

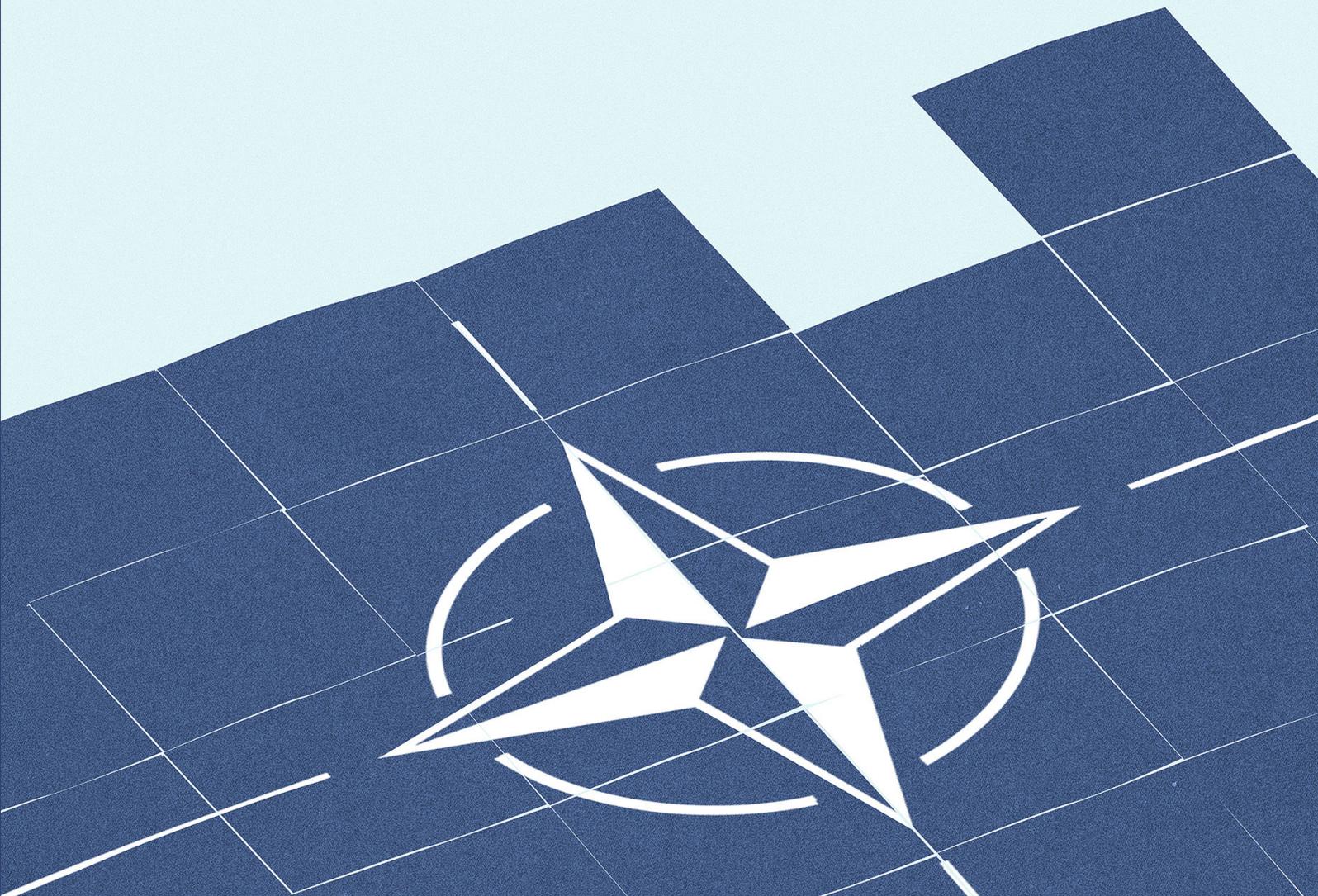
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NATO at the Crossroads



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Should NATO Change Its Name?

Ding Yifan



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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a product of the Cold War. At that time, the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact had some symmetry. NATO's presence in Europe was jokingly called by Europeans: "Keep the Americans in, keep the Russians out, and keep the Germans under." After the Cold War, with the demise of the Warsaw Pact, the existence of NATO became a problem and the importance of the United States declined. If the sole purpose of NATO remained only to "keep the Germans under," would Germany agree? Thus, for the United States to maintain its influence in Europe, it needed to find both a purpose and justifications for NATO relevance.

NATO's expansion toward the countries of Eastern Europe had been accepted by Russia only reluctantly until Ukraine was lured by the U.S. to join the alliance. Russia had repeatedly warned that, unlike other Eastern European countries, both Ukraine and Georgia were in the bosom of Russia. As such, Russia's military actions in Ukraine are, to some extent, a retaliation for the tone-deaf U.S.

Russia's action against Ukraine has provided the pretext, long sought by the United States to reassert its influence in Europe, despite NATO's status as an obsolete instrument of the Cold War. NATO's need for an enemy to prove its *raison d'être*, was confirmed at NATO's summit in Madrid when it published a new strategic concept paper, which not only considered Russia as an immediate threat, but also pointedly positioned China as an existential threat for the first time.

NATO's official paper alleges China's stated ambitions are matched with coercive policies and pretends that those policies challenged its interests, security, and values. Needless to say, those accusations seem both completely groundless and unclear. NATO member countries claim to be rules-based, however, in any sensible

judicial system, any accusation must be based upon facts and not intentions. How can NATO accuse China on the grounds of its so-called intentions? This attitude reminds us of a fable by Aesop: when a wolf comes upon a lamb while both are drinking from a stream, in order to justify taking the lamb's life, the wolf accuses it of various misdemeanors, all of which the lamb proves to be incapable of.

NATO's official paper also blames China for seeking to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic material and supply chains. It is common knowledge that NATO's member countries are also the most developed and industrialized, possessing the most advanced technologies. Who is pursuing the policy of small courtyards and high walls, who is embargoing various technologies to China, and who wants to decouple from China in the field of science and technology? It is wishful thinking to use technological advancement to delay China's development. In fact, China has always been a favored target of technological sanctions by Western countries. One needs to only remember that during the Cold War there was a U.S.-led Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom) created and based at the US embassy in Paris. Today the CoCom has been superseded by the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies, which has also targeted China.

While NATO countries have been imposing a technological blockade on China for years, how can it be said that China is trying to control the technological and industrial sectors? In fact, China has always wanted to cooperate with developed countries such as NATO members, to jointly promote scientific and technological research in order to progress human civilization. China advocates building a community with a shared future for mankind and encourages sharing technology with friendly countries, sharing the fruits of economic development, and working together to tackle global challenges: climate change, carbon neutrality, and so on. However, if those countries do not want to cooperate with China, then China will strive to achieve these technological development goals on its own.

NATO rebukes China for its deepening strategic partnership with Russia and accuses both countries of mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order. NATO has said that Russia and China's cooperation runs counter to their values and interests. However, it is a sovereign decision to determine state-to-state strategic partnerships. Both China and Russia are exercising their sovereign rights to form a strategic partnership of coordination. While the United States has built a politico-military alliance with some European countries, China has not interfered. Why then, do NATO countries find fault

with China's choice? Both China and Russia are permanent members of the UN Security Council. Why should China undermine the rules-based order? Moreover, both China and Russia are the builders of the extant order. Breaking international pledges and commitments has been common practice for the United States. For example, it signed the Paris Agreement and then decided to quit; it concluded the TPP free trade agreement and then decided to quit, and, it also chose to quit permanent international organizations when dissatisfied. It is preposterous for such a country to accuse other countries of disrupting the rule-based order.

