

# NATO in 2030

## Credible in terms of enlargement, burden sharing and defense planning?

by *Fabian Böttcher*<sup>1</sup>

### Resumé

I skenet av Natos 70-åriga historia har författaren sett det som betydelsefullt att närmare studera hur Nato bör förhålla sig till frågor relaterat till medlemsutvidgning, delade kostnader (s k burden-sharing) samt försvarsplanering i en nära framtid. Artikeln baseras på intervjuer med flera seniora representanter och forskare inom organisationen, vilka av utrymmesskäl begränsats. Burden-sharing uppfattas som både omfattande och i viss mån politiskt känslig, ett av syftena med artikelns studie har därför varit att närmare belysa problematiken kring detta ämne med ett särskilt fokus på Rysslands och Kinas roll idag och i framtiden. Vad avser försvarsplanering visar artikeln på behov av potentiella reformer. I detta sammanhang har de intervjuade även tillfrågats om deras syn på huruvida Natos nuvarande åtaganden bedöms kvarstå under den kommande tioårsperioden och/eller om nya områden kan tänkas tillkomma. Här ser en del av de som intervjuats en potentiell möjlighet till en Nato-närvaro i Asien (t ex sydkinesiska sjön), vilket dock skulle kräva en förändring av den grundläggande fördragstexten. I artikelns sista del har ett par potentiella medlemsländer studerats närmare. Här blir det dock tydligt att inget av dem bedöms ansluta sig till Nato inom en nära framtid.

ON 4 APRIL 2019, in State Department, Washington D.C., USA, the Foreign Ministers of NATO were gathering to celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty.<sup>2</sup> The Alliance has been adapting almost throughout its history<sup>3</sup> in order to remain relevant with the Crisis in Crimea and Russia's ambitions driving new momentum in these changes.<sup>4</sup> The seven-decade institutional and strategic challenges<sup>5</sup> of the organization means it has to prove that the issue of burden-sharing can be solved and that the dissonance between the member states can be addressed.<sup>6</sup> One significant challenge to NATO would be a possible US withdrawal.<sup>7</sup> Looking ahead, Colonel Mariusz Fryc argues that the alliance will need to reform

operational decision making by giving more power to Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and to extend cooperation with the EU and non-NATO Baltic states.<sup>8</sup>

Although this article was written in 2016, it will be (amongst others) an aim of this text to attempt to prove the timeliness of his arguments. According to former SACEUR, General Phillip M. Breedlove, the US must not allow sanctions against Russia to be softer,<sup>9</sup> he sees it as important that the US should not stand back, and it must lead.<sup>10</sup> No decisions and no actions should have consequences that go beyond the immediate problems of the situation.<sup>11</sup> As the Swedish researcher Dr. Gunneriusson puts it: Currently the west is not willing to act on a Russian aggression

and is not willing to call them out on this.<sup>12</sup> The aim of this article will be to look at the question of NATO in 2030. What would a credible NATO Alliance look like in terms of membership enlargement, burden sharing and defense planning?”

## Course of research

The author started this research with a literature review to determine if there are enough sources to address this topic and to ascertain if this has been done before. After this, a group of potential interview partners (nine in total) were contacted.

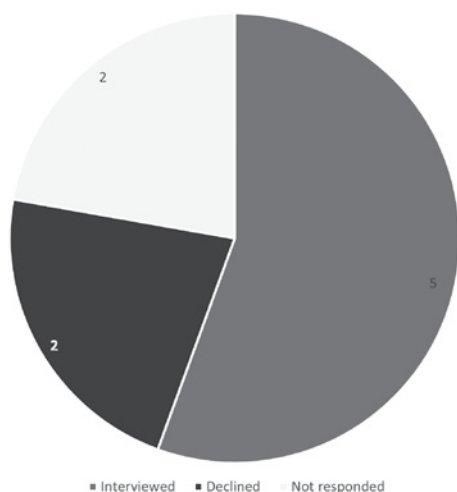


Figure No. 1. Responses from the contacted experts.

