

# GETTING NATO READY FOR THE REST OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: IS NATO 2030 THE RIGHT ROADMAP?

*Visiting Brussels in June, President Biden proclaimed that “America is back”. This also means that NATO is back, as Biden reconfirmed the United States’ solemn commitment to the defense of its European allies and Washington’s willingness to once again lead a transatlantic alliance that was much derided during the Trump years. At first sight, this is all good news for NATO; but could it turn out to be a mixed blessing for the Europeans in the longer run? This article analyses whether the NATO 2030 initiative is up to the task, and whether it provides the right answers.*

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**W**hen the US President, Joe Biden, held his first summit with his fellow NATO heads of state and government in mid-June, his priority was to heal past transatlantic rifts and to mark a new beginning. Yet this did not mean that the new U.S. administration sought to return to the old alliance pre-Trump or to mark a return to business as usual. As at the G7 in Cornwall just a few days earlier, Biden's quest was to recast transatlantic security relations within a new global narrative: that of the struggle between western liberal democracies and a newly assertive, self-confident set of authoritarian states, rivalling the classical west for geopolitical power and influence. From a historical perspective, this takes NATO back to its roots when it was conceived in the late 1940s as a pillar of the liberal-democratic pushback against the expansionist authoritarianism of that period, namely Soviet communism. The Biden narrative takes NATO out of its familiar anchorage in a European regional setting focused on border collective defense (to which it had returned after Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014) and re-positions the Alliance within a new multilateral framework designed to deal not just with the armies of the authoritarians but with the nature of their political and economic systems more fundamentally. This is quite a shift in gears from the more narrow direction NATO seemed to be heading in during the Trump years, bereft of U.S. leadership, playing a reduced role on the global stage, and challenged in its own neighborhood by the EU quest for "Strategic Autonomy". Now that "America is back" in NATO, NATO is also back in America, again at the core of the U.S.'s global vision for the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a flattering but equally challenging, and at times uncomfortable position to be in.

Almost in anticipation of the change in the political wind in Washington, NATO has done a lot of work over the past year to analyze the new global security environment and determine how it needs to respond and adapt. The Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, appointed a team of experts, chaired by Thomas de Maiziere of Germany and Wes Mitchell of the United States, to come up with ideas on how NATO could enhance its political role, and better coordinate not just military tasks but also political strategies among its members. This group reported its findings late last year and Stoltenberg has followed up with his own outreach project, called NATO 2030. This has engaged think tanks and younger audiences to gather their ideas and inputs on the Alliance's future course. The NATO 2030 report of the young leaders group shows an interesting generational contrast with the more senior experts group in its focus on transnational security threats, such as climate change and pandemics, rather than on the more traditional great power competition from Russia and China, not to mention familiar military challenges such as nuclear deterrence. The senior group produced 138 recommendations which were obviously far too many for the NATO summitters to digest. The advantage of Stoltenberg's NATO

2030 initiative is that it has allowed the Alliance's leadership to filter all the multiple ideas and proposals collected in the outreach exercise and to boil them down to a more manageable set of eight recommendations. These are aligned with the key reform areas. The good news for Stoltenberg is that this broad package, although not all the details and individual recommendations, was approved by the NATO summit and can now form the basis for the drafting of the Alliance's next Strategic Concept, due for submission to next NATO summit in Spain in 2022.

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The Alliance's current Strategic Concept dates back to the Lisbon Summit in 2010. It is clearly out of date having been conceived in the days when terrorism and energy cutoffs seemed to be the major threats, and the Alliance's primary role seemed to be to carry out stabilization missions and cultivate partnerships with non-member states rather than to face up to aggressive great power rivals. Managing regional crises as they came along (and against inferior opponents), such as in the Balkans or later Libya, seemed to be more likely tasks than defending democracy against a global authoritarian onslaught or preparing to fight major high tech wars far from the Alliance's home base. The 2010 concept does not even mention China and described Russia as a partner, albeit a prickly one. Yet the security environment has sharply deteriorated over the past decade making crises the norm rather than the exception and giving NATO a much broader and tougher spectrum of threats, both internal and external, to deal with. For some time already, a new Strategic Concept has been urgently needed to ensure that the Alliance can defend its norms, strengthen its politico-military instruments and deter adversaries that are demonstrating an increasing appetite for risk and confrontation. Whether this is Russia harassing NATO warships in the Black Sea or China pushing outwards into the Taiwan Strait. A new Strategic Concept will not provide solutions to every challenge; but it can clarify thinking, establish priorities and refocus the allies on collective goals and efforts rather than the usual immediate national interest driven perspectives, hobby horses and talking points. So how are Stoltenberg's eight big ideas likely to go down with the 30 allied delegations at NATO HQ?