While China does not send its navy to police Europe, some European countries have sent warships to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, in the name of protecting the freedom of navigation. In fact, the security situation in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait is better than that in many areas of the world, and there is no expectation by the peoples of the region for European protection. The expenditure of European taxpayers' funds to send warships to Asia, in a display of power, is neither feasible nor desirable.

If NATO seeks to expand toward Asia and expand its sphere of influence into both the Indian and Pacific oceans, it ought to change its name first.

NATO claims to be a defensive alliance that defends democratic values and human rights. But when NATO bombed infrastructures in civilian areas in Belgrade, did NATO think about protecting human rights first? Did Serbia launch an attack on any NATO member country and trigger the activation of the NATO collective defense mechanism? NATO's bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq also lacked conclusive evidence that Afghanistan or Iraq attacked a NATO member. NATO bombing campaigns had inflicted a large number of innocent civilian casualties, which were disingenuously described as "collateral damage." Have NATO's unprovoked bombings protected the human rights of dead civilians and homeless refugees?

NATO behaves much like a mafia organization, which, under the leadership of a rogue boss, persecutes and bombs countries that are powerless to fight back. This explains, in large part, why NATO was so cautious when encountering Russia.

In an attempt to bring NATO into Asia, the undeclared but persevering US objective is a security focus on the Taiwan Strait. While the Taiwan issue is a legacy of China's history, it remains within China's sovereign power to decide how and when to solve this problem. All NATO countries have established official diplomatic relations with China, their governments recognized there is only one

China, and Taiwan is part of China. By breaking with these solemn undertakings, through meddling in Chinese domestic affairs and/or instigating Taiwan's separatist movement, NATO members shall be held fully accountable for their actions and assume the severest consequences.

NATO needs to be reminded that it would be a historic mistake to misinterpret China's patience as cowardice and to forget that China had previously fought U.S.-led coalition forces in Korea before its industrialization and the establishment of a domestic military industry. On the Korean peninsula, China, mainly using borrowed weapons, pushed US troops back to its invasion point, forcing the U.S. to sign an armistice to end a war it could not win. Now that China has the most comprehensive industrial manufacturing capacity in the world, and has built an advanced military-industrial infrastructure, the armies of the NATO alliance need to think twice before testing China's resolve or they will certainly meet an end much worse than that of the Korean War.

NATO's Choice

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At its founding in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was understood as an inter-regional organization that took in countries washed by Atlantic waters. However, from the very beginning, Italy's membership set an example of an anomaly. Several years later, when Greece and Turkey joined NATO, the organization further breached its geographical limitation. Ninety-seven percent of Turkey's territory lies within Asia; thus, and without exaggeration, NATO became a transcontinental organization.

The Soviet Union was regarded as the biggest security challenge for NATO during the Cold War. For more than 70 years, NATO has adjusted its tasks and approaches according to the changing international environment. NATO's main operational objective during the Cold War, however, remained to defend collectively and deter the security threat from the Soviet Union. The Soviet revisionist policy, to a large degree, stimulated NATO's development and provided the rationale for NATO to operate actively in Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO published its 1991 Strategic Concept which stated, "The threat of a simultaneous, full-scale attack on all of NATO's European fronts has effectively been removed and thus no longer provides the focus for Allied strategy." NATO no longer had a convincing reason for its continued existence.

NATO began to urgently seek and formulate other types of threats/risks to rationalize its existence, including terrorism, ethnic conflicts, human rights abuses, political instability, economic fragility, and the spread of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and their means of delivery. The 1999 Strategic Concept stated that "[t]he security of the Alliance remains subject to a wide variety of military and non-military risks which are multi-directional and often difficult to predict. These risks include uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area and the possibility of regional crises at the periphery of the Alliance, which could

evolve rapidly.” By pointing out a litany of uncertain and unpredictable risks, NATO could both justify and maintain its necessity and continue operations in the post-Cold War era.

Whether the enumerated risks were convincing enough for NATO to continue to operate has remained disputed for more than two decades. NATO’s existence prompted reflections among the Europeans. Some argued that NATO should have been disbanded after the disintegration of the USSR. At the turn of the 21st century, British *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Steele wrote that “[w]e must go all the way, up to the termination of NATO” because it “serves almost entirely as a device for giving the U.S. an unfair and unreciprocated *droit de regard* over European foreign policy.” In 2019, French President Macron described NATO as “brain dead” because the U.S. failed to consult NATO before taking action.

Paradoxically, the dissolution of the USSR injected new vitality into NATO. The collapse of the Soviet Union not only drastically improved the external environment for NATO but also created opportunities for NATO’s expansion. In the post-Cold War era, NATO entered into a new stage of development with the former members of the Warsaw Pact, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland becoming members in 1999. Since then, NATO has undergone several further rounds of enlargement. In the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022, NATO members demonstrated unprecedented unity, and Finland and Sweden were invited to join NATO at the Madrid Summit in June 2022. Their admission would make NATO an organization with 30 European countries and two North American countries.

NATO has been one of the biggest beneficiaries since the end of the Cold War. Not only have most European countries become members, but NATO has successfully managed flexible responses to the changing international environment. In the post-Cold War period, NATO has adapted to external and internal changes by transforming from a primary defense organization into a more comprehensive organization that combines military, political, diplomatic, and economic missions. NATO also actively engages with international and regional organizations including the UN, the EU, and the African Union. Outside Europe, the concept of a Global NATO has manifested in cooperative arrangements with Asian countries including Japan (since the early 1990s), New Zealand (since 2001), and Australia and South Korea (since 2005). In December 2021, the four Asia-Pacific countries were invited for the first time to participate in a NATO foreign ministerial meeting to discuss how to deal with the rise of China. They also participated in the June 2022 Madrid Summit.

The close cooperation with these four Asia-Pacific countries is in strong contrast with NATO's definition of the "China threat." Yet, the question is whether NATO's selected response to the changes in its security environment is wise. In the Cold War era, the 1967 Harmel Report on the future tasks of the Alliance initiated NATO's first step toward a more cooperative approach to security issues, and was regarded as "a key political and strategic think piece." It broadened NATO's approach towards external players and helped break the deadlock between the East and the West. In a 1976 NATO ministers meeting, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that "China may be one of the most important NATO allies." President Jimmy Carter received a proposal from his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski suggesting that NATO should be encouraged to "invite the PRC to send an observer to NATO, or conversely request the PRC to invite a NATO delegation to visit China." In the post-Cold War era, despite ups and downs, NATO-China relations, although low-key, were generally positive in the period before Donald Trump became US President.

As the leader of NATO, the United States has designated China as a "long-term strategic competitor" in its official government strategy documents since 2017. The US 2022 National Defense Strategy states that China is "the most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge." The European Union, a close ally of the U.S., labeled China as a "systemic rival" in its China policy published in 2019. Affected by the US and EU policy changes toward China, NATO first mentioned in its London Declaration in 2019 that "China's growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance." Yet, by 2022 in the released new Strategic Concept, NATO has shifted from its previously balanced approach and listed China as a challenge to its "interests, security and values" and adopted the term "systemic rival" to define NATO-China relations.

