEC, ASEAN, ASEAN+3, the forthcoming RECP, CPTPP, etc.), and Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines are US allies with military bases. A region-wide security organization, if implemented successfully, needs to transform the existing multilateral forums and bilateral agreements into something more integrated within the framework of a collective defense. Therefore, NATO's engagement with Asian countries, in terms of military exercises and strategic dialogues, would bridge the gap across Europe and the Asia-Pacific region to address China's rise.

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<sup>12</sup> "Just Another Paper Tiger? Chinese Perspectives on the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Strategic Forum at National Defense University*, June 2020.

## The way forward

Revisiting the "NATO in Asia" debate in international relations is an issue of critical importance, as the security landscape in the Asia-Pacific region has changed since the 2000s. Even though the US announced the "Pivot to Asia" policy during the Obama administration, it is still unclear whether the US military would explicitly promote a collective defensive organization under the Trump administration. While the prospect of an Asian NATO remains uncertain, the security conditions might change rapidly if Beijing engages in confrontational actions toward Taiwan or in South China Sea disputes. The most fundamental challenge of NATO's presence in Asia is a strategic one: how to avoid the spiral of hostility between China and its neighbours at a time when the US-China power competition is already pretty intense. Should Beijing decide to apply economic coercion more frequently toward its neighbours and become more assertive in the maritime disputes in East Asia, a NATO-like organization in Asia might be formed to counter China's sphere of influence.

Now is when NATO's active engagement would be of great help to Asian countries, as its previous experience in countering Russian aggression provides useful guidelines for China's neighbours in Asia. Specifically, the EOPs offers a feasible way to develop defense exercises with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, which are also US security allies in East Asia.<sup>13</sup> NATO members could also learn from the policy measures adopted by Asian countries, and develop a more comprehensive strategy in addressing greater assertiveness from China.

<sup>13</sup> "Partnership Interoperability Initiative," *NATO*, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Full text available through [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_84336.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm)

## **Beyond fanfare and hub-and-spokes bilateralism: How NATO can constructively engage with the Asia-Pacific**

**Dr. Nicole Jenne**

As a transatlantic alliance whose main focus will remain on Europe at least in the near to mid future, should NATO even spend resources to think about what role to play in the Asia-Pacific? There are no obvious answers to this question. NATO members and pundits have been engaged in an ongoing debate regarding whether NATO should (re)focus on European collective defense or broaden its strategic outlook toward global collective security. The lack of consensus on the Alliance's geographical reach and scope of action, combined with a high degree of uncertainty about the future of international relations in the Asia-Pacific, make it difficult to draw a roadmap for a NATO Asia policy that would be welcomed as a viable option by the different stakeholders on both sides. Divergent national priorities and threat perceptions notwithstanding, in this article, I will argue that by taking a closer look at security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific over the past decades, it is possible to devise several directives on how NATO can play a constructive role for the region's stability and, by extension, global security. Departing from the premise that NATO cannot afford to stay away from what is now essentially an Indo-Pacific theatre if it wants to remain relevant as an institution, I argue that the Alliance's engagement should follow two basic principles. First, it should abandon the well-trodden path of bilateralism as prescribed by the hub-and-spokes system (also known as the San Francisco system), a US-led order that has defined the region's international relations since the end of the Second World

War. Instead, NATO should seek to act in its own right and support Asian initiatives at building regional security institutions. Second, NATO should seek practical cooperation advanced by small coalitions of the willing and stay away from loud and lofty declarations. Security fanfare in Asia-Pacific multilateral forums has had limited success in fostering relations between states. Moreover, too visible a role could easily politicize NATO's engagement, thus turning it into a force in the regional balance of power that could potentially intensify competition between the US and China instead of easing it.

### **Why NATO cannot miss out on Asia**

The Asia-Pacific is a relatively new item on NATO's agenda. The Alliance officially recognized that it should take a stance on rising China at its 2019 London summit. However, what this should mean in practical terms remains controversial. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, when launching his outline for NATO 2030, mentioned that becoming "more global" was key for ensuring the Alliance has continued relevance.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a considerable part of NATO believes that it should focus on nearby territories, and more importantly the Eastern European neighbourhood. There, Russia's interventions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have re-centered NATO's attention firmly on what has never ceased to be its core business, the shift to crisis management in the 1990s notwithstanding: territorial defense.

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<sup>1</sup> Jens Stoltenberg, *NATO Secretary General Launches NATO 2030*, Audio, 2020,

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_176193.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176193.htm).