The first on enhancing political consultations among allies will probably receive a favorable reception. After all the initial impetus for the NATO 2030 exercise was an interview that President Macron of France gave to *The Economist* in 2019. Macron declared that NATO was “brain dead”, a statement that shocked many allies at a time when the Alliance was already facing attacks on its credibility from the Trump administration. As they rushed to defend NATO from Macron’s outburst, the allies gave the Alliance a much-needed public relations boost. Macron subsequently clarified that he felt that NATO was working fine as a military planning organization but that it had failed to rein in Turkey over its interventions in Syria or Libya and that too many allies were acting unilaterally without prior notification in the North Atlantic Council. Yet those same allies were then coming to the Council and invoking Article 4 of the NATO treaty to request diplomatic backing for their unilateral and often surprise actions.

Given the turbulent state of international relations, it makes sense for the allies to use NATO more to share their analyses and try to forge common approaches on regional conflicts and global challenges. Indeed some former alliance officials have suggested that NATO could be the forum where the global democracies could discuss and coordinate grand strategy on China. Yet this expansion of NATO’s political role has been tried in the past and has not worked. Some allies believe NATO should only discuss regional issues where it has a direct responsibility, such as troops on the ground. The Western Balkans comes to mind here. Others worry that if NATO discusses a regional crisis it will be interpreted by others as the Alliance preparing to take action and could be destabilizing. Allies have also preferred to discuss sensitive issues bilaterally or in smaller groups like the Quad (U.S., UK, France and Germany) or the Five Eyes or a country or issue specific Contact Group. Many EU allies think that the EU (because it links security, diplomacy, trade and humanitarian resources) is a better instrument for coordinating with the U.S. in a major crisis than NATO. So whereas most allies will support the calls for a more political NATO, putting it into practice in concrete cases will no doubt prove more difficult. One area where the Secretary General may have more success is in broadening NATO consultations to more areas of government. Terrorism, attacks on critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns extreme weather events and pandemics are more likely to be handled by interior ministers, national security advisers, local mayors and police chiefs than by foreign or defense ministries. NATO could, therefore, invite these homeland defense authorities to meet with or participate in the North Atlantic Council to help allies share expertise and enhance their preparedness. A good example was set in 2019 when national security advisers met at NATO to discuss hybrid warfare and a playbook of diplomatic and economic counter-measures. When it comes to budgets, meetings of finance ministers could prove useful. Finance ministers actually met

frequently at NATO in its early years in the 1950s when the Alliance was trying to find the resources to fund its initial Lisbon military force goals totaling 96 divisions.

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The second area is resilience. The years since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 have seen NATO turn its attention to hybrid warfare and non-conventional threats as well as more classical conventional defense. The civil emergency planning structures that the Alliance developed during the Cold War to handle things like sufficiency in foodstuffs, water, fuel, communications, air and surface transport and continuity of government have been revived. NATO planners have established seven baseline requirements to cover these areas and have extended their scope to new forms of connectivity such as cyber space, satellite availability and data integrity. Allies were asked to answer detailed questionnaires regarding their investment, redundancy, and preparedness, allowing NATO planners to identify any gaps and vulnerabilities. The proposal now is to go beyond reporting and to the next step which is to formulate concrete resilience goals which will be apportioned among allies in the same way as the defense planning capability targets. These resilience goals would then become highly visible national commitments which the allies would assess collectively every two years or so. They would come with obvious financial and investment implications.