NATO in nature is a defensive organization with the mission of maintaining peace for the Alliance. China in history is a peace-loving nation that has never expanded militarily or taken territory from its neighbors by force. The rise of China has heightened the security concerns of the West, but Chinese leaders have stated on many occasions that China will never seek hegemony. China is the world's second-largest economy and the second-largest trading partner of both the U.S. and the EU. The strong degree of interdependence lays a solid foundation for stable cooperation between China and its Western partners. Yet, the dangerous tendency of supply chain decoupling between the West and China would seriously weaken the basis of cooperation, and replace it with realist zero-sum calculations.

While it is true that China follows a different development path from those of NATO members, the differences in political systems should not serve as an excuse for competition and rivalry. NATO and China share common interests in maintaining world peace and stability. Based on this common sense, new identities can be constructed. If China is incorporated as a partner, it can work with NATO to address many global challenges including terrorism and climate change. If China is increasingly perceived as a rival, the world may enter a more uncertain and precarious geopolitical situation. Misunderstanding and miscalculation have led to bloody and costly historical lessons. NATO now stands at the crossroads of a strategic choice: to adopt a less ideologically motivated and less geopolitical stance and become more flexible and pragmatic, or to continue its expansion into Asia Pacific and be the primary disrupter of regional peace and stability.

NATO's Expansion and Its Implications for the U.S. and the World

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After more than 30 years of American exceptionalism, domestic divisions, failed foreign policy adventures, massive military spending, and record-breaking deficits, the United States is intent on shifting part of the cost, if not decision making, of the “Policeman of the World” role to NATO. What does this mean over the short- and intermediate-term for the U.S., NATO, and the world?

American exceptionalism

The fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, brought the Cold War era to a close, but rather than ushering into a period of peace and tranquility, for the United States, it birthed an uninterrupted series of conflicts and wars. Countries and areas in Panama, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Sudan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Maghreb, Gulf of Aden, Pakistan, Indian Ocean, Libya, Uganda, Syria, Yemen, Iran, and now Ukraine, became battlegrounds, some only once, others on multiple occasions. The lack of success of these actions, politically and economically, can be measured in the divisions and insecurity of the world today.

Through each of these misadventures, there was the certainty of American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States is superior to other nations because of its exceptional history, that it has a unique mission to transform the world, and that any damage done to innocent individuals, peoples, or nations is

justified collateral damage for the greater good of maintaining global order and preventing another world war. So, no apologies have been made to the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, or to any of the other countries or peoples, whose lives and futures have been lost because in the Washington mindset, they were regrettable, but acceptable, losses.

Today, America lives in a “post-fact,” “post-hypocritical” world, when the US government invokes the need for “international standards” and the “rule of law” while refusing to acknowledge either the International Criminal Court it helped create, or the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that it seeks to enforce against others but refuses to sign (the larger irony being, the treaty was a global response to America’s desire to enlarge its maritime borders), or when the U.S. unilaterally repudiates international treaties like the Kyoto and Paris Climate accords and the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and then makes claims about the desire to uphold the international “rules-based order” while invading countries, engaging in human rights abuses, and accusing others of doing what it has done, and continues to do so. In the end, it becomes a hypocritical sham to many countries and people who see America as not a principled country that leads by example, but as an empire that preaches values it does not practice.

Domestic divisions

The social, economic, and political divides in America have manifested themselves in polarized views about guns, racial violence, abortion, voter suppression, increasing economic disparity, Trump, consistent leadership failures at home and abroad, and the very cohesion of the country.

After the Uvalde Texas shooting massacre, it is hard for people to believe that the police will protect them or their children.

The drumbeat of young black men like Jayland Walker, who was shot 46 times by police officers, the lopsided incarceration of black men at a ratio of 5 to 1, and the open fear and hatred towards immigrants of color add to distrust in the police and society when it comes to the color of one’s skin.

The politicization of the Supreme Court based on odd “Originalist” legal theories, promoted by conservative ideologues has resulted in voter suppression of minorities and the loss of women’s right to control their own bodies.

Economic disparities continue to worsen, as of 2022, the top 10% controls 69% of the wealth, while the bottom 50% has only 2.8%.

Trump's bold-faced lies about winning the election continue to be believed by the majority of Republicans. And while the Jan. 6 Congressional hearings are taking a toll, he is still favored as the 2024 Republican presidential candidate by 49% of Republicans.

Trump, as an elected leader, points to an even deeper issue related to the continuing failure of American leadership in domestic and international matters due to arrogance and a lack of preparation. Then the devastating economic consequences, which saw a 19.2% contraction of the US economy from the 4th quarter of 2019 to the 2nd quarter of 2020, marking the worst recession in US history. The poorly planned stimulus program that followed missed the mark for many and instead contributed to America's current inflation problems, and the Federal Reserve leadership, which believes you can solve food and energy shortages with fiscal and monetary policies, are devastating the poor and lower middle classes.

Internationally, despite repeated assertions that Russia would go into Ukraine, Biden's administration made no apparent preparations, once again, showing a naivete or calculated disregard for the consequences to the EU and the world, involving a conflict the U.S. set in motion; a repeat of its performances in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the other wars and conflicts mentioned above.

Finally, the unprecedented attack on the Capitol, being replayed in the House of Representatives as we speak, is a poignant reminder of how easily so many discontented Americans can be carried away by a wave of lies into being part of an insurrection.

Massive military spending and US deficits

The result of these endless wars and conflicts, external and internal, has been a financial disaster for all Americans, except the military-industrial complex. Spending on the armed forces and conflicts between 1989 and 2022 totaled over 17 trillion US dollars, adding to a US deficit that now stands at 30.4 trillion US dollars. This does not include the monies spent and actions taken in "the war on drugs," the lives lost, or the fact that the world is less safe today than it was

in 1989. Meanwhile, real wages for the lower-middle classes stagnated and their hopes for a better future for themselves and their children withered.

NATO as the new “Policeman of the World”

Following an acrimonious and unfruitful G7 meeting, NATO met from June 28th to June 30th, ostensibly to talk about the Ukraine situation, but the end goal from the beginning was to designate China as the organization’s long-term threat. A new determination to deepen “defense” cooperation with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea was announced, and coincidentally all the countries were in attendance.

It was an interesting backflip for an organization established at the end of WWII to implement a defensive security agreement between European and US states against Russian attacks and to prevent another World War starting in Europe. During the Cold War, NATO’s purpose was about “detering Soviet expansionism, forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent.” But, when the Warsaw Pact dissolved in 1991, instead of disbanding, NATO was folded into a US strategy to deter “the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere.” This quote is telling, as it clearly underlines that Russia was viewed not as a potential partner to be integrated into Europe, but as a threat that needed to be perpetually guarded against, and that the U.S. intended to maintain its hegemonic position using NATO.

It turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In 2007, Vladimir Putin repudiated the US unipolar world order hostile to Russia in a speech to the Munich Security Conference. Based on broken oral assurances that NATO would not expand into areas of the former USSR and having had its application to NATO turned down three times, Putin had come to the conclusion that the hope he had expressed in his speech to the German Bundestag in 2001: to be part of a European “home,” was no longer feasible. Imagine if Russia had been allowed into NATO, the hostilities we face today would have never happened. Once again, a lack of vision, or one obscured by the need to have a “bad guy” to justify American exceptionalism, prevented any hope of peace.

