

Does NATO have a future?

by Fabian Böttcher¹

Resumé

Kriget i Ukraina har utan tvekan förändrat Europas politiska landskap i allmänhet och säkerhetsläget i synnerhet. Institutioner som Nato befann sig i en identitetskris före krigsutbrottet men dess ställning har sedan dess stärkts. Huruvida Nato har en framtid är ingen ny frågeställning utan den har ofta återkommit under senare år. Författaren behandlade denna frågeställning i en artikel publicerad i *KKrVAHT*, 4. häftet 2020, närmare bestämt hur en tänkbar Nato-allians skulle kunna se ut år 2030. Syftet med föreliggande artikel är att återkoppla till några av huvudfrågorna som togs upp i den tidigare artikeln, men i en kortare version. Föreliggande artikel skrevs i samband med författarens magisteruppsats och var begränsad i textlängd varpå återkoppling till samtliga aspekter av ursprungsartikeln inte varit möjlig. Vi vet idag inte hur kriget i Ukraina kommer att sluta eller vilka konsekvenserna kommer att bli, men vi kan redan konstatera att Nato reagerade snabbare och mer effektivt på krigets utmaningar än vad kritikerna förutspått. Då Natoländerna förväntas lägga 2 procent av sin BNP på försvaret, teknologisk utveckling, kvinnors rättigheter, insatser för fred och säkerhet – samt Nato:s nya strategiska koncept och dess framtida utvidgning (att innefatta även Finland och Sverige) – så finns det hopp om en framtid för Nato-alliansen. Men detta är under förutsättning att alliansmedlemmar inte ger uttryck för oförtjänt självbelåtenhet som hämmar Natos utveckling.

ON 03 SEPTEMBER 2030 NATO died as Putin achieved all goals of his Thirteen Days War, conquering the Baltic States and as the “Bluff” of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty got called.² The success was accompanied by a carefully tailored nuclear threat to Europe not including the US, and the European Armies had no means at all to counter the Russian aggression.³ Luckily, this is only a made-up scenario. But how is the factual relevance of NATO in 2022? Questions regarding the relevance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are not new. Already in the Summer of 1989 Francis Fukuyama raised the question whether we still need NATO since History according to him was about to end.⁴ What can we do to prevent such a scenario as drawn by Allen, Hodges

& Lindley-French from happening? NATO was able to celebrate on 04 April 2019 in Washington D C USA its 70th birthday. By now, NATO is even 73 years old. So how does it look for a future of this organization? At a first glance, this might seem to be a rather simplistic question, which it is not.

In the following, the author is going to revisit the main points of the 2020 publication about NATO’s future⁵ in combination with NATO’s very own 2030 initiative and publication⁶ and other relevant sources.

The process of completing this essay was started by a literature review in combination with revisiting previous sources. It was aimed wherever possible to use recent sources (2020–2022). Identified key points served as subchapters for the main part. Based up-

on the material found and the citations utilized, the author developed his opinion with regards to certain subjects. The word count limit by the University (2500 words) served as an initial natural limitation for the essay, hence not all points could be revisited or in the length and complexity of what the subject normally merited. The final draft of the essay was reviewed by an independent person (grammar, spelling and logical consistency) and afterwards, necessary adjustments were applied. The essay has been extended to a degree for the purpose of publication.

2 percent Gross Domestic product Spending Goal

Ever since the Allies decided at the Warsaw Summit in 2014 that every member is to spend 2 percent GDP on its defense expenditures,⁷ this has been a highly debated topic and a source of criticism by US Presidents towards Europeans who verbally supported this but didn't act sufficiently on it. This posed significant risk of controversy and decreasing cohesion in the Alliance. One can argue that it is somewhat sad that the War in Ukraine was needed to push some of the European NATO partners into action. Notably, the German Chancellor Olaf

Scholz announced in the Bundestag on 27 Feb 2022 that Germany will be working to meet each year going forward the 2 percent spending goal.⁸

The above chart (allied nations in green) with some recent data shows that, also due to COVID-19, not many NATO nations are close to meeting the 2 percent target. Likely if met, this will increase the cohesion of the Alliance and make it more prepared to fulfill its tasks. This is a positive development for the Alliance, just as it may be reiterated that (as expressed in a previous publication) any spending goal must be linked to tangible deliveries, meaning defense capabilities fit for purpose.⁹ Still, overall, it remains a long way to go to reach the 2 percent target.

