

NATO'S 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT: PREPARING FOR A MORE COMPLEX AND INTERCONNECTED WORLD

In 2022, at the Madrid Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government adopted a new Strategic Concept to guide the Alliance's adaptation in a world of strategic competition, pervasive instability, and recurrent shocks. The new Concept recognizes that many of the challenges and threats facing NATO, from growing pressure against the rules-based international order, to terrorism and climate change, are very much global in nature. Therefore, the Concept stresses the importance of adopting a global approach to security. This requires understanding the connections and interlinkages between different challenges and regions, but also actively investing in working with partners, near and far, in contributing to preventing crises and boosting resilience.

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At the 2022 Madrid Summit, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) adopted a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance. The Strategic Concept is NATO's most important guiding document, second only to the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's founding document, signed in Washington on 4 April 1949.¹ It expresses the Allies' collective political will, and outlines NATO's enduring purpose, core values, and fundamental tasks. The Strategic Concept agreed in Madrid is the eighth in NATO's history, and the fourth one in the so-called "post-Cold War era", following those adopted in 1991, 1999, and 2010. The 2022 Concept replaces the one agreed upon in Lisbon in 2010. It identifies the central features of the security environment, articulates how the Alliance intends to tackle its main threats and challenges, and provides guidelines for its future political and military adaptation.²

The 2022 Strategic Concept reflects the extensive changes in the Alliance's security environment that have occurred since 2010. Overall, it acknowledges that both the global and Euro-Atlantic strategic landscapes have significantly deteriorated and that the world in 2022 is more complex, contested and unpredictable. The Alliance now faces the most challenging security environment since the end of the Cold War. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine gravely altered the Euro-Atlantic security environment, exacerbating a climate of "strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks."³

The new Concept offers a blueprint to navigate this challenging strategic environment. To do so, it reaffirms the key purpose and greatest responsibility of NATO, as a defensive Alliance: to ensure the collective defense of Allies, against all threats, from all directions, by military and non-military means.⁴ The Concept also stresses that NATO's principles and values, individual liberty, democracy and the rule of law, remain consistent and that all NATO Allies are committed to upholding them.

NATO's Strategic Concept also outlines how the Alliance seeks to engage with the rest of the world. In line with its commitments to the United Nations Charter, NATO intends to continue to work towards just, inclusive and lasting peace, and remain a bulwark of the rules-based international order. While NATO's primary focus is on the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, the Alliance will retain a global perspective to address common challenges. To that end, NATO will work closely with partners in its neighborhood and across the globe, while continuing to

1) NATO, "Strategic Concepts", 18 July 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm

2) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf

3) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 6.

4) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 1.

reach out to other countries with whom Allies share values and interests, and with international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, to contribute to international peace and security. The Alliance will continue to promote good governance and to integrate climate change, human security, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda across all its core tasks and activities, advancing gender equality as a reflection of NATO's values.

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NATO’s Challenges are Global Challenges: Security is Indivisible

The world that NATO Allies face today is contested and unpredictable. Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace in the Euro-Atlantic area. Its brutal and unlawful aggression, repeated violations of international humanitarian law and heinous atrocities have caused unspeakable suffering and destruction, and exacerbated instability across Europe and beyond. The 2022 war against Ukraine is the culmination of a long-standing pattern of Russian destabilizing and coercive behavior, carried out through hybrid tactics, malicious activities in cyberspace, disinformation campaigns, the manipulation of energy and food supply chains, economic coercion, and military action. Russia has also engaged in irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and unraveled the international arms control and non-proliferation architecture. The effects of Russia’s actions reverberate worldwide, resulting in global energy and food crises, and putting pressure on the rules-based international order.

NATO has taken significant steps to respond to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, including by strengthening its deterrence and defense posture, boosting its resilience to hybrid tactics and working with partners to support their efforts to counter malign interference and aggression. Recognizing that a strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO has also reacted to Russia’s unlawful and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by supporting Ukraine’s inherent

right to self-defense, as rooted in the Charter of the United Nations.