Instead of peace, the U.S. showed the EU the economic dividends of military, political and economic supremacy in the form of targeted loans to countries

that employed American contractors like Kellogg, Brown and Root, CH2M Hill, and Bechtel, and that bought American equipment from makers like Caterpillar. During the Afghan war, an average of 300 million US dollars a day was spent, and a similar amount in Iraq. American firms like KBR, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Parsons, Northrop Grumman, and the infamous Blackwater, lined up for parts of the trillions doled out, in many cases without bids. As can be imagined, the massive money involved was noted enviously by European arms, equipment, and services companies that wanted a piece of the pie.

The economic carrot of war money was not enough though to get the EU to up its military spending and oppose those to whom the U.S. deemed as adversaries. There had to be a galvanizing event, especially given the rather lukewarm EU reaction to the US unilateral withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the JCPOA. By luck or planning, the simmering Ukraine conflict seemed like the perfect event. It would make Putin the villain, weaken Russia, and could be fashioned into a conduit for casting China as an outlier while energizing NATO into sharing the costs of assuming America's "Policeman of the World" role. The American exceptionalism camp may have reasoned that by putting Ukraine in play, it would either result in China breaking with Russia, or create an opportunity to paint China as a conspirator, either one being a desirable outcome.

It seemed easy. Every major American intellectual from Kennan to Kissinger, including Biden and the current head of the CIA, Casey, had stated categorically that putting Ukraine in play would draw Russia into an armed confrontation. But what started under Obama in 2014, with what the Russians saw as a political putsch by pro-EU and U.S. factions and ended up with an independent Crimea, was interrupted by Trump, whose mercantilist vision only extended to casting America as a victim who needed to get paid. But, with Biden at the helm, the game was afoot. Already reeling under the failures in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, etc., the botched retreat from Afghanistan, the incompetent handling of the pandemic, and a wartime military budget, a budget which dwarfed the education budget by a factor of almost 3X, the U.S. wanted proxy countries, which would avoid US body bags for its troops, buy arms and willingly pay for them. The answer was of course to make NATO into an extension of US policy, and by policy, that meant an instrument of American exceptionalism.

The vision of a "Global NATO," first articulated in 2006, has become a grim reality for billions of people who don't want what the U.S. has done in South America, Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and now Europe, to happen in Asia.

What does this mean over the short- and intermediate-term for the U.S., NATO, and the world?

Ironically, the US narrative on NATO's global role is best summed up in a November 2021 speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. He extolled that in "an age of systemic competition" where "Russia and China are undermining the rules-based international order," NATO is needed to become "the institutional link between Europe and North America"... "to defend democracy, freedom, and the rule of law," obviously oblivious to the ironic reality of the State Department mantra being uttered by a European who is oblivious to the costs of what he was proposing or its consequences.

Despite being months away from the latest conflict in Ukraine, China already figured into the equation. It would seem strange to identify your largest source of imports and third largest export destination as an entity that needs to be defended against. To some, the absurdity may be palpable. The idea that the EU has been somehow tricked into trading and making money by a sneaky adversary seems ludicrous on its face, but the constant daily rhetoric seems able to quash reasoned thoughts, at least for now.

In the short term

The EU has switched its dependency for food and energy from Russia to the U.S. and will be paying more for defense, possibly even more for the rebuilding and absorbing of a country whose metrics and qualifications made them a nonstarter for EU membership in 2019.

In the medium term

This comes at a time when financial pressures from poor leadership on the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the financial repercussions of stimulus payments, massive miscalculations about the effect of the conflict on food and energy prices as well as a snarled supply chain logistics, and burdensome tariffs are, and will continue to be, felt by voters. It is hard to imagine voters will be more concerned about refugees than keeping themselves and their families warm and fed with a

roof over their heads.

Over the long term

Weakening your allies will not help you, even if they are your competitors if your adversaries continue to prosper.

But in the end, the optics and irony of a group of former colonial masters and their progeny, who cling to a mainly European-derived identity, ushering in a second era of hypocritical “white father knows the best,” are not going to play well with an increasingly multipolar world where people remember the first round of colonialism. So, while NATO’s role may be to maintain/resurrect the failing racial, social, economic, political, and ideological supremacy of the U.S. and the EU, it may, in the end, isolate and diminish them.

TIO Spotlight Talk



The BRI in the Post-Pandemic World

A dialogue with Maria Adele Carrai and Michele Bruni following the 48th G7 summit



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TIO How will China adjust BRI to a post-pandemic world? And will the initiative continue to have important implications for the developing world?

Carrai First of all, I would like to say a few words about how the pandemic impacted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). We saw a slowdown in many infrastructure projects all around the world, and even Tsinghua University at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, said around 20% of BRI projects would be seriously affected by the pandemic, 40% would see a few adverse impacts, and another 30% or 40% would be somehow affected. It's interesting because already, some projects had been stopped before, so some issues would have already started before the pandemic. In 2019, for example, Malaysia canceled a \$20 billion East Coast Rail Link with China Communications Construction Company, but after the pandemic, there's been a slowdown. Everything was hard to get, material, labor, etc.

But then according to the Secretary General of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC), Peng Huagang, more than 600 projects had been completed despite the pandemic, and also new projects have been launched. And so that's a positive sign.

But again, overall, we see a slowdown in these projects. Besides, if we look at

trade, China has bounced back incredibly fast. People, the travel of people, however, remains very limited. I'm sure Dr. Bruni will have more about that. Basically, the number went down, not to zero, but to a very low number. And that's an important indicator of the Belt and Road Initiative because one of its goals is people-to-people connectivity. And now with the current policy of zero-Covid and with travel restrictions, it's hard for people to move. So, that's the status and how the pandemic has affected the Belt and Road Initiative.

Moving forward, I can see three trends for the Belt and Road Initiative. One is better quality. We might see fewer, but better projects that focus more on sustainability, both socially and environmentally. This is a trend that already started before, but I think with even less money because China now has to face its domestic economic issues and an increasing unemployment rate. So, I think there would be less capital to devote to projects overseas, so the projects must be economically feasible with high quality.

The second aspect that I can see going forward, given the very insecure geopolitical environment, also with the Ukraine-Russia war, is that China has been less shy about its interests in securing the Belt and Road Initiative. Some of these ports and transport networks of the BRI might be used also to help secure the Initiative because China has a lot of interests and has invested a lot economically abroad. So, I think that might be the next move.

And then the last one is re-globalization. China is pushing very much for globalization, particularly regionalization in the Asia Pacific. During the pandemic, Chinese trade and investment in Asian region countries increased a lot. You have the RCEP, which is one of the largest trading blocs in the world. And I think the idea is that China wants to create a more integrated supply chain within the region and then expand it to the BRI. So, I think these are three important trends that will partly define the BRI moving forward.

TIO Picking up on what you've said about demographic transition, Dr. Bruni, what will happen to the BRI plan in light of the demographic trend?

Bruni Let's start analyzing a megatrend that has been affecting the planet for almost three centuries, the Demographic Transition (DT), and its impact on China and the BRI. In essence, it is a process that brings a population from:

- a traditional regime, characterized by high rates of fertility and mortality, to a modern regime, characterized by low rates of fertility and mortality
- a phase in which the population grows at an increasing rate to a situation in which the population declines
- a phase of rejuvenation to a phase of aging

This process has been affecting populations across the world and China is no exception. In 1950, China was still in the first phase of the DT, a phase characterized by fast rejuvenation and increasing population growth rates which reached a record of 3% by the second half of the 1960s. Nevertheless, China successfully surpassed the first challenge posed by the DT, the education challenge. It did so by expanding in record time its physical and human educational infrastructure.