There are at least two reasons why NATO should engage with Asia.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, the region's growing geostrategic importance means that instability there will negatively affect the openness of global trade routes and the possibilities of international governance, with important ramifications for North America and Europe. Secondly, NATO's leading member, the United States, is deeply immersed in and will remain a central player in the realm of Asia-Pacific security. Due to Washington's commitments, in the case of conflict the US is likely to turn to its traditional allies with the expectation that they provide support. Therefore, stability in the Asia-Pacific is of direct interest to NATO.

The Alliance should, however, steer clear of trying to keep China down. While such an effort is futile anyhow, along the way it would likely aggravate great power competition, thus setting up the Thucydides trap NATO's members should strive to avoid.<sup>3</sup> According to some observers, any involvement of NATO in the region would add to the already-existing tensions between the US and China.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as I shall further argue below, this does not need to be the case if its initiatives are well thought out and carefully managed. Asian countries have generally seen it as positive to have numerous actors engaged in the region.<sup>5</sup> As long as NATO does not serve as a tool of US foreign policy, its presence will be welcomed. This is also true for China, which is generally less suspicious of European countries. Even when a harsh tone dominated Sino-US relations as

of late, relations between European capitals and Beijing have remained cordial.

### **Support for regional initiatives for multilateral engagement**

So far, NATO's meaningful cooperation with the Asia-Pacific has largely been limited to bilateral engagement with four states: Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. All of them are US allies and have explicitly been presented as "like-minded partners" sharing NATO's values of democracy, freedom and human rights.<sup>6</sup> From Beijing's perspective, it is understandable, thus, that NATO's insertion in the region is perceived as an effort to contain China, a policy that is doomed to fail. China is on the rise, and what NATO members ought to do in order to defend their national interest is concentrate on managing their own roles in international affairs rather than China's. For NATO to merely fall back on the bilateral alliance ties that make up the US-led hub-and-spokes system in the Asia-Pacific contradicts the purpose of supporting a more stable and peaceful future regional order. The web of bilateral alliances of Asian states that converge on the US-hub is a system predicated on the Cold War, and has failed to adapt to changing circumstances.

Although observers generally agree that the US has played a stabilizing role as East Asia underwent deep socio-economic and political

<sup>2</sup> See also Philip Shetler-Jones, 'What Should NATO Do about Asia?', in *NATO and Asia-Pacific*, ed. Alexander Moens and Brooke A Smith-Windsor (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), 61–81.

<sup>3</sup> See Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Webber, 'The Perils of a NATO Rebalance to the Asia Pacific', in *NATO and Asia-Pacific*, ed.

Alexander Moens and Brooke A Smith-Windsor (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), 96.

<sup>5</sup> See Hsien Loong Lee, 'The Endangered Asian Century America, China and the Perils of Confrontation', *Foreign Affairs* June-August (2020).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance NATO, *Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Lowy Institute* (Brussels: NATO Newsroom, 2019), [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_168351.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_168351.htm?selectedLocale=en).

transformations in the post-Cold War era,<sup>7</sup> the continuation of the hub-and-spokes system is not commensurate to new realities.<sup>8</sup> This is illustrated by the US's resistance against Japan's efforts to engage the region through potentially stability-enhancing multilateral frameworks, due to concerns that Tokyo could be lost to an emerging Asian bloc.<sup>9</sup> It is also obvious in the inability of the US (and its Asian allies) to halt North Korea's accelerating nuclear development and counter its brinkmanship. In short, the attempt to prolong an obsolete order built on the hub-and-spokes system rather than searching for more peaceful alternatives (that would also guarantee the US's continued presence in the region) has had detrimental effects for peaceful relations in the Asia-Pacific. Therefore, NATO should take a different path and actively engage in and promote inclusive multilateral regional initiatives that would allow states to develop an alternate order and hence reduce the current, destabilizing uncertainty. It is true that the US has placed some emphasis on multilateral engagement in the Asia-Pacific, most recently through the Obama administration's 'pivot'. However, US policymakers continued to see multilateral institutions as supplementary components in the established 'bilateralism plus' system,<sup>10</sup> a premise that NATO as a successful example of international cooperation is well-placed to overcome.