Strategic Concept 2022 & NATO Madrid Summit June 2022

The NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022 saw the unveiling of a new Strategic Concept,¹⁰ which was somewhat overdue given that the last strategic concept dated back to the Lisbon Summit of 2010, which was very much focused on missions like the one in Afghanistan, which hadn't recognized Russia as an adversary and which omitted to mention China at all.¹¹ The new Strategic

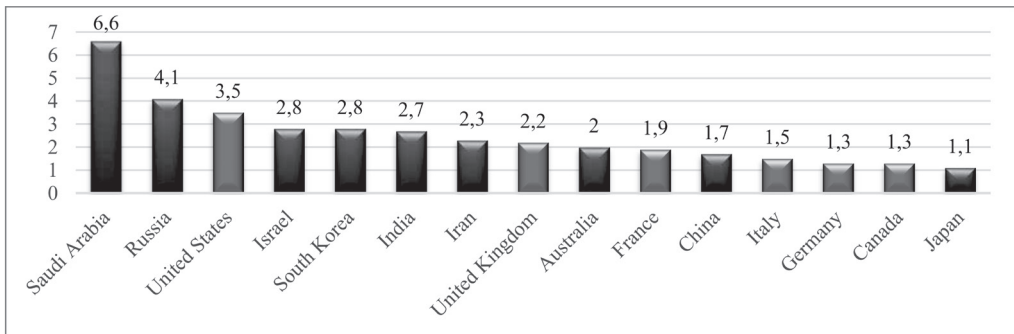


Figure 1: Military expenditure in % of GDP (highest spending countries 2021). Source: Military expenditure as percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) in highest spending countries 2021 available at www.statista.com.¹²

concept reiterated collective defense as a key task of the Alliance, named Russia as an aggressor against international security and pointed out that China's worldwide ambitions increasingly challenge NATO.¹³ The Strategic Concept was to a degree based on the previously issued recommendations by the Advisory Group to the Secretary General, "NATO 2030".¹⁴ Those recommendations included that a new Concept must aim to better take into consideration the various threat perceptions of NATO nations (e.g. Italy on Migration in the Mediterranean and Baltic States on Russia).¹⁵

It is interesting to note that by addressing these issues, NATO nations also followed a suggestion by Allen, Hodges and Lindley-French in their book.¹⁶ Besides that, the Summit in Madrid was important in many other regards. NATO reiterated its commitment to support Ukraine, the Allies committed to a significant increase in the deterrence and defense posture and they handed an invitation for Sweden and Finland to join the Alliance.¹⁷ It is with no understatement that one can judge that a new Strategic Concept was overdue and that all decisions made in Madrid are important to make the Alliance ready for the future. The only thing remaining is to deliver on the promises given and implement a working deterrence force posture going forward.

The Adversary Russia¹⁸

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine most certainly changed the security landscape of Europe. Thomas McNamara argued in

May 2022 that Putin's thinking construct is about an alleged loss of Russia's imperial past, which he tries to recreate by "correcting" international borders.¹⁹ Furthermore, he adds that the US and Europe made huge mistakes in handling Russia by promoting a badly coordinated NATO-expansion and not maintaining critical military capabilities.²⁰ Looking back at the strategic concept described in the last chapter, Allies expressed particular concerns about Russia when it comes to the capability to develop and utilize new disruptive delivery systems like hypersonic missiles.²¹

If one looks at the chain of interventions and small wars caused or supported by Russia since 1992, it appears strange to look back at the doubts of the public in February 2022 whether Putin will go ahead with an invasion of Ukraine or not. However, as suggested in the last publication, NATO leaders have considerable effort in conversations and exchanges with Russia before the start of the war, but unfortunately, Ukraine in 2022 is a continuation of the efforts to inflict a "fait accompli" like in Georgia in 2008 and in Crimea in 2014.²² Regrettably, it is to be expected that the war will go on for some time but thanks to the support by the western community, there is a good chance for Ukraine to not lose the war.

Enlargements Initiatives

While the author in 2020 did not see it likely for Finland and Sweden to join NATO,²³ Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine changed this, leading towards the invitation

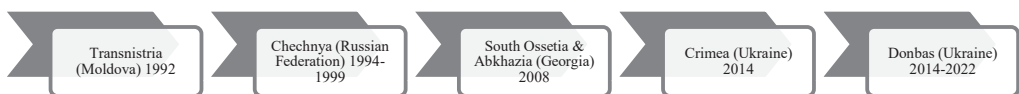


Figure 2: Timeline of Russian Wars / interventions in former Soviet territory 1992–2022. Source: Own creation.

