

# A REVITALIZED NATO AND ITS “NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT” AMID GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CHANGES

*At the beginning of 2022, just as the globalizing world was entering the post-Covid period and the United Nations Climate Change Conference declared a “code red” emergency for the climate crisis at COP 27, a strategically calculated move came from Russian President Vladimir Putin to unlawfully invade Ukraine. From the beginning, the invasion of Ukraine has generated impacts much larger and more transformative than any previous crisis, triggering serious crisis-ridden developments in the international system and globalization and forcing national governments and global actors to recalibrate and reposition. It is in this global and broader context NATO’s Madrid Summit and its “new Strategic Concept” should be analyzed and assessed. This paper argues that the summit is historic, necessary, but not sufficient. To substantiate this argument, it analyzes is NATO’s new strategic concept in detail, exploring its critical importance, its transformative effect and the six challenges that it faces.*

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**C**ontrary to the fast and immature declarations of the “end of history” at the end of the Cold War in 1990, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has so far given rise to recurring global crises in security, economy, democracy, and climate and shifted power configurations between the West and the rest. The 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, the 2008 global economic crisis, the 2010 Arab uprisings, climate change, democratic backsliding, the Covid-19 Pandemic, and finally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine can all be categorized as “multiple crises of globalization”, paving the way to a “systemic change and power transition” in global politics. In his book *Strategic Vision*, Zbigniew Brzezinski calls this double movement “global turmoil”, a time characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, risk, and ontological insecurity whose consequences and impact could create everlasting conflicts and wars unless they are coped with effectively.<sup>1</sup> A hundred years ago, at the beginning of the 20th century, Antonio Gramsci penned his famous statement describing a similar situation: “the old is dying, the new cannot be born yet: in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of 2022, just as the globalizing world was entering the post-Covid period and the United Nations Climate Change Conference declared a “code red” emergency for the climate crisis at COP 27, a strategically calculated move came from Russian President Vladimir Putin. On 22 February, Putin famously gave a speech to justify his decision to invade Ukraine with reference both to previous world wars’ rhetoric on irredentism and fascism, and to the NATO decision in 2014 to further expand its geopolitical boundaries after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. On 24 February, Russia began its illegal invasion of Ukraine. Putin’s war aimed not only at the destruction of Ukraine but also, and more importantly, to leverage Russia against the West and strengthen its strategic place and capacity amid the new era of great power competition. From the beginning, the invasion of Ukraine has generated impacts much larger, more effective, and more transformative than any previous crisis, triggering serious developments in the international system and globalization and forcing national governments and global actors to recalibrate and reposition.

I argue that it is in this context of the simultaneous existence of war and system transitions that NATO’s Madrid Summit, and its “new Strategic Concept” should be analyzed and assessed. It has been seven months since the beginning of the ongoing invasion. As the conflict and combat have escalated, its impact has been crisis-ridden and multilayered. The war has sparked anew period of geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainties. The world as we know has profoundly changed. Moreover, we might be in a situation today where we are not able to fully capture the effects of the invasion, which might ripple out for years. As we can already see from the

<sup>1</sup> Z. B Brzezinski, *Strategic Vision* (Basic Books, New York, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> A. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2000).

ensuing food and energy crises, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has brought to the fore the multiple crises of globalization that have been occurring simultaneously in the areas of security, energy, and food, coupled with climate, recession, unemployment, and inflation. At the same time, this has accelerated the ongoing systemic change and transition.

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While “the post-Cold War era” has come to an end with the beginning of the war, the political economy of globalization has been altered, combating global warming has been neglected, and a more fluid and disruptive era has begun. Furthermore, there is a laundry list of signs that the Pax-Americana and its embedded liberal post-1945 world order are quickly coming to an end: calls for the “Second Cold War” or “Cold War 2.0”; concerns about a nuclear war leading to the “Third World War”; trade wars and the rise of “de-globalization”; widening and deepening of severe polarization, exclusionary nationalism and “culture wars”; democratic backsliding and illiberal authoritarian populism; the global power shift and the fortification of the power of the non-Western international relations and strategic capitalism. Meanwhile, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, while fastening the end of the era, has been bringing about a variety of morbid symptoms and crisis-ridden developments, requiring each and every actor to reposition its role and place. During this interregnum, this transition, no actor is immune from the necessity to recalibrate its capacity and strategy. Strategic vision and choice are absolutely imperative for success. This is nowhere more evident and necessary than in Europe and the West.