<sup>7</sup> Amitav Acharya, 'Power Shift or Paradigm Shift? China's Rise and Asia's Emerging Security Order', *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (March 2014): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12084>.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph draws on Nicole Jenne and Christian Wirth, *Filling the Void: US-Facilitated Regional Multilateralism as a Solution for the Asia-Pacific Problem of Order* (Unpublished manuscript, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick M. Cronin and Michael J. Green, 'Redefining the U.S.–Japan Alliance: Tokyo's National Defense Program', *National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies*, McNair Paper, 31, no. November (1994).

Certainly, Canada and the Europeans have no choice but to support a NATO strategy in Asia broadly in line with the US's. However, they should be wary not to turn into an extended arm of the Pentagon. Once the Sino-US rivalry becomes still more heated, it will be impossible for NATO to keep out of this great power contest, and at a frontline where a relatively small part of the Alliance's resources is currently concentrated.

### **Practical cooperation without declarationism**

What is needed in terms of genuine support for regional multilateral initiatives is not another transregional dialogue to the Asia-Pacific's alphabet soup of international groupings (including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF; the East Asia Summit, EAS; ASEAN+3; the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting with its various extension; etc.). While these have been credited with keeping communication channels open, it is questionable whether the many summits and exchanges have actually achieved tangible results.<sup>11</sup> To avoid simply adding another item on the region's anyway crowded calendar of multilateral fora, NATO should focus on practical cooperation.

In fact, as the example of Singapore and its "plug and play approach"<sup>12</sup> in cooperating outside the formal alliance structure

<sup>10</sup> James Gannon, 'The Evolving US Approach to Regional Community Building', in *Engaging Asia. Essays on Laos and beyond in Honour of Martin Stuart-Fox.*, ed. Desley Goldston (København: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2018), 33.

<sup>11</sup> See Seng Tan, 'Is ASEAN Finally Getting Multilateralism Right? From ARF to ADMM+', *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 1 (2 January 2020): 28–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1691502>.

<sup>12</sup> Yee Kuang Heng, 'NATO and the Asia-Pacific: Perspectives from Singapore', in *NATO and Asia-Pacific*, ed. Alexander Moens and Brooke A Smith-Windsor (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), 199.

demonstrates, NATO's engagement with regional states does not even need a formalized relationship. ISAF in Afghanistan is often cited as an example where jointly operating brought states and their militaries from the Asia-Pacific and NATO closer together.<sup>13</sup> It need not be a war (and hopefully will not be) to build rapport and trust between states. In fact, NATO can successfully engage with the region not as a defense-focused actor but as a broader security actor.

NATO has unique knowledge of standardizing multilateral planning and operations, a number of shortcomings notwithstanding. This unparalleled expertise will be of interest to countries in the Asia-Pacific according to their respective national security outlook and capacity. As these vary considerably across the region, the membership in specific cooperation initiatives should be flexible. If an individual scheme is perceived as beneficial by its participants, it is likely that other states will follow.

In order to determine exactly what type of practical cooperation is of interest to Asian counterparts, some political-security dialogue will need to take place. However, contrary to the tendency to dub every exchange amongst Asia-Pacific representatives a confidence-building measure, such should not be an end in itself. Existing channels like meetings at the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue, or with ambassadors serving in Brussels and other

parts of Europe will make considerable headway in identifying which ideas and initiatives NATO can take forward together with its Asian counterparts, and whether any of the existing regional fora can be used as a framework to do so.

Suitable areas for practical cooperation include maritime security and safety, pandemic disease, terrorism, military support for civilian response to disasters, and military medicine. This list is naturally non-exhaustive. Cybersecurity is of interest to many Asian states, though it will likely be beneficial only in cooperation with liberal democratic countries due to their approach to information. As I have argued elsewhere, the cooperative use of the military and defense infrastructure, commonly subsumed under the term defense diplomacy, is not a silver bullet for fostering relations between states.<sup>14</sup> Defense diplomacy activities concurrently contain *realpolitik* motivations and can therefore advance competition and mistrust. Nevertheless, these risks can be minimized if cooperation is set to achieve tangible outcomes in which each partner has a stake.

Clearly, what NATO can do in the Asia-Pacific is delimited also by its resources. Therefore, a practical, heads down approach in support of initiatives from within the region as proposed here, fits the Alliance's available capacities well.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Benjamin Schreer, 'Beyond Afghanistan: NATO's Global Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific', *NATO Defence College Research Paper* 75 (April 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Jun Yan Chang and Nicole Jenne, 'Velvet Fists: The Paradox of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia', *European Journal of International Security* forthcoming (2020).