However some allies believe that this benchmarking by NATO would be too intrusive in a domain of critical infrastructure protection which can be highly sensitive. They feel that this should remain a national responsibility and not something managed or decided by NATO. Hence, it is still to be determined whether resilience goals will be largely generic and aspirational rather than specific and constraining. However, the Alliance could come to an agreement on an annual vulnerability assessment, particularly in regard to the critical transport, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure on which it relies for its military deployments, and could also conduct regional exercises to stress test the resilience of critical supply chains and nodes. Here the cooperation with the EU on military mobility (where the EU has launched its own project under PESCO) can help to generate EU funding and capability support for the connectivity upgrades that NATO needs most urgently.

Third is climate change. As a former UN Special Envoy on climate change, it is not surprising that Jens Stoltenberg has chosen to lead on this subject. Although NATO made a passing one-line reference to the security implications of global warming in its 2010 Strategic Concept it has not systematically addressed this challenge until now. Back in March, NATO foreign ministers approved the Alliance's first collective assessment on this topic. The Secretary General has now put some concrete ideas on the table. They have the merit of staying well within the Alliance's field of competence, which helped to have them adopted at the recent NATO summit. For instance, NATO will adopt common standards for military vehicles and equipment that use carbon reduction technologies. An associated aim is to develop a methodology to measure how much carbon NATO forces emit on an annual basis. Moreover, NATO will adapt and train its forces to be able to operate in more extreme weather environments, and do an impact assessment on how its military infrastructure could be disrupted by immediate and longer-term climate-related events. Military bases and essential infrastructure such as ports need to be made more resilient to sea level rise and higher temperatures. Finally NATO, with its intelligence sharing and strategic forecasting capabilities, can serve as a hub for developing early warning and foresight among allies and partners regarding geo-political shifts engendered by climate change or more imminent political and social stresses leading to possible crises and humanitarian disasters. These are all sensible and, given the growing evidence of the impact of climate change, long overdue measures. As such, they have been largely welcomed by the NGO community although some NGOs have criticized NATO for not signing up now to binding and verifiable CO2 reduction targets. Predictably some allies were hesitant to accept binding targets because of the constraints these could put on alliance exercises and conventional defense readiness. Yet by so publicly associating itself with the highly visible domain of climate change action, NATO will put itself under close scrutiny.

Another proposal is in the area of capacity building and training. As NATO has terminated its mission in Afghanistan and will do the same in Kosovo before too long, the era of major interventions seems to be coming to an end. The focus is now moving to training and mentoring local forces so that they can handle domestic stabilization tasks largely on their own, with the support of international advisory teams on the ground. The EU is already going in this direction with its EUTM missions in the Sahel and its new European Peace Facility. NATO has also set up a number of advisory missions in places such as Ukraine, Georgia and Jordan, and NATO defense ministers back in February decided to expand the Alliance's training mission in Iraq across the country, with an extra 1200 NATO trainers under a Danish command ( now to be assumed by Italy). Stoltenberg has proposed to put these activities on a more structured basis by setting up a new training command HQ as part of the Alliance's integrated military

command system. Yet there are two questions here. The first is: does NATO have enough training clients to justify such a large new structure? The EU is already doing many of the training missions in areas of strategic interest to NATO, such as the Sahel, and persuading non-EU allies, such as the U.S. and the UK, to also make a military contribution (if not in the framework of the EUTMs but under the UN flag or bilaterally). That said, the future demand for NATO's training services, beyond the continuing operations in Iraq and Kosovo, is uncertain; and there is already a regional training center in Kuwait which is under-utilized. So the second key question is whether the allies will be prepared to establish a new, expensive HQ, with extra manpower requirements, or decide that training should be carried out by the current and recently expanded NATO command structure.