### ***NATO’s Madrid Summit: Historic, Necessary but not Sufficient***

The initial reaction of Europe and the West to the invasion has been truly remarkable. The unity of the West, of Europe, of the transatlantic Alliance, of NATO, and the EU has been to a large extent achieved. What remains to be seen is the degree to which this initial and truly remarkable unity can be sustained amid the global and regional turmoil, the complexity of which has deepened through the multiple crises of globalization and changing power configurations in the international system.

In this historical context, NATO leaders gathered in Madrid on 29-30 June 2022 not only to discuss how to effectively tackle the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its immediate and long-term impacts, including the acceptance of Finland and Sweden's historic applications for membership, but also to set NATO's strategic direction for the future and to strengthen its role and place in European and global collective security, both of which will ensure that the Alliance will continue to adapt to the changing transatlantic and global world.

Together with the New Strategic Concept, key points discussed throughout the gathering covered the strengthening of investments in deterrence and defense. Among other measures, NATO decided that by 2024, Allies must meet the requirement of spending 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Furthermore, support to Ukraine and other partners at risk was ensured by a strengthened Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine, which includes support in areas like secure communications, anti-drone systems, and fuel. Additionally, the Alliance's adaptation to emerging challenges such as issues related to climate change, challenges from NATO's South, and the reaffirmation of NATO's common values were among the topics discussed.

Just as remarkable as the memorandum of the summit was the trilateral agreement reached by Türkiye, Finland, and Sweden by which Ankara, as an existing member of the Western military alliance, lifted its veto on Finland's and Sweden's bid to join the Alliance in return for comprehensive assurances regarding the aspiring member states' links to Kurdish militants considered as a threat to Türkiye's national security. Indeed, before the gathering, the Turkish government had already clarified its uncompromising stance on the Nordic countries' membership as long as they pursued their ongoing investigations into the financing and recruitment activities against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and affiliated groups. Common ground was championed mostly thanks to Secretary-General Stoltenberg's constructive approach and his understanding of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's arguments, including that "No Ally has suffered more brutal terrorist attacks than Türkiye, including from the terrorist group PKK."<sup>3</sup> On the eve of the summit, the tripartite meeting between the leaders of Sweden, Finland, and Türkiye as well as Secretary-General Stoltenberg resulted in the candidate states confirming that the PKK is a terrorist organization and promising to interrupt all bilateral activities with it and affiliated groups. This sent a strong message of unity and support for Kyiv in response to the immensely radicalized Russian threat.

By and far the most important outcome of the summit was the New Strategic Concept. The Concept is the guiding document that has outlined NATO's values

<sup>3</sup> Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the trilateral meeting between Türkiye, Finland, and Sweden, NATO, last updated 29 June 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_197253.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_197253.htm)

and vision every ten years since the end of the Cold War. It is a blueprint for future strategic plans and outlines NATO’s transformation in line with the NATO 2030 agenda adopted at the 2021 Summit. The new Strategic Concept consists of a total of 49 articles to “define the security challenges facing the Alliance and outlines the political and military tasks that NATO will carry out to address them.”<sup>4</sup> The Concept outlines NATO’s three core tasks: deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.<sup>5</sup>

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As outlined in the Strategic Concept, Russia is considered the “most significant and direct threat” to alliance security.<sup>6</sup> This is an important point of departure from NATO’s last Strategic Concept in 2010, which defines Russia as a “strategic partner” of NATO, and to that end, the 2010 Concept focused on improving dialogue and cooperation with Moscow. True to its time, this reflects the pre-2014 security environment before NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia.

The new Concept is reflective of a completely different threat environment, as now NATO is facing an era of strategic competition. For the first time, it recognizes that the Euro-Atlantic area is “not at peace.”<sup>7</sup> Its security is undermined by strategic competition as well as pervasive instability. Therefore, the Concept calls for further reinforcement of the “deterrence and defense” function of the Alliance under Article 5.8As has been enshrined in the Washington Treaty for over 70 years, the Alliance’s key purpose and greatest responsibility is to ensure Allies’ collective defense as etched in Article 5.

Furthermore, within the new Strategic Concept, there is a focus on climate-related issues. Climate change is recognized as a “defining challenge, with a profound impact” on NATO’s collective security. The Alliance aims to become the leader of climate change security. With efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and

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<sup>4</sup> “FACT SHEET: The 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid”, *The Office of the White House*, 29 June 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/29/fact-sheet-the-2022-nato-summit-in-madrid/>

<sup>5</sup> “Strategic Concepts”, *NATO*, last updated 18 July 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_56626.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm)

<sup>6</sup> “NATO declares Russia its ‘most direct threat,’ offers Finland, Sweden membership”, *DW*, 29 June 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-declares-russia-its-most-direct-threat-offers-finland-sweden-membership/a-62297662> 29 June 2022.