China entered and still finds itself in the second phase of the DT which is marked by the progressive decline in the population's growth rate. During this phase, the working age population registers a rapid increase resulting in the second demographic challenge, the employment challenge. Through a pragmatic approach and effective reforms, China succeeded in creating a number of jobs necessary to face its massive increase in labor supply. Due to Covid-19's negative impact on fertility, this phase will most probably end very soon and earlier than initially forecast.

Resolving the education and employment challenges in a timely manner was key to confronting the greatest demographic challenge of all, the poverty challenge, which China dealt with admirably.

However, there is another demographic challenge that awaits China in the following decades: a parallel increase in the number of elderly people (which will become more than 30% of the total population) and a massive decline in the working age population (WAP).

When considering the impact of the DT on not only China but all BRI partner countries, we should remember that the process starts when a country reaches a certain level of socioeconomic development. Indeed, the DT initially only affected the countries that first experienced the Industrial Revolution during the 19th century. Consequently, the world's countries are currently experiencing different stages of the DT with the most developed countries (and very soon China as well)

having reached the last phase of the DT while the poorest countries are still in the first phase.

The result is an increasing demographic polarization in which there is simultaneously a group of countries where the WAP is declining and another group where the WAP is exploding. The countries of the former group will be inevitably affected by a growing and structural shortage of labor and those of the latter by a growing and structural surplus of labor.

The 65 partner countries of the BRI, which together make up more than 60% of the world population, are characterized by a demographic polarization even more pronounced than that of the planet as a whole. Therefore, I believe when discussing the future of the BRI, it is extremely important to consider not only the very clear impact of the DT, but also the way in which China could lead and coordinate the adoption of employment, labor, and especially migration policies that could deal with the last challenge created by the DT and in so doing transform the two opposite demographic problems that will affect the partner countries into an opportunity for all and for the Initiative as a whole.

TIO Going back to the point about the newly promoted Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, Dr. Carrai, what are the differences between this new infrastructure plan and the Build Back Better World (B3W) that President Biden promoted during last year's G7 meeting as well as the EU's Global Gateway plan?

Carrai Actually, there's been a transfer because there was the Build Back Better World that was launched last year. Then this year, at the last G7 meeting, the group launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, committing \$600 billion to invest in infrastructure globally. So, this plan is newer; it is similar to the Belt and Road in a sense, but it is not fully defined. So essentially, you can include all sorts of projects under the G7 plan. One of the biggest differences between BRI and all the plans promoted in the West is that the latter are still in words, and so we will have to see how much real substantial commitment will run through the channels and materialize abroad. Another difference is that the G7 plan is a multilateral initiative. And so, you have G7 countries plus the European Union that will contribute, and this of course creates much more problems of coordination. For example, just in Europe, coordinating the members is already very difficult. Imagine bringing in seven or so countries that have some different

views and different interests.

So that is a big difference because the Belt and Road Initiative has been very effective, because it was led by state-owned enterprises, by the Chinese state, and of course, even if the Chinese state doesn't have full control over all its economic actors abroad, it offered these packages for the construction companies, so projects are often built very quickly.

These are something that the G7 initiative doesn't have. The new global infrastructure and investment plan is basically just another branding of the B3W. It also incorporates the Blue Dot Network that was launched a few years ago. So, what we really see is this slow trajectory from declaration to some substantial economic commitment, right? But then again, we have to see how much of the money really will go into infrastructure projects.

Another difference, at least in terms of words that this Infrastructure Partnership of G7 is committed to, reflects, in some ways, Western values of democracy. So, they want to have this rules-based infrastructure project that respects rules, human rights, high standards, that in a way, is different, or it wants to be different. It focuses even more on these aspects. But as I discussed before, BRI focuses more on the quality infrastructure. Then of course China has this diplomatic principle of sovereignty and non-interference. So, China will be probably less concerned about what kind of regime they are doing business with, because the approach is partly different. But there is now an increasing focus on quality and rules, also because it's in the interest of China to create more stable investment with rules and regulations rather than just chaotic deals.

TIO Let's elaborate a little bit on that. Right now, what we're facing after the pandemic is that every country's economy is suffering. This includes the United States and the member states of the G7. It's obvious that financial issues will surely be a great challenge for all these countries given the current economic situation. Other than that, what are the biggest challenges that these countries will face in terms of the actual implementation of this plan?

Carrai Coordination. They have to create a full system for cooperation. Because as I said, China is one country and is not that difficult to coordinate, because you have all the state-owned enterprises; the bank coordinates with the construction companies, and they all have this direct relationship with the government. In

the G7's case, first of all, you already have other initiatives. It's not clear whether all this money, for instance, for the Global Gateway of the European Union, will be merged with the \$600 billion. You already committed \$300 billion for infrastructures in the developing world in a way to counter the BRI. Will this be merged with the G7 partnership or not? And really, in terms of implementation, and also the cost, it's also a challenge because if you really want to keep these standards very high, it means that you have to have labor, and you have to have people that make sure that the standards are verified.

You have to have all these manpower thinking through how to implement this partnership. But another way they can do is just basically to include just random projects here and there, like what I saw also on the White House website, the project that has been included is a bit random. So, I don't think there's really coordination, but that's just America. So, I think it would be difficult to really push the project forward. And you also have to coordinate with the bank. How will this money be managed? There's a lot to think about. It's not impossible, if there was a political will, nothing is impossible. And I think G7 could totally become a strong competitor to the BRI. But for now, I don't see there is a political will or the interest necessary in investing aside from competing with China: because China is doing this now and we should do this as well.

It is so important to think strategically about how you build infrastructure. What kind of economic global value chain do you create, how to integrate a region like Africa to benefit Europe, etc. And if it's done smartly, this can have huge benefits for Europe and the G7 countries. But again, I don't know whether there is a political will or the resource to do this.

Bruni If I can add something, there is also the fact that in our countries, governments change very often. It doesn't mean that what has been approved today by a government will be approved by the next one. Suppose, for instance, Trump wins the election, which I believe is not impossible, would Washington follow the same path charted by Biden or not? It is the idea that China should not win, which I think underlines all these ideas. And I think another aspect of this political cycle is that governments rarely have a long-term vision. We can't really have a 2050 plan. This is very difficult for us. Because we fight with each other. Just look at the European Union. It's a mess, sadly.

Now it seems like we can come together for something. But fundamentally we are different, and we still stick to our own parochial national interests and add to that the different parties within a country. So, I completely agree with Dr. Carrai.

And for infrastructure, for a plan like this, you must have a long-term vision and a long-term political will.

TIO Last time when we were talking about the BRI vs the B3W, Dr. Carrai, you said that third-party countries are now in a better position to benefit from the competition between China and the United States because they now have more options. Now, Dr. Carrai, what is your perspective on how would people in the developing countries benefit from the BRI and the G7 infrastructure plan, if it's implemented successfully?