The next is burden-sharing. When US Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, was at NATO in March, he reminded allies of their commitment to spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Nonetheless, he also added the helpful suggestion that the US would look at more than this target when assessing the burden shared by allies. Contributions to NATO operations and meeting important capability targets for new equipment and greater readiness would also be taken into account. This will be music to the ears of many allies who have long advocated broader and, in their view, fairer criteria. The Secretary General has now proposed a significant increase in NATO's common funding (around 25 billion US dollars annually) which could be used to support or reimburse allies who deploy forces on NATO operations or help to pay for frequent and intensive exercises involving reinforcements over large distances such as High North and Black Sea). More common funding could incentivize allies to volunteer contributions, especially when operations come out of the blue and have not been anticipated in constrained annual national defense budgets. The UN practices this type of reimbursement for its peacekeeping forces. Yet France has resisted this idea, arguing that it would result in a considerable increase in NATO's collective budget at the expense of national programs. France has also long argued that "costs should lie where they fall"; in other words that it is a national responsibility of each ally to provide adequate resources to its armed forces and to cover both planned and unplanned national operations. Given France's reservations, Stoltenberg can count it as a success that the NATO summit adopted his proposal for more NATO common funding in principle. The Secretary General had to back-track on his idea to use the extra funds to pay for allies' missions and the additional resources, once agreed, will probably be less than what he had hoped for. Yet given all the new roles and responsibilities that the summit has placed on the Alliance, increasing NATO budgets and staffing is unavoidable if these new activities are not to lose credibility quickly.

In sixth place comes Russia. The NATO summit communique included over 60 references to Russia, so Moscow remains by far the Alliance's top concern on both a political and military level. Yet the forum where these concerns could be addressed, the NATO-Russia Council, has not met since 2019. Jens Stoltenberg has suggested these meetings should now be revived, arguing persuasively that it is even more important to talk and understand each other during times of tension than during more cooperative moments. There is however a dilemma here for the allies. They insist, rightly in my view, that Ukraine and Russia's destabilizing hybrid warfare activities (such as cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns and election interference) should be top of the agenda when the NATO-Council meets. But this makes Moscow reluctant to accept NATO's invitations to meet as it knows it will be put on the defensive. As things stand, Russia is more interested in resuming military contracts with NATO than in carrying on a political dialogue which, in its opinion, cannot be productive under the current circumstances. NATO and Russia do indeed need to talk about military stability in the Euro-Atlantic area and transparency, risk reduction and incident prevention. Russia has also made proposals regarding moving exercises away from borders and a moratorium on intermediate-range missile deployments. It has offered to put its new 9M729 missile batteries in Kaliningrad into the mix as a potential sweetener. Given Russia's current regional preponderance in armor and missiles, these offers may not be acceptable to allies, but there is undoubtedly an important arms control agenda that needs to be discussed with Russia. It includes the issue of what to do with lapsed treaties such as Conventional Forces in Europe, Open Skies or the OSCE based Structured Dialogue and Vienna Documents providing for data exchanges and discussions on threat assessments. If the U.S. succeeds in reviving some of these issues in its bilateral Strategy Stability Talks, which Biden and Putin agreed to resume at their recent summit in Geneva, there may be scope to use them to restart the NRC consultations with Russia at NATO HQ. But how can this discussion be held without the Alliance compromising on Ukraine and Crimea and giving Russia the impression of a return to business as usual? The agenda of arms control talks needs to be clear and concrete to overcome this stumbling block.

Technology inevitably also has to be part of NATO 2030. The Alliance has been working on understanding better the impact of emerging and disruptive technologies on modern warfare, particularly in the information and data management space. NATO has identified 7 such technologies which it needs to be able to exploit against potential adversaries while preventing those adversaries from using the same technologies to gain a war fighting-edge over NATO. The focus here is on space and cyber, artificial intelligence driven processes, data integration, synthetic biology, bio-technologies, quantum computing, new materials and hypersonic

velocity missiles. The challenge for NATO is to engage with the civilian innovation sector and the venture capital markets where the most groundbreaking ideas are spotted and developed. This has been a weakness of NATO given its dependency on long-standing relationships with the major traditional defense contractors in its NATO Industry Advisory Group. One major step forward taken by the NATO summit was to establish an Innovation Accelerator modeled on the highly successful U.S. advanced projects DARPA agency. The idea is to create a hub on both sides of the Atlantic where startups can interact with the NATO scientific and technological community and potential private investors to conduct experimentation and form government-industry partnerships to take the most promising innovations to the market. NATO is currently seeking €75 million in startup funding to launch the Accelerator and incentivize initial research projects to come forward. It is yet a modest sum compared with what allies such as France and the UK, let alone the US, are spending on similar national initiatives. We should also include in this list the European Defense Fund with €7 billion over 7 years and the additional funding for defense research and space with €8 billion available through the new DEFIS Directorate in the European Commission. So to help NATO move forward, and avoid a gaping interoperability problem between the technologically enabled allies and those lacking these force multipliers or unable to use them, the new NATO Accelerator will need to draw on the work of the EU and national R&D technology hubs. Moreover, it must obtain better results from the Alliance's already existing structures, such as Allied Command Transformation, the Office of the Chief Scientist and the Science and Technology Organization in Paris. Given this already extensive civilian-military bureaucracy, NATO simply has to perform faster and more agilely in embracing emerging and disruptive technologies where the acceptance of risk, tolerance of failure and the ability to move fast without over-tight regulation and control are key to success.