<sup>7</sup> “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept”, *NATO*, accessed 18 July 2022, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

<sup>8</sup> “FACT SHEET: The 2022 NATO Summit”, *The White House*.

improve energy efficiency, NATO aims to combat the impacts of climate change while still ensuring military effectiveness and deterrence and defense. Thus, the new strategic concept aims to consider climate change, human security, and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda across all NATO tasks.<sup>9</sup>

The new strategic concept embodies a new focus on hybrid threats. Terrorism, for example, is defined as a threat to the security of citizens and international peace as well as prosperity and is seen as the “most direct asymmetric threat”. Also, as defined earlier by NATO, cyber threats such as cyber-attacks could directly invoke Article 5. Upgraded defense plans, with more forces at high readiness and specific forces pre-assigned to defend specific Allies, more troops, and more prepositioned equipment and weapons stockpiles in the east of the Alliance, have dramatically enhanced NATO’s eight multinational battlegroups.

Therefore, one can say that NATO will continue to adapt and develop, politically and militarily, to meet the challenges of a more unpredictable and competitive world. The Alliance is based on the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and North America. Within the new Strategic Concept, it is stated that NATO remains the unique, essential, and indispensable transatlantic forum to consult, coordinate, and act on all matters related to Allies’ security.

Let us turn our attention briefly to the European Union (EU). The war in Ukraine has been unprecedented in bringing together EU member states rapidly in the field of foreign policy. The EU’s primary actions have taken the form of six consecutive sanctions packages, including individual and economic sanctions, media restrictions, transport-related restrictions, a gradual oil ban, and diplomatic measures; granting of candidacy status to Ukraine and Moldova; a commitment to completely end the EU’s dependence on Russian oil and gas by 2030; and increased defense spending by individual member states, most notably Germany.

Yet, these measures also attest to the fact that in matters concerning security and defense, Europe still relies primarily on NATO and the United States. The EU has not yet taken any concrete measures toward developing a more substantial and unified security and defense policy. This means that the post-Second World War model of ensuring European security through the U.S. military presence and the political and economic integration embodied in the EU continues and will prevail for the time being.

In this context, the necessary and historic Madrid summit and the approved new

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<sup>9</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, NATO.

strategic concept would recalibrate, remodify, and revitalize NATO’s modus operandi and importance in European and global security architecture. As Galip Dalay has correctly observed, NATO is becoming “more European in its membership composition but more global in its ambition by establishing more links between the security of the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific.”<sup>10</sup> It did so by bringing to the fore the need for (a) a more agile and robust collective security; (b) a more determined stand and fight against terrorism; (c) a multi-dimensional and multi-layered understanding of security by going beyond state security and paying scant attention to democracy, human rights, human security, and climate change; and (d) a rules-based global and regional governance.

Moreover, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a revitalized NATO has meant, first, that Europe rather than the United States will be “pivotal terrain” for European, transatlantic, and global collective defense. Second, NATO will be the “key anchor” linking transatlantic security and collective defense with the Pacific and Asia. Third, NATO’s new Strategic Concept will mark an “institutional pivot” in European collective security defense. While the EU is focusing on making itself a “geopolitical actor” and achieving its strategic compass for security and defense, to put it in the words of President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, NATO’s new Strategic Concept and EU’s strategic compass and energy policy are expected to take decisive steps together in stride toward the regulation and reduction of Europe’s gas demand. Europe must explore alternatives in preparing for the coming “Winter Peril” caused by Russia’s oncoming gas disruptions. Finally, the revitalization of NATO is a necessary step in the revitalization and strengthening of the West not only as an “idea” but also as a “unified actor” in the battle between global rules-based governance versus populist authoritarianism and strategic capitalism.

### *Six Challenges*

Indeed, as an initial response to the invasion, all of these decisions and ideas are truly remarkable. They constitute decisive and historic steps against invasion/aggression and power change/transition in the international system. Yet, they are not sufficient to achieve the desired end. There are at least six serious challenges hampering success, namely those of achieving sustainability, promoting democracy, internalizing inclusive governance, and advocating for rules-based inter- and intra-institutional alliances rather than transactionalism. In conclusion, let us clarify these challenges:

**First**, even though these efforts to achieve unity are remarkable, the unity of the

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<sup>10</sup> G. Dalay, “Turkey gains much from NATO, but a rocky road lies ahead”, *Chatham House*, 12 July 2022.

West at the nation-state and institutional levels is not easy to maintain. As the global and regional turmoil and globalization's multiple crises endure, cooperation and collaboration between actors becomes more difficult to continue. The “**sustainability and resilience**” of this unity is thus the main challenge to deal with. How to render this remarkable unity into a resilient and enduring one, as well as how to maintain NATO's effectiveness, are questions whose answers remain uncertain.