for both countries to join the alliance during the Madrid summit.²⁴ Finland and Sweden will significantly enhance the capabilities of the alliance in many fields, but also significantly extend the direct border between Russia and NATO. Ukraine and Georgia are important partners of NATO with the ambition to join the alliance, since one could see the membership as the best protection of the security of a country.²⁵ Both countries have been contributing significantly to NATO's peacekeeping efforts but both have also a long history of hostilities inflicted by Russia (Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014 & currently ongoing).²⁶

Here one might reiterate the finding of the author from 2020 that while the alliance has every sympathy with Ukraine & Georgia, it does not appear wise to offer a membership action plan (MAP), let alone the membership, as long as parts of their territory is being occupied by Russia.²⁷ Also, NATO's principle of unanimous votes on the accession of new members make it unlikely for Georgia and Ukraine to join anytime soon.²⁸ Regrettably, the author did not find any reports of the remaining Balkan nations making notable progress towards a NATO membership, so it continues to seem unlikely for any of those to join the alliance in the nearer future.²⁹ As long as there won't be any consolidation between Serbia and Kosovo or a further integration of Serbia into European structures, there won't be progress with membership for these nations.

Did we learn lessons from the COVID-19-pandemic?

While Allies refrained from invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty during the height of the COVID-19 crisis, NATO provided significant support to nations in need with strategic airlift capabilities for medical supplies

and the like.³⁰ Led by the Secretary General (SG) and the Deputy Secretary General (DSG), NATO presented itself as a competent crisis manager attending to pandemic-specific tasks while continuing operations like Afghanistan and Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP).³¹ One takeaway to be considered for the future of the alliance should be that NATO must (going forward) be prepared for future pandemics as significant security risks.³² This can only be achieved by planning ahead and by remaining adaptable and emitting solidarity for the Allies.³³

It cannot be ruled out that in the future potential adversaries will even possess the capabilities and willingness to engineer a new pathogen like "COVID-29" in the publication by Allen, Hodges & Lindley-French.³⁴ Overall, one may see the Alliance work in the context of COVID-19 as successful. Even though the work of the alliance could for the most part not be completed in the home office, NATO managed to deal with the new challenge of COVID-19 in an appropriate manner, without jeopardizing its missions. By this work, NATO certainly reiterated trust in the population through evolving to deal with challenges emerging from phenomena like a pandemic.³⁵

Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

One might argue that consequences of war and conflicts disproportionately affect women and children, e.g. in the form of sexual violence.³⁶ Introduced in 2007 and based upon United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, the NATO agenda on women, peace and security is aiming on integrating (various) gender perspectives into operations of NATO.³⁷ In a nutshell, with this agenda NATO aims at including the gender perspectives into the core tasks of cooperate

security, deterrence and crisis prevention.³⁸ How is this being accomplished? First, there is a Special Representative to the NATO SG for Women, Peace and Security, which is currently Ms Irene Fellin (ITA).³⁹ She has direct access to the Secretary General and is the one implementing the WPS agenda. This structure of gender advisors is mirrored in all NATO headquarters with an advisor to the respective commander. The WPS agenda aims in recognizing that in most conflicts women are the victims of (sexual) violence, which needs to be dealt with somehow.⁴⁰

Even though this agenda faced some initial struggles, it has developed significantly and is considered within all of NATO's tasks.⁴¹ The significance NATO attributes to this can be seen by its inclusion in the 2022 strategic concept.⁴² It is seen as very important by researchers that NATO further integrates the WPS agenda in order to be able to deal with increasingly complex conflicts with increasingly complex gender situations.⁴³ This can only work if gender matters are considered a key part of any leadership approach, if NATO aims to diversify its leadership and if there is a real accountability on achievements related to WPS.⁴⁴

On this graphic, one can see that since 9/11 the average of women in NATO's armed forces doubled, while it experienced some decline along the way. NATO's member nations are far from an equal number of men and women in their armed forces but considering how "new" the concept of serving female members in armed forces is in NATO nations, there is clear progress and NATO is on a good way.

Technological Advancements

Allen, Hodges and Lindley-French argued in 2020 that any future war in Europe will be a highly technologized one.⁴⁵ This is something one can clearly observe in Russia's ongoing war of aggression with drones strikes, Elon Musk's "Starlink" satellites providing extraordinarily important support to Ukraine's forces on the ground and the like. In general, one can state that no organization that wishes to remain relevant can ignore the rapid technological developments in the world, like digitalization and digital transformation.⁴⁶ This is something leaders of all levels have to consider for their approach on leading in a digital age.⁴⁷