The interviews were transcribed and coordinated with the respective expert. The transcripts have been included in the main file. The text from the transcripts was analyzed with the help of the webpage *QCamap.org* and, with the inductive method, the text of the main body was developed, put into chapters, and added to the file. The final version was checked with the experts via a “communicative validation”.

## Method

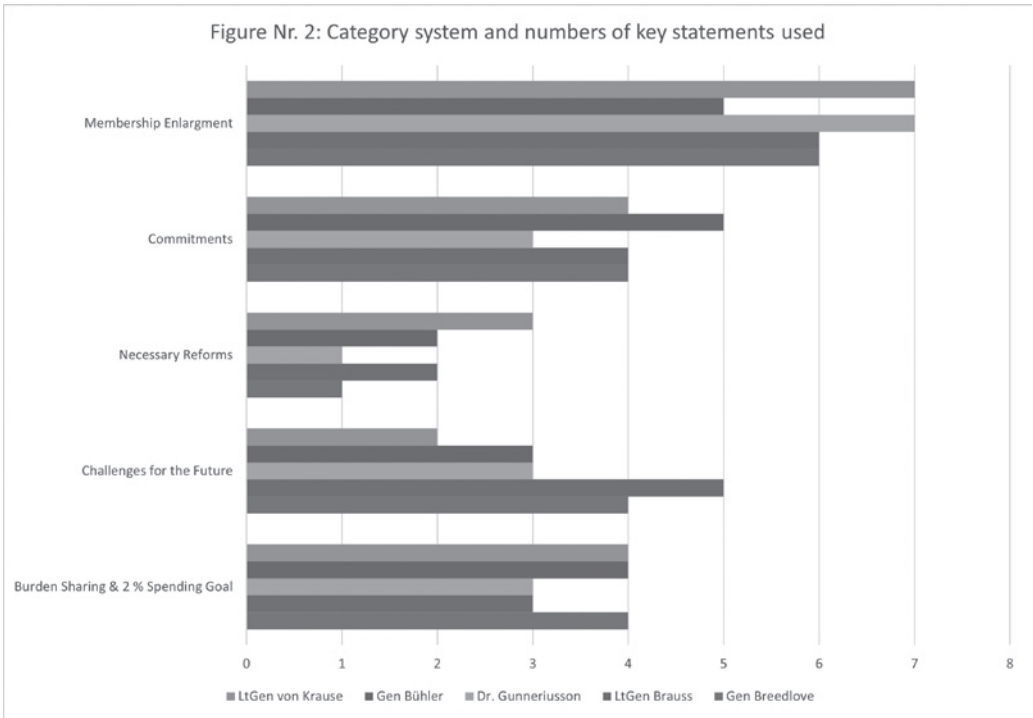
Literature research was used as a “flanking” and supporting means. The main chapter was used to put the interviews into the context dictated by the research categories,<sup>13</sup> which formed the chapters and conclusions have been drawn. The chapter was opened with a quote of a relevant paper (if found), followed by the paraphrased key statements and rounded up by an analysis by the author. For this paper, the FOM University – regulations for a formal design of scientific seminar – and graduation papers” of May 2020 have been used.

## Limitations

The main part of this article generates from interviews conducted with the experts. The personal opinion expressed is partially balanced in the paper with available official documents. Often the experts referred to meetings where the author was not present. The background of the experts who consented to interview has inevitably introduced a bias to the research, as most of them were former NATO officials or openly in favor of NATO. The size of the article (4 000 words) posed a limit to the number of interviews that could be conducted.