**Second**, the historic decisions taken at the NATO and EU summits should be coupled with a “**democratic reboot**”. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is an attack by authoritarian populism on democracy and the rules-based international system. Moreover, democratic resilience, coupled with an effective system of checks and balances, is a recipe against fragility and fragile states and, at the same time, augments crisis responses. Defending democracy against backsliding and institutional fragility should be seen as a benchmark against which new strategic concepts can be assessed. However, the widening and deepening of the extreme right, authoritarian populism, and exclusionary nationalism in the West is damaging democracy at a time when it needs to be consolidated and secured.

**Third**, the question of global and European collective security and defense requires inclusive “**governance**”, which entails taking seriously and developing effective steps for alleviating food and energy security, solving the problem of supply chains, and providing citizen-friendly policies to help with the provision of fundamental needs. This requires inclusive governance that not only incorporates questions of democracy, human rights, and climate change but promoting participatory and deliberative collaborations between institutions, states, and civil society organizations.

**Fourth**, there should be “**coherence**” in the way in which NATO's new Strategic Concept operates in terms of strategies and tactics, ideas, and reality, and in coping simultaneously with unprecedented challenges coming from democratic, economic, and climate security. Coherence is also needed in sequencing a new strategic concept and a strategic compass.

**Fifth**, “**rules-based multilateralism and institutional alliances**” rather than flexible and transactional alliances should be promoted. As the post-war liberal order has declined and weakened over the last seventy-five years, what has been promoted by countries like Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and China can be called issue-based, flexible, transactional alliances with an emphasis on consequentialism over appropriateness, interests over rules, delivery over checks and balances. Thus, security and economy are prioritized over democracy, growth over climate change, and flexible alliances



over democracy. NATO’s historic Madrid Summit, while seeing Russia as an immediate security threat and China as a strategic security challenge, also promotes rules-based-multilateralism and institutional arrangements. Yet, the recent Russia, Iran, and Türkiye summit in Syria, as well as China’s operations in Asia and Africa, are examples of flexible alliances without democracy. Furthermore, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has warned in his famous book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, the most dangerous development against the West would be “a grand and anti-hegemonic coalition of China, Russia, perhaps Iran”, and we may add Türkiye here, “united not by ideology but by complementary grievances.”<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski’s warning also has to do with the difficulty of sustaining unity without a democratic reboot, inclusive governance, and coherent strategies.

Finally, **sixth**, “**the double-face of Türkiye**” creates problems for Western and NATO unity. As Ivo Daalder puts it, “Türkiye: difficulty to live with, nearly impossible to live without... Turkey’s strategic importance to NATO is clear. And, yet, over the years, Ankara has hardly been a reliable ally.”<sup>12</sup> While being an important member of NATO, Türkiye’s continued willingness to increase its relations with Russia from security to the economy creates increasing concerns in the West. As a member of NATO and declaring itself as a “Ukraine-friendly country”, Türkiye’s pivotal role not only as a “geo-strategic balancer” between the West and the Rest, but also as a “geo-economic supply chain hub” in energy and food security has enhanced and become critical in this new crisis. In its diplomatic efforts, Türkiye has been a “mediator” between Russia and Ukraine for conflict resolution. Moreover, in its role as a strategic hub, Türkiye has been a crucial actor in tackling the food security crisis, allowing Ukrainian grain exports to transit the Black Sea. Türkiye has the potential to be a pivotal country acting as a “balancing agent” in the international system and globalization. All of these qualities make Türkiye an important actor both globally and regionally for effective global governance. Yet, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s close relations with President Putin; Ankara’s continuing close ties with Moscow in energy, economy, tourism; and its willingness to promote a flexible alliance with Russia and Iran in its regional affairs have been deepening the existing crisis between Türkiye and the West. The more the double-face of Türkiye continues in reality and perception, the longer the existing trust problems will remain between Türkiye and NATO, from which Putin and Russia will continue to benefit.

For sure, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine at a time when globalization and the international system are in transition and turmoil has brought uncertainty, risk, and ontological insecurity to the fore. The revitalization of NATO is thus of utmost

<sup>11</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, (Basic Books, New York, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Ivo Daalder, “Turkey: difficulty to live with, nearly impossible to live without”, *New Europe*, 21 August, 2022.

importance in making the unity of the West and the transatlantic alliance sustainable. A revitalized NATO through a New Strategic Concept is the West's answer to the changing power configuration among great powers at the systemic level. True, the Old is dying; but the New has not been borne yet. Uncertainty is what frames the present. What is certain in it is that Europe and NATO are the new pivots for global collective security and defense.\*\*

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