## Challenges Facing NATO Partnerships in the Age of COVID-19

Dr. Arif Bağbaşlıoğlu

NATO's partnership policy, which has made the Alliance reasonably functional in the post-Cold War era, has also been one of the most important manifestations of its transformation. Over more than 25 years, NATO has maintained multiple partnership frameworks which serve several functions. Its first partnership program, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) launched in 1994, paving the way for practical co-operation between NATO and Central and Eastern European states, including former Warsaw Pact members. Participation in PfP was considered to be a pathway to NATO membership particularly for Central and Eastern European states. Later cooperative security arrangements and initiatives like PfP focused on the Middle East, specifically the 1994 Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). NATO also cooperates with a range of countries beyond these regional partnership frameworks. Referred to as "partners across the globe", they include Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, and Pakistan. Today, NATO's partnership policy epitomizes *cooperative security*, identified as one of its three official tasks, together with *collective defense* and *crisis management*. The importance and meaning of the partnership policy, aimed at generally improving relationships with non-NATO countries, have increased even more in today's international conjuncture characterized by growing security threats. In this context, there are challenges facing NATO's partnership policy, which I will discuss along with suggestions to overcome them. The three main challenges facing

NATO partnerships are "*instability in partner countries*," "*limitedness of resources allocated to partners*," and "*finding new ways to be able to ensure interoperability*."

### Instability in partner countries

Key developments threatening NATO's security and increasing instability include the dissolution of state structures in the Middle East, the presence of ISIL, the refugee crisis, cyber-attacks, the Ukraine crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea. One way for NATO to counter these threats is by establishing global security alliances, as can be seen from many examples in NATO's history. NATO has successfully demonstrated its ability to establish global security alliances in its harmonious performance with the UN, the OSCE, and the EU during operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, and in the relationships it has established with the UN, the EU, and non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan. In addition, NATO's partnership policy has undeniably helped integrate Balkan countries into Euro-Atlantic institutions. NATO could develop similar relationships and partnerships with the African Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Africa, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East, which directly affect the security of NATO countries, among which there are partner countries. I should highlight here that NATO countries' economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in an arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia. Consequently, NATO has developed relationships with

international organizations in those regions. The primary goal here should not be to position NATO above other organizations but to establish a concept and an infrastructure that situates NATO at the center to enable security organizations in different regions to act in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

### **Limitedness of resources allocated to partners**

The second important problem for NATO is that it allocates insufficient resources for its partnerships, which also reflects the longstanding burden sharing issue. Burden sharing is not a new area of contention among the members of the Alliance and refers to a more equitable distribution among NATO member states of the costs and risks in the process of accomplishing their activities. Currently, less than 1 percent of NATO's common funding budget, about \$20 million annually, goes to partner programs. This is not sufficient to achieve the aims of institutional partnerships and partners.

Burden sharing has also been discussed in terms of various dimensions in the academic literature since the 1950s. This issue has also appeared on NATO's agenda in various periods and at different intensities depending on changes in the international conjuncture, particularly in the post-Cold War period. Successive U.S. administrations have raised the issue to emphasize their argument that the U.S. spends more on European security than European states themselves, especially given differences in attitudes and interests regarding alliance policies between the U.S. and European NATO members. During Donald Trump's presidency, especially, the U.S. Administration has tried to prioritize the

debate. It is useful to highlight here that threat perceptions and interest differences within NATO have become more visible in today's international conjuncture as even European allies no longer agree on security. For example, Western European countries, such as the UK, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, believe that security cooperation should focus on sharing intelligence regarding international terrorism whereas Eastern European countries, such as Poland and the Baltic Republics, regard NATO as a means of deterring Russia.<sup>1</sup> Thus, an issue like burden sharing is unlikely to be resolved soon, which is directly related to defense planning policies in NATO member states. Nevertheless, despite being a recurring issue, burden sharing disagreements will not cause major structural changes, such as NATO's disintegration.