Carrai Before the BRI, a lot of countries didn't have any options. In terms of Serbia, they wanted to build this highway. The European Union has never agreed on investing in the project because it didn't make any sense to them, right? So, China came in and built it. Sometimes you still have economic spillover and benefits, but sometimes it is not the case. That said, I think that there is a possibility to have many different options. I think the developing world can be smart about it and identify what are their needs. The problem is that sometimes there is no capacity for this because there is a lot of corruption. So maybe you have a dictator that decides to build a completely useless infrastructure project to show off power, right?

But again, China now is moving more towards quality. And I think there will be less willingness to fund this kind of project, so there is going to be much more scrutiny and coordination.

Bruni What about corruption? Would also corruption play a big role in this, who is getting the money from?

Carrai Of course. But there are different ways of corruption. For example, in Africa's projects, all the procurement goes to African companies. Another thing is that the donor, for example, the European countries, would sometimes have the idea that we do good to these developing countries. But I think that the different approach of China from which the Western countries should learn is that we're not doing charity, we are benefiting from it. It's a win-win. We also make profit. I think that's a different attitude we still see in the West: "This poor country, we need to help them...We need to just waste this money in the rat holes..." The US officials said this in the past, referring to Africa. I think the mindset needs to change. This money is invested for good reasons and to plan good infrastructure projects that

can also benefit the donor. Again, it's not just charity. It is an investment.

TIO Going back to your previous view, how then can the world benefit from the way China manages its migration flows along the BRI?

Bruni Migrations have a very significant social, economic, and political impact on both departure and arrival countries. Moreover, while there are numerous success stories, an increasing number of tragic events connected to migration have taken place across the world, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Mexican-US border, from the routes crossing the Balkans to those across the African deserts and the forests of Southeast Asia.

At the same time, demographers, economists, and politicians seem to be unaware that the world is entering a phase dominated by unprecedented demographic polarization. Just to give some numbers, according to the zero-migration scenario of the World Population Prospect just published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, from 2020 to 2060 the WAP of Europe will decline by 138 million (-28%), that of the U.S. by 30 million (-14%), that of Japan by 28 million (-38%), and that of China by 133 million (-24%). In the very same period, the WAP of Africa will increase by 1,096 million (+143%), that of Afghanistan by 30 million (+141%), and that of Pakistan by 117 million (+87%).

To comprehend the economic and political implications of this situation, let's imagine that over the 2020-2045 period the potential arrival countries (including North America, Europe, China and other eight Asian countries, and the Gulf countries) are cut off from the potential departure countries by an insurmountable wall. To keep the rate of employment (i.e., the ratio of employment to WAP) constant, the first group of countries would have to take around 375 million jobs away, while those of the second group would have to create 775 million jobs. Both solutions are not realistic, albeit for different reasons.

On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine that the countries of the first group will be able to replace the decline in labor supply through the adoption of active labor policies and increases in productivity even through the wholesale adoption of AI and robotization. This would most probably result in a decline in GDP, a situation normally defined as an economic crisis. On the other hand, it is impossible that the poor countries will be able to reach the growth in production required to create an additional number of jobs coherent with the growth of their labor

supply. Therefore, the countries in the first group will not be able to proceed along their path of social development and economic growth, while those of the second will see unemployment and poverty increase enormously, fueling social and political unrest that could easily spill over into neighboring countries.

This situation does however suggest a win-win solution: the organization and co-management of migration flow coherent with the quantitative and qualitative needs of arrival countries. Additionally, due to economic fairness, arrival countries should finance the education and vocational training of future migrants in departure countries.

While the WAP of the BRI will increase by 340 million in the next 25 years, it will be the sum of a decline of around 185 million in the countries in the latter phases of the DT (including China whose WAP will decline by 133 million) and an increase of 525 million in the countries in the earlier phase of the DT.

Since China has a leading role in the BRI and the 5th area of cooperation of the Initiative regards the human factor, we could imagine China taking the lead in organizing labor exchanges between the countries with a structural shortage of labor and those with a structural excess of labor based on a correct evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative needs of the labor markets of potential arrival countries. This exchange could involve not only BRI partner countries but also other African and Latin American countries as well.

In the last 30 years, the Western world has taken a myopic attitude towards migrants. Based on wrong theoretical premises and unfounded prejudices, the European Union and the U.S. have tried to stop the arrival of badly needed workers with the only result being the deaths of tens of thousands of people and the waste of taxpayers' money.

One could hope that Beijing could carefully consider the failure of the "wall policy" and adopt a "school and training centered policy." A more enlightened, rational, and humane approach to migration would be beneficial to China as it would allow the country to proceed along its path of socio-economic development, allow the country to better support its increasing elderly population, and enhance the country's international image. Indeed, this policy would boost China across the Global South as the labor market and economic situations of many poor countries would improve as it would reduce excess labor supply, boost education, and increase foreign exchange reserves from remittances, all of which could help achieve a process of sustained socio-economic development.

Finally, all this could help ensure international peace and stability which are more and more being threatened by the increasing economic inequality between countries. Additionally, a more sustainable geographical distribution of the world population could be beneficial to the environment.

In conclusion, a rational approach to migration is crucial not only for China and the BRI but for the planet.

This interview was conducted by Kang Yingyue, International Communications Officer of Taihe Institute.

Youth

Voices



The Nature of NATO Expansion - A Realist View



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Conventional wisdom about the enlargement of NATO is either America-Centric or Russia-Centric. The Western countries blame Russia as the source of NATO's expansion and say there is no alternative to defending themselves from the Russian threat.¹ Russia argues that its decisive and aggressive operations are driven by NATO expansion, which is equivalent to waking to find NATO tanks parked at your front door.²

This "chicken and egg situation" provides an excuse for both sides to reach a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, neither the America-Centric or Russia-Centric view is built on sand or mutually exclusive. Based on the structural realism theories - one of the most popular theories in describing international relations - the expansion of NATO is inevitable, and both sides' explanations possess specific rationalities. Thus, this article takes a realist perspective to investigate the myths surrounding NATO expansion.

When Mearsheimer Meets Waltz

"What happened in Ukraine is the West's fault!" John J. Mearsheimer stated in his gentle Brooklyn accent. He was expressing this astounding idea to dozens of students without scruples in a one-and-a-half-hours seminar.³ Some of the audiences were studying at the Center of International Relations (CIR) and others came from different schools at

1 NATO, "NATO-Russia Relations: The Facts," NATO, August 9, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm.

2 Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

3 The University of Chicago, "Why Is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer," www.youtube.com, September 25, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JrMiSQAGOS4&t=1929s>.

the University of Chicago, but all were attracted by Mearsheimer's fame and controversial reputation. His audience, brainwashed by a deep-seated sense of optimism and moralism within "American values," kept silent, while simultaneously, a series of explosions were happening in their brains.

Mearsheimer was not the only one who foresaw the effects of NATO enlargement. Most realists, whether they are defensive or offensive, share similar predictions. In fact, from their perspective, the enlargement of NATO and the reactions of Russia are rational and inevitable. Interactions were not determined solely by one side in the game, but by the overall structure of the international system.⁴

What is the international system? After the Cold War, the world order was unipolar, and the United States was the only hegemon. So, how did the international system drive each side's grand strategies? Three patterns, in the context of realism, play vital roles in the process of grand strategy formation: First, all states are fearful and realize the need for self-reliance within an anarchic international system; second, the ultimate objective of a great power is to become the sole hegemon within the system; third, is the balance of power theory. The first two came from the bedrock assumptions of Mearsheimer's aggressive realism, and the pattern about power balancing was first outlined by Kenneth Waltz in 1979. Together, they explain how the structure of the international system has driven NATO expansion.

