

# NATO TODAY: FACING CHALLENGES FROM THE EAST AND SOUTH

*The Euro-Atlantic security situation is more complicated than it has been since the end of the Cold War. There are major security challenges pressing in on Alliance territory across an arc from east to south, and those challenges risk spreading into NATO countries themselves. Particularly due to events in Ukraine, NATO is faced with its most difficult relationship with Russia since the end of the Cold War. NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia. NATO's objective remains to encourage Russia to choose a path of cooperation and responsible behavior, to be a country that works within the international community to solve common problems. The situation to NATO's south and southeast is no less dramatic. NATO's core purpose is to defend Alliance territory and populations; NATO is reinforcing its defenses, stepping up cooperation with partners, and reaching out politically to meet these new challenges and carry out that mission.*

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**A**t the NATO Summit in Wales, in September 2014, two topics dominated the discussions. Alliance Heads of State and Government addressed, first and foremost, the challenge Russian actions in Ukraine have posed to security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic Area. Dramatic as this challenge is, NATO is also forced to focus on challenges from the south, in particular the violence and terrorism taking place in Iraq and Syria, which have implications far beyond those countries themselves, as well as the worrisome developments in Libya. NATO does not prioritize among these challenges. Its core task of defending its Allies against any threat remains unabated, and it will respond to challenges from wherever they may arise. But in order to do so, NATO has to be strong. It has to have the right capabilities, so as to be able to face up and adapt to what will be long-term and substantial problems.

This was the key outcome of the recent NATO Summit in Wales. Allied leaders re-confirmed on this occasion that NATO will do whatever is needed to defend its territory and population. In this context, they adopted a Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which will reinforce NATO's ability to address current and future threats from wherever they may arise, including the challenges posed by Russian actions. This is the biggest reinforcement of Collective Defense since the end of the Cold War.

As part of the RAP, the Alliance will increase the readiness of the NATO Response Force, so that it has the capacity to respond within days to a threat of aggression. The RAP also incorporates measures that address the type of hybrid methods we have seen in Eastern Ukraine. Measures under the RAP include continuous air, land, and maritime presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, on a rotational basis.

The catalyst for these measures is Russian actions, mainly in Ukraine, which are in breach of international law and have also damaged trust. To put it simply, these actions are challenging the rules and agreements that have kept the peace in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Russia's attempts to alter internationally recognized borders of sovereign states are challenging one of our key principles: that each country has the right to freely choose its own path.



Russia has repeatedly violated the principles upon which Euro-Atlantic security is built – codified in documents such as the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act – by illegally and illegitimately annexing Crimea, and in Eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists continue violence and intimidation.

As a result, last April, NATO Foreign Ministers decided to suspend all practical cooperation with Russia, while keeping channels of communication open. Allied leaders at the Wales Summit upheld this decision. But this is not where NATO would like to be in its relations with Moscow.

For the last couple of decades, NATO has strived to build a genuine partnership with Russia. This is particularly evident in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, where a common commitment was made to create a “lasting and inclusive” peace. In 2002, the NATO-Russia Council was created, where Russia could sit alongside NATO Allies as an equal. NATO worked together with Russia to counter terrorism and piracy, and also helped Russia improve its maritime search and rescue capabilities. We cooperated successfully in strengthening the stability of Afghanistan, and keeping the peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. But now we are faced with the most difficult relationship since the end of the Cold War. NATO is not alone in this view. The EU also is facing the challenges that stem from Russian actions and, as a result, has imposed a series of restrictive measures. NATO is working closely with the EU in order to ensure that we deliver a strong common message to Russia that its current behavior is simply unacceptable.

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NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia. Russia is NATO’s biggest neighbor and will remain so. We cannot change geography and therefore we cannot ignore each other. We have to build a relationship that will be both constructive and cooperative, one that is based on mutual respect, not suspicion, and on international law. During these difficult times, what we need above all is transparency and predictability. However, in order for NATO to build such a relationship, it has to be strong both as a military alliance and as a political alliance. This is a precondition and the best way to establish a constructive relationship with Russia.

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NATO’s objective remains to encourage Russia to choose a path of cooperation and responsible behavior; to be a country that works within the international community to solve common problems. When Russia’s leadership decides to take such a turn, NATO will re-engage with it constructively, as we have demonstrated we are willing to do over the past 20 years. But this will not take place to the detriment of NATO’s fundamental principles, upon which Euro-Atlantic security lies.