Yet simply acquiring and integrating the new technologies into a multi-domain concept of operations is only one half of the story. As the technologies advance so the concepts regarding their operational use need to evolve as well. Here the NATO summit approved 3 important steps. The first is that NATO will produce a joint evaluation of the policy and ethical framework for the use of artificial intelligence. This is badly needed at a time when China and Russia are actively pursuing their research into the military applications of AI and fielding it in their next generation of sensors, drones, data exploitation and semi or even fully automated weapons. This is a competition where NATO cannot afford to be left behind. A second step was to link the Alliance's Article 5 collective defense clause to attacks on NATO's space-based assets. This was a logical step after the Alliance declared space as its 5th operational domain at its London summit in December, 2019. The task now is

to conceptualize and define what an armed attack in space might look like in terms of disruption or destruction of satellites, their short or long-term impact as well as refining the toolbox of deterrence and response strategies. Thirdly, in cyberspace, NATO lowered the threshold for a collective response to a cyber-attack from a major aggression, equivalent to an armed attack, to a series of lower level but persistent cyber intrusions. This was in line with U.S. policy after it suffered a number of ransomware attacks against its pipeline system and food distribution, along with attacks on management control software in the spring. Yet these attacks are frequently the work of criminal gangs rather than nation states and do not justify a military response. So lowering the cyber threshold will oblige the Alliance to intensify its work on attribution, in cooperation with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, as well as to expand its toolbox of diplomatic, economic and technical response options below the Article 5 level.

Finally, in eighth place but certainly not in terms of importance, comes NATO's future role in the Indo-Pacific. NATO's summit will be remembered in history as the moment when China moved to the top of NATO's agenda, based upon a more consensual assessment of China as a systemic competitor and existential security challenge than had seemed possible just a few months ago. China's more aggressive rhetoric and its clampdown on human rights in Hong Kong and Xinjiang province undoubtedly contributed to this rapprochement. For the first time, NATO's next Strategic Concept will have to state how the Alliance can face up to two great powers and strategic rivals at the same time. In addition to the fact that Russia and China challenge western democracies in very different ways, they are also increasingly working together, particularly in the military sphere. Russia is bringing China closer to Europe, especially with their joint maritime exercises in the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean. So NATO needs to develop separate strategies for how it deals with Russia and China but also a joint approach for how it deals with them together. Putin at the recent Valdai conference did not exclude that they could conclude a formal military alliance in the future. NATO has spent a lot of time trying to better analyze and understand China, which is no bad thing as China has spent several decades analyzing the NATO countries and their strengths and vulnerabilities. This work has given China its newfound confidence in the way it deals with the democracies today and pushes back hard against criticism and perceptions of interference. Yet the Strategic Concept must now go beyond studying China and set out a strategy for handling systemic competition with Beijing over the long run. Outcompeting China is clearly a better strategy than trying to confront it. This means that NATO's future China strategy is likely to focus first and foremost on managing the challenge of China's rise in its own European theatre. The priority will be on improving the

resilience and autonomy of supply chains, watching investment patterns and improving the science, technology and defense industry bases of allies. NATO will also keep an eye on joint Chinese-Russian military exercises or operations in the Arctic or the Baltic and Mediterranean, as well as in Russia's western military district. The Alliance will also have to track China's use of soft power through influence campaigns and the media, as well as any overt hybrid warfare tactics.