When the U.S. Meets NATO

The first wave of NATO enlargement in the post-Cold War era was not initiated by NATO. In 1991, the Summit of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) tried to establish the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and invited the Soviet Union and other Central and Eastern European states (CEEs) to become members. The purpose of the NACC was to provide a new forum for multilateral security consultations, not an attempt at NATO expansion. However, in 1993, President Walesa of Poland, Havel of Czechoslovakia, and Gorbachev of Hungary asked if their countries could join NATO in a meeting with then US President Clinton.⁵ The strong desire for NATO membership expressed by the three

4 John J. Mearsheimer, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 6 (2001): 173, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20050342>.

5 Kimberly Marten, "Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 2 (November 1, 2017): 135–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.16>, 140–142.

presidents inspired the Clinton administration to begin considering NATO enlargement seriously.⁶

The aforementioned self-reliance principle explained the actions of the three CEE presidents. As former Warsaw Pact members and *Intermarium* states, the three dreaded Russian powers, incapable of fending off the giant of the East, they saw NATO as the best guarantor for their security. As such, it is reasonable to accept the CEEs' perspective on Russia as a major motivator for NATO expansion. It is also the key argument of the West's Russia-Centric narrative - NATO would expand passively only if others felt threatened by Russia. However, fundamental questions remained: Were there alternatives to the expansion of NATO when the three CEE countries sought a security commitment from the West? Why would the United States desperately push for the enlargement of NATO without consideration for the consequent rise in tensions created by applying a revisionist diplomatic strategy in the neighborhood of Russia? In other words, what other incentive might the United States have in its acceleration of NATO enlargement?

The incentive for the United States to expand NATO derives from the second and third patterns alluded to above. In the history of human civilization, international power distribution has never been as asymmetrical as it was during the 1990s. According to Mearsheimer and many other scholars, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the first "real hegemon" in history.⁷ Due to its economic power, projective capability, and dominant ideological status, America could shape the world order at will. Nevertheless, challenges to American power still existed. Waltz argued that, in this situation, the balance-of-power theory applied as an unassailable axiom.⁸ In this view, other states, including Russia, China, Japan, and the European powers, must unite to balance American hegemony.

Indeed, the enviable position the U.S. found itself in required the maintenance of its status as the primary assignment of American grand strategy. How many US presidents have publicly advocated their ambitions, and feelings of pride, in the US role of world policeman? Moreover, statesmen in Washington D.C. also understood that American hegemony was vulnerable when considering the balance of power theorem. For offshore balancing, America must maintain a permanent military presence in any critical region, even if it could/

6 Ibid, 144-146.

7 Mearsheimer, 42.

8 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 117.

will enhance others' suspicions of American expansionism. Waltz captured this argument in his seminal article on NATO expansion: "Unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others."⁹ Waltz predicted that in the post-Cold War era, the traditional European allies of the United States would try to unite to balance the hegemon's power. The historical evidence fits the anticipation of realists: in 1991, France tried to detach European security from NATO and return to the Western European Union (WEU); later, when the Clinton administration implemented NATO enlargement, Germany objected.¹⁰ However, Washington saw NATO as a functional instrument to alter the balance of power. NATO provided the United States with an excellent means of crippling the decision-making autonomy of the great European powers and bringing them under US dictate. NATO membership effectively excluded the most developed and industrialized regions from the exercise of power balancing. Thus, extending NATO longevity became the most crucial objective of the American grand strategy.

The United States found two challenges in sustaining NATO, namely the fundamental questions of purpose and legitimacy. Glenn Snyder wrote that "alliances have no meaning apart from the adversary threat to which they are a response."¹¹ What was NATO's purpose once it had no enemy? The existence and the expansion of NATO drew a new line of division on the European continent. Furthermore, it would weaken Russia, which was more inclined toward East-West integration. How would Washington overcome these obstacles?

Of the two strategies introduced above, the first was the creation of an adversary for NATO. The new adversary must be sufficiently powerful to threaten the security of Europe's entirety; it should be close to the frontier of NATO, and it should be a traditional nation-state with continuous subjectivity. Iraq and Yugoslavia were too weak, China was too far, and terrorism was too abstract. For America, there was no better option than Russia.

The second strategy was to institutionalize Imperial Liberalism in offering legitimacy to NATO. Imperial Liberalism, which features the values of liberalism and democracy as well as other "Western values," was weaponized to achieve discriminatory national interests. These sacred "Western values" have been wielded by the United States like King Arthur's sword, Excalibur. Thus, the expansion of NATO is for the

9 Kenneth N. Waltz, "NATO Expansion: A Realist's View," *Contemporary Security Policy* 21, no. 2 (August 2000): 23–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260008404253>, 24.

10 Lawrence S Kaplan, *Nato Divided, Nato United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, Ct ; London: Praeger, 2012), Chapter 6.

11 Glenn H Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, Ny: Cornell University Press, 1997), 192.

protection of all democratic nations; NATO's military operations in the Middle East became efforts to overthrow tyrants; bombs dropped on Belgrade became angels from Heaven to end the holocaust. Professor Robert Tucker called it a "Freedom Crusade."¹² Which country is a democracy, and which is not? What is liberty, and who suffers under tyranny? Who should be blamed for a war crime? Only the U.S. was gifted with determinate power.

Conclusion

The origins of NATO expansion, derived from the request of CEE states, thrived due to the US ambition to become the world's hegemon. World order changed with the end of the Cold War, and NATO, a twisted product of a particular historical era, became obsolete. However, the U.S. spared no effort in sustaining NATO for its functional capacity to both avoid systemic power balancing and thus, maintain its hegemonic position. To extend the longevity of NATO, the U.S. created a new enemy for Europe and then developed Imperial Liberalism to endow NATO with expansionary legitimacy. In a nutshell, NATO has evolved into a multilateral weapon to sustain the US hegemonic status. Two strategies were introduced to maintain the presence of NATO, and enlargement became its unique path.

Joseph Schumpeter argued that once organizations have been created, they will find something to do and become hard to get rid of. Once NATO's purpose had been changed from balancing against the Soviets to protecting American hegemony, its destiny was fixed; thus, if Russia were to collapse, China would become the primary enemy; if China failed, India or Japan would become the enemy. Until all potential opposition to US hegemony was demolished, the expansion of NATO would not cease. The recent NATO Summit in Madrid confirmed the organization's irrevocable trend of expansion. In the Madrid Summit's final declaration, NATO explicitly named Russia "the most significant and direct threat" and branded China as a "systemic challenge." To some extent, NATO has thrown the world closer into a yawning abyss of dangerous confrontation.

12 David Hendricks and Robert Tucker, "The Freedom Crusade," *The National Interest* 81 (2005): 12-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42897567>.

A New NATO-China Modus Vivendi



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Towards Renewed and Sustainable Relations

At the recently concluded summit in Madrid, Spain, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg unveiled the alliance's new blueprint - a Strategic Concept - that outlines its vision and priorities for the upcoming decade. The blueprint made a reasonable attempt at differentiating between Russia and China - whilst the former it condemned as a "significant and direct threat" to NATO, China was instead portrayed as an actor that would give rise to "systemic challenges."