## Burden Sharing & 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Spending Goal

The experts expressed the opinion that the general NATO defense planning system is fit for purpose. However, it should be noted that Allied Command Transformation (ACT) in Norfolk, United States and the International Staff (IS) at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium have started a revision of this process. Lieutenant General Brauss explained



that the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP) is clearly structured and NATO's capability requirements to fulfil missions and tasks were assigned to all Allies as “NATO Capability Targets” within the NDPP. When met in full, the Capability Targets enable NATO to fulfil its conceivable operations and tasks (crisis response up to collective defense). These targets are ambitious as NATO decided at the Warsaw Summit of 2014 that they need more high-end capabilities and forces. Furthermore, he explained that the Minimum Military Requirements underlying the Capability Targets are identified by the defense planners at ACT, Allied Command Operations (ACO) in Mons, Belgium and NATO HQ.

General Bühler underlines this position saying defense planning in the alliance can only work if one defines capability require-

ments, i.e. a cake of capabilities that are derived from the operational plans and which are then distributed to the nations. He points out that there is a basic agreement on how many targets a nation must accept. Defense ministers receive regularly reports from the strategic commands on the implementation of those targets. The objective results from the NATO planning process are being given according to the formula 29 minus 1. According to him, this is a logical order that can also be carried out by a planner. No expert expressed explicit need to change the defense planning process.

During the Warsaw Summit the heads of state agreed to increase national defense expenditure and move towards the “2 percent of GDP spending goal” within ten years in order to fill NATO's capacity shortfalls.<sup>14</sup> This was not a completely new goal, as it

was included in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) that membership candidates are to commit significant budget resources into defense spending.<sup>15</sup> This had been reiterated at the Prague Summit of 2002.<sup>16</sup> General Breedlove states that “defense begins at home (Article 3) and people have to understand that the US, after years of carrying the main burden, expects the rest of the Allies to do their part”.

Lieutenant General Brauss sees the 2 percent target as an important part of the “Defense Investment Pledge” and for him, within the current security situation, it is without alternative to aim to reach it. Burden Sharing is for him not only about defense spending, it is also about fulfilling the NATO capability targets. Dr Gunneriusson supports the existence of the goal, as he thinks there should be something to aim for. If the US shifts its focus more to Asia, he thinks it will be easier for European nations to reach 2 percent.

The currently discussed European recovery fund after the COVID-crisis of 750 billion Euro<sup>17</sup> leaves even greater doubt that nations will live up to their promises. For General Bühler, this is a political “benchmark” with little practical relevance. Lieutenant general von Krause expressed in a recent publication<sup>18</sup> a considerable criticism of this goal (i. e. there is no real link between preserving security and the GDP). He reiterated this criticism in his interview, as there are significant definition problems for him. Each country budgets differently so the sizes are not comparable, and it is usually given in dollars and there are different conversion methods. However, for him, this value has a significant political impact, so we must live with it, however output-oriented criteria would be preferable.

Dr. Gunneriusson points out that people might misuse 2 percent (e.g. France 1940 had great defense capabilities, but they were wrong for the war situation with Germany they faced). The experts were overall supportive of the 2 percent GDP Spending Goal as a common target; however, they agree that there are definition problems and misunderstandings within the 2 percent spending goal, and that this should be looked at. It should be clarified that this goal stands for national spending on defense as a percentage of GDP and not for contributions to NATO. As a new culmination point, US President Trump confirmed in a Press Conference on Monday 16 June 2020 the withdraw of approx. 9 500 soldiers from Germany because of Germany's failure to meet the 2 percent.<sup>19</sup> The impact of this has yet to be seen and cannot be discussed further in this paper.

## Challenges for the future<sup>20</sup>

### Russia as an adversary in the east

Nowadays, Russia employs a tactic of mobilizing people with emotional arguments<sup>21</sup> (e.g. the west wants to suppress us). The Alliance has to work on the credibility of their political arguments in order to stabilize the deterrence strategy.<sup>22</sup> Gen Breedlove believes that Russia runs a program that tries to split NATO allies and emphasize the differences. He believes we have to try to find a better way forward with Russia and we need to engage in serious conversations to begin to establish/re-establish trust. Never has he seen Russia so active militarily and in hybrid means and he thinks that NATO is more relevant than it has ever been, and NATO needs to develop a response to those activities.