This approach seems more realistic than a NATO military presence in the Indo-Pacific region, given its long-term and heavy military responsibilities in the European neighborhood. The more the U.S. leaves this task to its European allies the more they will need to devote their limited military capabilities fully to it. In other words, deployments in the Indo-Pacific will be primarily a matter for individual allies rather than NATO as a whole. In this respect, the UK has decided to send its new aircraft carrier, the Queen Elisabeth, to the South China Sea, and France recently sent a submarine on a freedom of navigation mission to the same location. France, Germany and Belgium have also sent frigates on port visits to the Indo-Pacific and to join multinational exercises. If allies send more assets to the Indo-Pacific, NATO planners will need to figure out how to plug potential gaps in the Alliance's collective defense and exercise posture in the European theatre. This leaves two key questions that the new NATO Strategic Concept will need to resolve.

First, the Alliance will have to identify a format for talks with Beijing. The more it concentrates on the challenge from China, the more it needs to open up a channel of dialogue with this country. Otherwise misunderstandings and mutual threat perceptions are bound to grow. NATO 2030 recommends this step and the summit too endorsed the need for dialogue although it stopped short of advocating the creation of a NATO-China Council, with associated working groups and sub-structures, along the lines of the NATO-Russia Council. The two co-chairs of the Secretary General's senior group of experts thought that such a Council would be premature until the allies have harmonized their assessments of China. So other interim channels will be required instead. For instance a military dialogue and confidence building such as that between NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Chairman of the Military Committee with the Russian defense chief, Gerasimov, annual strategic talks between the NATO International Staff and senior Chinese foreign and defense ministry officials and a parliamentary track through the partnership outreach of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

The second question is what will be the future shape of the Alliance's relationship with its Asia-Pacific partners, such as Australia, Japan and South Korea? These countries were invited to the G7 meeting in Cornwall but they were not part of the

NATO summit which put China on NATO's strategic radar. This may have been wise to avoid the impression of a new anti-China alliance being summoned into existence. Only one of the partners, Australia, is currently part of NATO's Enhanced Opportunity Partnership. How interested will these Indo-Pacific democracies be in stepping up their cooperation with the Alliance if NATO is not taking on compensating military roles and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific? Will they be content with a more intellectual form of partnership which is limited to exchanges of assessments on Indo-Pacific security and emerging challenges such as terrorism, piracy, cyber or climate-driven threats; or will NATO propose some more concrete activities such as an annual maritime exercise in the Indian Ocean to practice freedom of navigation or anti-piracy procedures? If NATO is not ready to deploy ships or air assets in the region, will it at least consider establishing military liaison and diplomatic offices in the region to improve allies' situational awareness and connectivity with Asia-Pacific partners? This could be of value at a time when countries like Australia have announced military modernization programs and increases in their naval deployments and regional training and engagement activities.

In conclusion, NATO 2030 has been a useful exercise in mapping out for the allies the key issues and choices that they will confront in adapting the Alliance to today's rapidly mutating and unfortunately deteriorating security environment. NATO's Secretary General deserves the credit for grabbing the bull by the horns and putting his ideas on the table. Having spent so much of his time and energy on managing crises, as much in relations among allies as between allies and their adversaries, he has now taken the lead in the debate on NATO's longer term future. Stoltenberg was rewarded by seeing his key proposals, at least in their broad outlines, adopted at the recent NATO summit. Biden too will be pleased that he was successful in giving the Alliance a more global orientation and branding, and putting China on the agenda as a strategic challenge rather than only an economic or trading rival. This will help to shore up support for the Alliance in Washington. The attentive reader of the summit communique will see China even in those paragraphs where Beijing was not explicitly mentioned: in space, cyber, resilience, new technologies and innovation, and enhanced political consultations. Yet the success of the summit in emphasizing all the new directions for NATO came at the expense of a relative quiescence on many traditional and unfinished items of business. Strengthening NATO's collective defense forces in Europe, helping Ukraine and Georgia to resist Russian pressures, stabilizing the Balkans, finding a way forward in Afghanistan, and sorting out a better synergy between NATO and EU defense research and capabilities efforts are arguably just as important for NATO's future as a viable security institution as addressing China or climate change. The old business does not go away, or become less important just because

the new appears on the horizon. The authors of NATO's next Strategic Concept will have to provide the policy substance on Global NATO while ensuring that Europe NATO does not stagnate or go into reverse.