More broadly, Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are both leading an authoritarian pushback against the rules-based international order and promoting alternative authoritarian models of global governance. These trends have direct implications for NATO Allies and Euro-Atlantic security, but their impact is truly global. In this context, the NATO Strategic Concept also addresses, for the first time, the PRC and asserts that its coercive policies and stated ambitions represent a challenge to NATO's interests, security, and values as well as to the international rules-based order. In particular, the PRC "seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains."⁵ The PRC engages in coercive behavior against neighboring countries but also against nations in different parts of the world. The deepening strategic partnership between the PRC and the Russian Federation and their attempts to undercut the rules-based international order are deeply troubling. NATO does not identify the PRC as an adversary and remains open to constructive engagement with the PRC, as there are many challenges that require cooperation, such as climate change. At the same time, the Allies need to address the systemic challenges Beijing poses to Euro-Atlantic security.

The Strategic Concept also highlights a range of non-traditional threats and challenges to Euro-Atlantic security that are shared by the rest of the world, highlighting once again the point that security is global. Terrorism remains the Alliance's main asymmetric threat. Terrorist groups are "enhancing their capabilities and investing in new technologies to improve their reach and lethality."⁶ Conflict, fragility and instability endure in various regions of the world, such as in the Sahel, North Africa, and Middle East regions, directly affecting the security of NATO Allies and of partners. The impact of climate change, fragile institutions, health emergencies, and food insecurity exacerbate these crises. Emerging and disruptive technologies bring both "opportunities and risks,"⁷ and represent a crucial arena of global strategic competition, just like cyberspace and outer space. The erosion of the arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture has negatively impacted strategic stability, both in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond. Last, but not least, climate change is "a defining challenge of our time,"⁸ disrupting societies, undermining security, and threatening the lives and livelihoods of citizens in NATO and beyond.

5) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 13.

6) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 10.

7) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 17.

8) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 19.

In the same vein, the Strategic Concept explicitly recognizes that the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area are affected by security developments in other key regions, such as the Indo-Pacific. In other words, just like Russia's war against Ukraine is impacting security and stability well beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, conversely, a security crisis in the Indo-Pacific region would also have repercussions for European and transatlantic security.

How NATO Ensures the Security of Allies and Contributes to Upholding the Rules-Based International Order

The 2022 Strategic Concept reaffirms that NATO remains indispensable to guarantee the security and defense of Allies. As a political and military alliance, NATO is the “unique, essential and indispensable transatlantic forum to consult, coordinate and act on all matters relative to individual and collective security.”⁹

NATO's key purpose and greatest responsibility is “to ensure our collective defense, against all threats, from all directions.”¹⁰ This key purpose is fulfilled through three core tasks: deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.

Deterrence and Defense

The new Strategic Concept highlights the importance of deterrence and defense as core tasks. The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace, and NATO cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity. Deterrence and defense represent the backbone of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the commitment that Allies undertake to defend each other against all threats. In an environment of growing strategic competitions, it is vital that NATO preserves a 360-degree approach and a global awareness and reach so that it can deter and defend, but also contest and deny effectively across all domains—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace—and against all threats, no matter where they stem from.

The Concept acknowledges the progress made since 2014 to strengthen the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture, while also urging the continued bolstering of Allied presence, forces and capabilities, to credibly and sustainably deter and defend, now and in the future.

9) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 3.

10) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 1.

At the Madrid Summit, Allies took concrete decision to strengthen deterrence and defense, building on the adaptation undertaken since 2014 and on the further measures implemented since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine to safeguard the security of the Alliance. Allies also reaffirmed their commitment to invest in defense and agreed to build on the 2014 Defense Investment Pledge to maintain a continued upward trajectory in defense spending and NATO common funding, to ensure that the Alliance is well-equipped and resourced to face present and future challenges.