Lieutenant General Brauss sees the Russian deployment of land based intermediate-range nuclear-capable missiles (range approx. 2 300 km) as a threat. These missiles could strike targets everywhere in Europe. This could underpin a potential regional conventional attack and confront NATO with a “fait accompli” bolstered by a nuclear threat to paralyze NATO's decision-making processes. He thinks that maybe NATO could develop or deploy, as an example, long range precise conventional missiles that could strike key nodes necessary for Russia's capability to wage war. However, an alternative opinion might be that NATO has multiple weapon systems capable of deep strike within Russian territory. So, it appears to not be so clear who is the aggressor.

General Bühler says Russia is going through a development (started in mid-1990s), when the military and the economy were basically down. If you see Georgia (2008) & Ukraine since 2014, then “Power Projection” towards Syria and the expansion into Libya, you see a certain development. Russia today has the capabilities necessary to render minor conflicts, like Crimea, militarily “fait accompli”. This means that the Russians have escalation dominance. The experts agree that there will be in the foreseeable future an antagonistic relationship between NATO and Russia. For the purpose of this paper this means that it is to be assumed that the relationship with Russia will not fundamentally change in the next decade but the suggestion to NATO is to put every effort on trying. It will be important to try to understand Russia better and perhaps adopt a less belligerent approach.

## China as a new competitor for the US

General Breedlove believes that China can deal individually with the nations in the

Pacific because there is no NATO-like presence, which potentially serves as an example for Russia. He sees the South-China Sea as a future Area of Operation for NATO, which would require a Treaty change for NATO as Article 6 and Article 10 define the Area of Operation of NATO differently.

For Lieutenant General Brauss, the rise of China has increased the “great power competition”. He sees a number of indications that there is a security partnership between Russia and China. Which means that, in the future, the Americans place their strategic center of gravity towards Asia, their contingency planning will focus on that region and forces that will be assigned for potential conflicts may move from Europe to the Far East. If there would be a conflict between the U.S. and China, the transatlantic community would be confronted with two strategic challenges and Russia might then be tempted to exploit such a constellation. Dr Gunneriusson adds here, a major challenge for NATO that is the Article 6 and the Area of Operations for NATO. He reminds that NATO to a high degree is a European security project and not a global one. NATO should become a global power for situations as in the South-China Sea. It is to be however doubted that there is any interest in this, as NATO does not agree on even smaller issues. For General Bühler, China is one of the future superpowers, possibly almost alone after the COVID crisis.

The majority of the experts see in China an upcoming challenge for NATO, which the Alliance is right now not prepared to face, and they see a need for NATO to become a global actor. Therefore, the suggestion is that NATO reviews the articles of the Treaty and could become a global power with a potential presence in the South-China Sea. The experts saw the deterrence in Eastern

Europe as a good example which could be used also in Asia.

## The structure of NATO

According to General Breedlove, we should be focused on internal values and things that drive us back together. Lieutenant General Brauss believes that Europeans in NATO need to further enhance their contributions to deterrence and defense in Europe and they need to be prepared to contribute to the protection of the global sea lines of communication. He thinks NATO is still lacking a coherent and consistent reinforcement strategy and the implementation of the NATO Readiness Initiative is of utmost importance. Dr. Gunneriusson adds here, the challenge is to face threats which might come in different shapes than NATO was constructed for (it has to re-invent itself). For Lieutenant General von Krause, NATO as a whole is a challenge. NATO is the tool for multilateralism and, when the leading nation considers leaving, that is the biggest problem. General Bühler believes that you have to allow managerial posts more time so that they can understand a plan and implement it. Furthermore, NATO has a rotation principle based on three years cycles, undercut by many nations on many military posts for political reasons. In the long run he does not think that is feasible. NATO has to choose people based on their qualifications and not by nations.