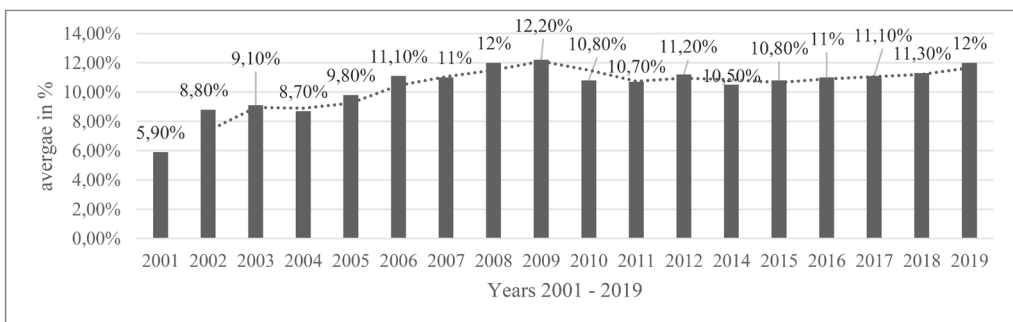


Figure 3: Average of women in NATO member states armed forces. Source: Own creation, based upon data from Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member & Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, 2019.⁴⁸

There are countless ongoing developments in Quantum, Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS), Hypersonic Technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) with broad consequences on any potential battlefield, which NATO has to take into consideration.⁴⁹ Since not all allied nations are on the same level of technological development, emerging and disruptive technologies (EDT) have the potential to seriously jeopardize the cohesion and the effectiveness of the alliance if not addressed properly.⁵⁰ Technological developments / advancements will continue to be a topic to consider for further research on the matter of NATO's future.

Analyzing NATO's potential for a future

Based on the things stated up until here, the author assesses that there is a lot of potential for NATO's future. One can say that potential doubts about the relevance of the alliance going forward in the 21st century have been wiped away by Russia's war of aggression. Nations who had been neutral for decades wish to join the alliance, since they recognize the importance of such an organization for their territorial security. This is not to say that NATO is without problems or challenges. The alliance must continue to do all in its power to ensure cohesion and relevance of the organization. There still are lessons to be identified from the failure of the mission in Afghanistan.

On the principle of unanimous votes, NATO might wish to consider a reform, since there appear to be single nations who block the accession of new member states on grounds which are debatable to a certain extent. Here, one could make a case for some sort of majority mechanism (e.g. $\frac{3}{4}$ majority). Allies must uphold and even extend their recent promises on defense

spendings (technological advancements are anything but cheap) and they must ensure that the importance of defense matters for national politics is recognized in all member states. The COVID-19 pandemic gave NATO the possibility to show its usefulness for the population under different circumstances. NATO should continue to aim for equal representation, to increase the numbers of women in the armed forces. Taking all this into consideration, it is assessed that NATO indeed has a future and a good one, if allies keep up their commitment.

Conclusion

The question whether NATO has a future is a very complex one of high importance for the alliance. Ever since the report of the expert group was published in 2020, NATO worked on implementing suggestions made there. It was interesting for the author to revisit the subject after his published article from 2020. There are a multitude of sources on this topic and more and more papers are being published, so there is huge interest in this subject in the scientific community. It may be reiterated that no one knows what the future might bring,⁵¹ so the current essay is one attempt to find meaningful conclusions. Other authors may have different opinions or may put different factors in the center of the analysis.

An aspect not visited in this essay, which merits further analysis, could be the role of Europe in NATO and how a stronger European continent could release some burden from America. Given the rapid developments in the political world, the subject of NATO's future should be revisited from time to time.

The Russian war of aggression is continuing, and one can only guess how the political world will look after this war ends. Even

though the alliance recognized Russia as its major adversary, there should be every effort by NATO to get back into a dialogue with Russia after the end of the war. This should in no shape or form be seen as stating that Russia's aggression to Ukraine was justified. The author firmly believes in cooperation with the people of Russia, but most likely not with the system of Putin. Committed war crimes and atrocities have to be investigat-

ed and prosecuted. A future alliance should carefully evaluate whether it wishes to grow further or whether potential new members would bring more problems than usefulness.

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Notes

1. The author produced this article as a private person and in shape or form related to his current employer.
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16. Allen, John R. et al.: "Future War and the Defence of Europe", *Oxford University Press*, 2021, p. 146.
17. Op. cit., Hamilton, Daniel S., see note 11, p. 132.
18. Disclaimer: Since Ukraine War is an ongoing conflict with rapid developments, anything expressed here can naturally only be a preliminary finding.

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27. Op. cit., Boettcher, Fabian, see note 5, p. 60.
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34. Op. cit., Allen, John R. et al., see note 16, p. 19.
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44. Ibid., p. 108.
45. Op. cit., Allen, John R. et al., see note 16, p. 245.
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