### **Finding new ways to ensure interoperability**

The third issue, ensuring interoperability among NATO members and partners based on common goals and interests, is crucial for NATO's survival. The most important reason why NATO endures in the absence of a Soviet threat in the post-Cold War era is by ensuring interoperability among member states and partner countries willing to stay connected to NATO. Today, there are clearly deficiencies in this regard. The main reason why the PfP program is considered more successful than other NATO's institutional partnerships is that PfP has ensured the creation of common objectives and made concrete achievements in the participating countries. All 14 countries that have joined NATO since the Cold War ended were PfP countries that contributed to NATO operations during this program. It can be

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<sup>1</sup> Susi Dennison, "Fear and Loathing on the Road to the U.S. Elections", *European Council on Foreign*

*Relations*, October 2016, [https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/flash\\_scorecard\\_us\\_elections](https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/flash_scorecard_us_elections), p. 2.

stated that it is not possible in a short time for NATO to accept members soon from other institutional partnerships (Mediterranean Dialogue or Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) or from its partners across the globe. Instead, NATO can develop an agenda affecting these countries and interoperability in solving problems can be built as a joint goal. The contributions of partner countries to NATO's mission in the Aegean to ensure human security can also be increased. In short, interoperability can be achieved among partner countries and NATO by providing common interests and feasible objectives on issues such as migration, cyber-attacks, threats to energy supplies, and environmental challenges with security ramifications.

### **The Coronavirus pandemic and NATO**

The Coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly thrown into question the functions of norms and rules shared by states and international organizations and other institutions, such as diplomacy and international law. The pandemic has once again revealed how low the level of solidarity in the international society is between states and international organizations, although it does not answer the question of whether international society is a myth or a reality when used to define or classify international relations. However, this does not mean that international cooperation and solidarity, and international organizations – which are the manifestations of international cooperation and solidarity in international politics – have lost their functions. Rather, the Coronavirus pandemic will initiate a debate for reform within international organizations. NATO has also begun to work on creating a new strategic concept to increase dialogue and strengthen solidarity among member states while providing political coordination.

In a clear sign of efforts to make China internationally responsible for the pandemic,

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo speaks of “the Wuhan virus” in reference to the city where it supposedly originated, while US President Donald Trump calls it “the Chinese virus,” even claiming that the virus came from a laboratory in Wuhan. The Trump Administration's discourse needs to be evaluated within the framework of internal policy objectives regarding the November 2020 presidential election. China-US competition, which was already more prominent in the three years before the Coronavirus pandemic, will result in a bipolar or multipolar international system whose economic characteristics will become more evident once the pandemic subsides.

Since the end of the Cold War, US foreign policy concepts, such as “partnership” and “missile defense system”, and strategies that expand the US's area of global struggle and intervention have sometimes been transformed into NATO policy under the same or different names on the basis of multilateralism. In the 2019 London Summit Declaration, for example, NATO leaders acknowledged that they cannot ignore the consequences of China's growing influence and international policies. It is thus very important for China to be on the agenda for the first time in NATO's history in the context of trade wars and political debates within NATO regarding the economy, technology, and cyber-warfare as a factor affecting NATO's security approach. The effects of the pandemic on the global economy may initiate a period in which European countries, whose defense expenditure has always been targeted by US administrations, will reduce their military spending. If so, the Permanent Structured Cooperation process of the EU's European Security and Defense Policy will lose momentum and NATO will be preferred as a platform for cooperation in the defense of European countries.

In conclusion, it is obvious that NATO, which has 30 members and is linked to 40 countries through its partnership policy, is not a homogeneous organization in many respects, with different interests in areas such as security perceptions, power capacity, and threat perceptions. However, despite this heterogeneity, this does not mean that NATO membership no longer makes sense or that it cannot establish robust relationships with its partners. In today's conditions, the varied interests of NATO members prevent costly operations with a high risk of casualties. In such an international conjuncture, NATO will prefer operations that ensure human security, as it does in the Aegean. These ensure that NATO continues to exist beyond the Atlantic as they are low-cost, with relatively low risks of casualties, and affect international public opinion positively. However, whether this preference continues and, more importantly, whether NATO can survive by maintaining its relationships with partner countries depend on the ability of its members to provide clear and coherent replies to questions about NATO's objectives and aims, together with the above-mentioned suggestions.

The mission of NATO Association of Canada is to promote peace, prosperity, and security through knowledge and understanding of the importance of NATO.

The NAOC has strong ties with the Government of Canada including Global Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence. We are constantly working to create and maintain relationships with international organizations such as the World Bank Group, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, NATO Headquarters, the International Criminal Court, and other prominent international NGOs and think tanks

As a leading member of the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA), the NATO Association of Canada strives to educate and engage Canadians about NATO and NATO's goal of peace, prosperity and security. NATO Association of Canada ensures that we have an informed citizenry able to contribute to discussions about Canada's role on the world stage.

All views expressed by the contributors to this volume are those of the contributors alone and do not represent the official perspective of the NATO Association of Canada.

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