This chapter links closely with the reform chapters. It is suggested that NATO look at the overarching structure and into ways to conduct business more “even footed” between Europe and the US, which begins with achieving the 2 percent target. The author shares the view of General Bühler that the system of staff rotation in NATO has to be critically reviewed. It is not working properly right now, so looking into the next decade;

NATO must decide what it wants, rotation for the sake of political compliance or a more tailored system based on the needs of the organization itself and on clearly articulated skillsets.

## Necessary reforms

### Definition of readiness

For General Breedlove, as SACEUR he felt that we did not have a common understanding of readiness, a transparency in the readiness and a readiness reporting requirement that gives military commanders a real understanding of what forces could be made available to them. Those definitions should be looked at and they should be streamlined to enable a better understanding of readiness in NATO.

### Strengthening Europe within NATO

Lieutenant General Brauss thinks the Americans will most likely wish to delegate more tasks and missions to the Europeans because they intend to focus on the Far East and even America does not have the military means to cope with two strategic conflicts concurrently. Enhancing Europe's role should be done by enhancing European military capabilities and coordinating their efforts in NATO and the EU to better avoid unnecessary duplication, remove fragmentation and create more and better capabilities. Dr Gunneriusson adds that with Europe taking more responsibilities we would also project more power over our interests.

Lieutenant General von Krause thinks that one way of doing this could be to further develop European defense cooperation, but that is not easy. The European army is for him an illusion, but the army of the Europeans would be a way, requiring the nations to start

to put back their own interests, which starts with differing defense spending interest. We should put back economic interests and be willing to add more sovereignty in the area of defense in the European idea, also to be more on the par with the US. During the analysis of the interviews and the supporting literature, it became clear that this should be tackled as soon as possible. NATO can become a better organization by having a better balance between the US and Europe.

### **Deterrence management**

For General Bühler, deterrence has to be managed. We do not do that yet; we are still on a level which he calls "Deterrence Administration" which is not yet management. This would mean that you can escalate/de-escalate up/down (a "Deterrence Modulation" adapted to drive the Deterrence up and down). What actually happened, we are back with the "selfishness of the nations"--there are large-scale multinational exercises that are led by nations, not coordinated with NATO, and potentially could provoke Russia. Even though this opinion has been stated by only one of the interview partners, the author chooses to include this as it matched his own experience. It is suggested to NATO to streamline those deterrence efforts.

### **NATO Commitments**

Broadly, the experts agree that a successful commitment needs two things: strategic patience and a condition-based approach. If these are not there, a mission is doomed to fail.

### **Afghanistan Mission**

Although not interviewed, the former SACEUR Admiral James Stavridis sees a chance of success of the recent peace agreement in Afghanistan of approx. 50-50 and

he emphasizes that there is no military solution and the fallen soldiers have to be honored by finding a political one.<sup>23</sup> Lieutenant General von Krause stated that Afghanistan was originally not a NATO-Mission and that the Alliance only came in later. General Breedlove normally compares the engagement in Afghanistan to commitments in Japan and Germany to underline that long-lasting success can only be achieved with steady commitment. On this scale, he emphasizes, we have only just begun in Afghanistan. In light of the planned US-withdraw and the Taliban-Afghan-peace agreement, for Lieutenant General Brauss, the mission will soon shift to be rather a symbolic one, as the Allies will be forced to withdraw too ("In together- out together"). The difficulty here may be that Afghanistan has a long history of being a violent place and a volatile political arena, as Dr Gunneriusson mentioned.

All experts agree that the condition-based approach and the strategic patience was not there in Afghanistan, the Alliance went in without a clear goal on what to achieve. NATO should take a close look at the Lessons learned (LL) of this mission, as they will be integral to consider for future commitments. Based on the interviews, Resolute Support Mission (RSM) will continue for the moment but will be replaced soon by a follow-on mission.