The situation to NATO’s south and southeast is no less dramatic. NATO, and indeed the international community more broadly, faces a series of serious security challenges across the Middle East and North Africa. No one feels that more than the people of the region themselves, who are suffering from violence inflicted in civil wars, as in Syria, from breakdown in law and order, as in Libya, and from extremist groups such as ISIL. Just as Eastern European Allies feel an increased threat because of Russian actions in Ukraine, so does Turkey as it faces increasing challenges from both Syria and Iraq.

This region is confronted by multiple, cross-cutting structural challenges, including weak institutions, porous borders, small arms proliferation, and sectarianism. Millions have been displaced from their homes by violence in Syria and Iraq, substantial numbers of whom are now refugees in neighboring states such as Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Thousands of migrants are also attempting, every month, hazardous sea crossings and fleeing violence. The fighting in the region risks exporting instability, terrorism, and other security challenges such as weapons proliferation to NATO and EU countries because, among others, of the high number of foreign fighters that have come from our countries, and who can return more radicalized and highly trained in terrorism.

NATO’s response to these threats and challenges is three-fold. First of all, we are engaged in order to prevent and manage those crises. Upholding collective defense commitments and showing our solidarity to an ally when under threat is the primary response. When the risk that Turkey would come under missile attack due to the conflict in Syria, the Alliance deployed Patriot missile batteries to defend Turkey

against possible attack, but also to send a clear political signal that all Allies stood with Turkey. The deployment has had both the military and political effects intended. More broadly the RAP will ensure that the Alliance has the adequate tools to respond to threats, not only from the East but also from the South.

Secondly, the Alliance is engaged in supporting those partners that face the most acute challenges, so as to further develop the means to address these challenges. In Wales, Allied leaders launched two initiatives, which are aimed at supporting such partners. The first of these initiatives aims to strengthen the interoperability between NATO forces and those of interested partners. At Wales, our Defense Ministers met with 24 especially interoperable partners, including countries of the region. We will use this Interoperability Platform to expand our practical cooperation on interoperability issues. This could involve greater military-to-military cooperation, and more opportunities to take part in NATO training, exercises, and education programs. The second initiative focuses on defense capacity-building. NATO wants to help the countries of the region be better able both to address security concerns in their own region and to participate in international peacekeeping and crisis management operations – including those led by NATO. This is an offer to assist them in defense and security sector reform, including planning and budgeting; but also encouraging “good security governance.” These are all issues where NATO and its nations have unique expertise to share. We will continue to take a hard look at how we can best complement parallel efforts by other international actors, including the UN and the EU.

Jordan occupies a special place in these initiatives. Jordan has made valuable contributions to NATO missions and operations, including in Afghanistan and Libya. As Jordan’s importance as a regional security player has only grown with the rise of ISIL, we are interested in further helping Jordan to project stability in and beyond its region. Allies’ leaders have also extended an offer to assist Iraq, if it is so requests, while reaffirming the need for the formation of an inclusive government where all segments of Iraqi society are adequately represented. Allies have also reiterated their willingness to help Libya design and build national defense and security structures, when the conditions allow.



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Israel, and key Arab countries sit together on a regular basis. Similarly, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative allows NATO to have a structured dialogue with Gulf countries, at both bilateral and multilateral levels. This initiative is a strong demonstration that the security and stability of the Gulf region are of strategic interest to NATO – just as the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area matters to the Gulf region.

Throughout our years of cooperation, our MENA partners have proven to be increasingly effective security providers, including well beyond this region. They made valuable contributions to our mission in Afghanistan. They took an active part in our operation to protect the people of Libya three years ago, and they are again playing a major role in the international coalition to counter ISIL. Countering this major threat to regional and Euro-Atlantic stability is not the single prerogative of one nation or organization. These are complementary objectives. NATO has no ambition to be the principal provider of security in the wider Middle East. Dealing with these challenges requires a broad, multinational effort. While this is not a NATO-led operation per se, all Allies contribute, in one way or another, through air strikes, training, providing equipment, or even humanitarian assistance to this joint effort. However, it is especially important that regional countries are part of that effort. This is not about the “West” imposing its will on the Islamic world, but a joint effort with legitimate authorities – in Iraq and the region – to meet a common threat.

Overall, the Euro-Atlantic security situation is more complicated than it has been since the end of the Cold War. There are major security challenges pressing in on Alliance territory across an arc from east to south, and those challenges risk spreading into NATO countries themselves. NATO’s core purpose is to defend Alliance territory and populations; NATO is reinforcing its defenses, stepping up cooperation with partners, and reaching out politically to meet these new challenges and carry out that mission.