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Countering terrorism is also essential to NATO's deterrence and defense. This is why the Strategic Concept reaffirms NATO's role in fighting terrorism, in line with the Alliance's 360-degree approach to deterrence and defense. Allies will continue to deter and defend against terrorist groups based on a combination of prevention, protection, and denial measures. Moreover, NATO will continue to enhance its cooperation with the international community, including the United Nations and the European Union, to tackle the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

Finally, the new Strategic Concept emphasizes Allies' commitment to build national and Alliance-wide resilience against military and non-military threats and challenges. Making efforts to safeguard Allied societies is a national responsibility and a collective commitment, and it is essential to counter threats that go beyond the military realm, targeting Allied economies, societies, and services. The Concept stresses the importance of boosting resilience and working towards mitigating strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies, with special efforts to ensure critically important reliable energy supply and sources.

Working With Partners to Prevent Crises and Tackle Common Challenges

The Strategic Concept recognizes that many of the challenges NATO faces—from climate change to terrorism, and from cyber threats to disinformation—are often global and require the Alliance to maintain a global outlook and to work with partners.

The Concept highlights how cooperation with NATO’s partners strengthens the Alliance and contributes to “stability beyond our borders.”¹¹ Central to protecting the global commons, partnerships enhance NATO’s resilience and support the rules-based international order. NATO will continue strengthening ties with partners that “share the Alliance’s values and interest in upholding the rules-based international order.”¹²

Political dialogue and practical cooperation with partners are also key to NATO’s crisis prevention and management agenda. Investing in conflict and crisis prevention is “a sustainable way to contribute to stability and Allied security.”¹³ NATO is committed to preventing and responding to crises that can potentially affect Euro-Atlantic security.

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Training and capacity building are key tools in NATO’s crisis prevention toolbox. These programs contribute to making partners more capable, more secure, and better prepared to respond to crises at home and abroad. Allies are also committed to strengthening partners’ resilience against malign interference, destabilization, and aggression. The Alliance has decades’ worth of accomplishments in building defense institutions and capacity with partners in NATO’s neighborhood and beyond.

The Alliance will continue to invest in bolstering the capabilities of partners in the Western Balkans and the Black Sea regions. NATO will also work with partners to tackle shared security threats and challenges in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel regions. NATO will continue to engage with new and existing partners

11) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 42.

12) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 44.

13) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 38.

in the Indo-Pacific region to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests.

In addition to investing in working with partners, NATO is also committed to cooperating with other international actors to contribute to tackle the root causes of pervasive instability, which often represent a “fertile ground for the proliferation of non-state armed groups” and the conditions fueling forced displacement, human trafficking, and irregular migration. In this context, NATO seeks to deepen cooperation and coordination with the United Nations and the European Union, as well as with other regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the African Union. Beyond existing partnerships, NATO remains willing to engage with any country or organization, “when doing so could bolster our mutual security.”¹⁴

Climate change is an area in which international cooperation and engagement are particularly important, and NATO aims to become the leading international organization to understand and adapt to the impact of climate change on security. The Alliance will also contribute to combatting climate change by reducing emissions, improving efficiency, investing in the transition, while ensuring military effectiveness and a credible deterrence and defense posture.

Conclusion

In light of a worsened strategic environment, characterized by strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks, the unity of NATO Allies has never been as strong as now. The Alliance has responded to Russia’s war of aggression by uniting in support of Ukraine’s struggle for self-defense. The Strategic Concept is a product of this unity, providing a collective assessment of the Alliance’s strategic environment and an overview of the tools and resources necessary for NATO to navigate this environment.

The Strategic Concept also reflects the dual purpose of NATO’s actions: the Alliance aims to ensure security and respond to aggression, but in doing so it upholds the rules-based international order. In a contested and unpredictable world, the values and institutions created to ensure global peace and security are under severe pressure, and all like-minded actors must work in concert to protect them. NATO is doing its part, by supporting Ukraine as it exercises its right to self-defense, deterring further aggression in the Euro-Atlantic area, contributing to crisis prevention and management, and working with partners on tackling shared threats and challenges.

¹⁴) NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, paragraph 44.