### **NATO Mission Iraq (NMI)**

For General Breedlove, Iraq is mostly a US-matter. Lieutenant General Brauss expressed that whether the training mission for Iraq will continue remains to be seen (the mission is currently on hold due to COVID-19). There is an expectation by the Americans of NATO doing more to fight terrorism in the region and there is a need to enhance NATO's effort to stabilize Iraq for a range

of reasons. At the moment, there are too many uncertainties to assess if and how this mission will continue. The analysis of the interviews has not given sufficient data to draw any real conclusions / predictions for this mission.

## Kosovo and the Balkans

According to former SACEUR General Wesley Clark, the engagement in Kosovo was successful because NATO was addressing a problem for Europe, the new destabilizing ethnic dispute and that NATO was using force only if all other means failed.<sup>24</sup> General Breedlove mentioned that the missions in the Balkan are important missions for us to keep the momentum. General Bühler added that it is possible to finish this mission in Kosovo if you take a political approach (integrate those countries in the EU). Without that, the conditions will never be created. For Lieutenant General von Krause, this mission has already fallen back to a symbolic one, predominantly a civilian mission under the aegis of the EU. Based on this it is likely that this mission will continue in the current status and it is desirable that there would be some effort to solve the political problems between the nations there. A broader way ahead will be described in the following.

## Enlargement in the future

### Finland & Sweden

The author Greg Simons expressed in his recent publication that there are divergent views in Sweden, but most likely Sweden wishes to only strengthen the cooperation with NATO without joining.<sup>25</sup> They are highly interoperable (as General Breedlove adds) and defense planning in the Baltic region is being discussed with them, as General Bühler explained. Dr. Gunneriusson as expert from the area added

that, in Finland, there is a constant debate about NATO, but never really a willingness to settle it. There could be a popular vote on this as possible in Sweden. So, if Sweden wanted, they could have solved this long time ago. He does not think it matters that much if these countries are NATO countries. They are fully integrated with the standards and the leadership organizations. It would matter for NATO to at least get Sweden on board because it is a sensitive area; however, this is unlikely as these countries would act together.

There is good reason to believe that pressure in some sort encouraged Sweden to place military on the island of Gotland again after previous demilitarization. Then, with increased tension and discussion about Suwalki Gap and also the Kaliningrad-threat, Gotland came up as a very strategic island because an occupation by a foreign power would definitely close the naval sea line of communication.

The experts unanimously do not expect Sweden and Finland to join. Some see it desirable in light of the Kaliningrad / Suwalki Gap Problem, but the conclusion is that it is not likely that this status of close aligned non-membership will change in the next decade as also the two nations don't have a clear position on this.

### Balkan Nations

The author Dr Utnaru-Troncotă states in a recent publication, that the Serbian position of being good friends with the West and with Russia is a comfortable position for their leaders to pursue.<sup>26</sup> General Breedlove does not think he sees any new members in the Balkans, after the last ascensions that are near completing the process. Lieutenant General Brauss sees the Western Balkans as “unfinished business” for both NATO and



the EU. He shares the view of Dr Utnaru-Troncotă. For Dr Gunneriusson, Russia see itself as the guardian of the Slavic people, even if not all agree to that. He thinks if Serbian politicians believe it is in their interest to listen to Russia then they will not join. That is the same with Bosnia-Herzegovina as long as Republic Serbska exists as more or less an autonomous part of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Kosovo has to become a proper state first of course. General Bühler sees a hole in the middle of the Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina & Kosovo) and it would be good to fill it.

It has to be concluded that the experts see it desirable to welcome those nations into NATO, however it is not easy and will not be accomplished for the foreseeable future. Serbia has to decide on which side it wants to be, Kosovo has to become a proper state (it is not recognized by numerous countries) and as long as Serbia does not recognize Kosovo, this will not happen.

## Georgia & Ukraine

During the Bucharest Summit (3 April 2008), NATO reiterated their support for membership for those states.<sup>27</sup> Since then, there have been several wars in both states. General Breedlove thinks that as long as Russia occupies territories there, they will not join NATO. Lieutenant General Brauss thinks, we should make every effort to support them in their endeavors to become a democratic state, but we need to carefully consider whether integrating them would enhance NATO's and their own security or whether it will in the worst case provoke the Russian regime. General Bühler does not see them joining due to their internal conflicts and neither does Lieutenant General von Krause. He further adds that if they had been members in 2008/2014, the world would have been

at war (article 5). None of the experts sees it realistic for those countries to join as Russia would oppose that potentially with the use of force; all think that NATO should continue their support to them outside of a formal membership. Therefore, it is recommended that NATO continues to support those without letting them join. Furthermore, NATO should not cease to try to bring Russia and these Nations to the negotiation table. An acceptable peace for all involved is worth more here than a NATO membership, but most likely out of reach for some time to come.

## Conclusions

To conclude this article, it must be stated that what was done in this text is to an extent a "look into a crystal ball", as nobody knows how the future will be. What would a credible NATO Alliance look like in 2030? The outcome of the interviews is that there is no further enlargement likely. Nations considered in this publication will not join NATO unless there is a significant change in domestic politics. It became evident, that in terms of burden sharing, allies need to live up to their promises. An important part of this could be a more united Europe, which would discuss with America on an "equal footing".

It may be worthwhile here to promote further, what the 2 percent target actually stands for. Defense planning in the future could be more global (including Asia); however, this would require significant (treaty) changes, which are unlikely. As noted in the challenges chapter, NATO could be stronger for the future with a more aligned structure. The Alliance should seek more dialogue with Russia and try to understand them better. What is clear is that the experts agree that NATO is still relevant in those turbulent times and (if reformed properly) will remain

a key player in security politics. As Admiral Stavridis puts it, we shall not forget that the world is a dangerous place (he signed more than 2000 condolence letters during his time as SACEUR).<sup>28</sup> There is a lot of potential to look into this matter more deeply.

The author is Master Sergeant in the German Air Force and serves as Staff Assistant (Information Knowledge Management) at NATO HQ Joint Force Command Brunssum.

## Notes

1. The author wrote this article as a private person and by no means any part of it states an official opinion of NATO HQ Joint Force Command Brunssum.
2. NATO 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 2020, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_165254.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_165254.htm).
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10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Gunneriusson, Håkan: *Hybrid Warfare and Deniability as Understood by the Military*, Polish Political Science Yearbook, vol. 48(2), 2019, p. 282.
13. See Figure No. 2.
14. Wales Summit Declaration, 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm?mode=pressrelease](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?mode=pressrelease), Item no. 14.
15. MAP, 1999, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_27444.htm?](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27444.htm?), Item III 1.
16. Prague Summit Declaration, 2002, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_19552.htm?](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19552.htm?), Item 5.
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18. von Krause, Ulf: *Das Zwei-Prozent Ziel der NATO und die Bundeswehr*, Springer VS Verlag, 2019, p. 7
19. Quinn, Colm: US President announces withdraw from Germany, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/16/trump-withdrawing-9500-troops-from-germany-merkel-grenell-pompeo-yang/>.
20. At the time of the publication of this research paper, the consequences/challenges arising from the COVID-19 crisis had yet to be experienced. The interviewed experts have not seen eye-to-eye on possible implications, therefore the author decided to exclude this matter.
21. Veebel, Viljar: "The Deterrence Credibility of NATO and the Readiness of the Baltic States to Employ the Deterrence Instruments", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 2017-2018, vol.16, 2018, p. 29.
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23. Stavridis, James: "Give Peace a chance", *Time Magazine*, 16-23 March 2020, p. 28.
24. Clark, Wesley K.: "How we succeeded in Kosovo", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Fall/Winter 2019, vol. XXVI, Issue I, p. 177.
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27. Bucharest Summit Declaration, 2018, [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/57772.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/57772.htm), Item 23.
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