Predictably, the statement was met with fierce opposition from Beijing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China declared that the new Strategic Concept "disregarded facts, confused black and white, and smeared China's foreign policy." The bifurcation in attitudes and reception towards the document was both indicative of the state of mutual mistrust between Brussels (NATO HQ) and Beijing, as well as foreshadowing the difficulties ahead in navigating bilateral relations between the two entities. The following sets out a pathway for a practicable, mutually beneficial modus vivendi that can be established between NATO member states and China - one that, broadly speaking, would assist in the construction of a pathway that mitigates the potential for a future World War Three.

A Few Points of Reality Check

Any discussion of a world where NATO and China coexist with some modicum of

peace must acknowledge the truculent nature of circumstances on the ground. As such, a reality check must also include the fact that bilateral relations have reached new nadirs over recent years and should be factored into consideration as both sides continue to bind the relationship.

Another key fact is that America, the dominant actor within the NATO alliance, is increasingly unnerved by what it perceives to be China's growing military, economic, and political capacities. The past decade saw drastic overhauls and reforms to the PLA (People's Liberation Army), with a substantial reduction in the number of actively enlisted personnel – from 3.9 million in 1985 to 2.3 million in 2018, a sizeable shrinkage especially given the population increase since then – leading to significant boosts to the volume of capital per capita in the army.

China is the second largest military spender in the world and has progressed by leaps and bounds in its maritime capacities. China's growing influence in international and multilateral institutions, paired with it successfully making inroads in regions ranging from Latin America to Southeast Asia, has fundamentally unsettled America as the prospect of being outcompeted by China in "Great Power Rivalry" solidifies. Whilst Western allegations concerning Chinese intentions to thwart American hegemony, just as Chinese ruminations over American tendencies to promulgate imperialism, are often exaggerated at the expense of the facts, it suffices to say that there are plentiful grounds on which Washington has subjective reasons to be apprehensive towards China's rise. Much of this paranoia has been channeled through the more institutionalist foreign policy approach of Biden, which seeks to rally its allies around Sino-anxiety as a shared ideological stance.

The historically dynamic relationship between China and Europe (many European countries count among NATO members) has been severely impaired by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Whilst Beijing views itself as having adopted a neutral, non-aligned position over Ukraine, such perceptions are not necessarily shared by many European states who view Russia as a revanchist and revisionist threat to their national security. Whilst Beijing views NATO as a warmongering entity that is chiefly responsible for the crisis unfolding in Ukraine, European leaders and citizens are more likely to attribute the ongoing atrocities in the conflict to the decisions undertaken by President Vladimir Putin. The division in attitudes towards Russian-Ukrainian relations has in turn spill-over implications for how NATO members perceive China at present.

NATO and China possess divergent values in their approaches to domestic

governance, economic growth and development, and social management. It would be erroneous to conclude that Europe, America, and China do not see eye to eye simpliciter: there is much in common between them, especially amongst Nordic and Central European states, and China, in their emphasis upon social welfare, communitarian ethic, and robust industrial policies. Yet, such commonalities do not obscure the fact that China is governed very differently from NATO members and that certain values and norms cherished in one may not be shared by the other. As values-driven diplomacy becomes increasingly potent – with such ideals coming to engender and constrain state leaders’ actions on the international stage – it is clear that NATO-China relations have more than one spanner in the works. To ignore the three points outlined above would be not only imprudent but unequivocally dangerous.

Towards a More Sustainable Modus Vivendi

To navigate a more sustainable modus vivendi between the two forces, this article draws upon Kevin Rudd’s model of managed strategic competition outlined in *The Avoidable War* (2022) as well as Professor Wang Jisi’s *Hot Peace* paradigm, published in *China-US Focus* (2022). Given that the proposed pathway for NATO-China relations is predominantly centered around *how* NATO and China ought to engage one another, Sino-U.S. relations are both a pivotal subset of and parallel discussion to the relational pathway.

First, there needs to be clear baselines concerning non-negotiable interests and “reserved domains.” These baselines must be mutually agreed-upon and respected. Regarding non-negotiable interests, it is clear that both sides must be tactfully selective in identifying what exactly it is that they cannot give up. For China, matters of territorial integrity concerning disputed territories, the economic stability and vitality of its population, and the elimination of foreign interference within domestic political affairs are of prime concern. For NATO, a favorable resolution to the Ukrainian crisis and China’s adherence to international norms governing nuclear non-proliferation and arms build-up remain crucial. All other matters, beyond such baselines, are and should be open for debate and negotiation, perhaps behind closed doors. Attempts to “test” each other’s baselines would not only be futile, but also disruptive to bilateral relations.

This is where “reserved domains” hold special importance – NATO and China should selectively disengage and put healthy distances between one another on

potential flashpoints where altercations and thus escalation are likely. Whether it be Eastern Europe, the South China Sea, or the Middle East, the world does not need another round of proxy conflict between great powers. Only when NATO and China keep each other at arm's length in these cases can peace result.

Second, NATO and China should continue to compete vigorously and intensely, but also *constructively*. The first step is the maintenance of open communication channels between Beijing and Brussels with multi-party talks undergirding the management of security risks. The recently concluded Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore was a testament to the centrality of high-level contact – the discussion between Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and American General Lloyd Austin proved to be fruitful in clearing up bad air and allowing both sides to articulate their reasons for disagreements.

Moreover, constructive competition must be a positive-sum exercise – instead of forcing countries to unduly choose between NATO and China, the imperative should be on *convincing* member states and/or favorable allies that both models hold positive potentialities. The focus should be on proving the relative desirability of the alliance's governing system and model, as opposed to preparing the world for increased great power rivalry. This can be done through more inclusive, consultative decision-making mechanisms within NATO that shift the alliance away from the U.S.-led hegemony. In the case of China, this looks like renewing organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to ensure that China plays a more sizeable role in steering and managing internal dynamics.

Finally, NATO and China must continually cooperate on matters ranging from peacekeeping in international waters, to supporting under-resourced governments struggling to contain domestic security risks and threats - there is much that can be done together. A tribalistic, Balkanized world with parallel, separate spheres of security may not seem like a bad idea at first glance, but as the world trends toward that reality, it may well end up going down the well-trodden path that our predecessors did in the run-up to the two devastating world wars that shook the world in the first half of the 20th century. Preventing war is of utmost importance.

Why Both NATO and China Can Benefit

The final question then remains – what's in it for both sides? Why should they

agree to this distancing/non-negotiation-competition-cooperation tricolon? For NATO, the answer is clear – they could ill afford to fight, and seek to win, two wars at the same time. It makes no rational sense for NATO to antagonize both Russia and China in ways that would only push the two substantial powers ever closer together. Additionally, NATO member states seek to preserve the intactness of the alliance against rising costs of living. In this view, China could help through its role as a primary exporter and key market player, and pivotal trading partner to European countries over the past few decades.

Similarly, China would not seek unnecessary conflicts, especially in relation to NATO. NATO is here to stay as a political and security entity, and in a truly multipolar world order, there should also be a place for NATO, in addition to the U.S., on the global stage. China is right in thinking that it is entitled to its own geopolitical and security concerns being taken seriously. The operative question is could this be accomplished without the upsetting or challenging to status quo norms and institutional arrangements? I am of the view that it can – China is not a systemic challenger to the global order, even if it does indeed present an alternative vision for world.

Finally, managing NATO-China relations is also central to resolving the tensions between Beijing and Washington. NATO member states are not the U.S. – both China and America would benefit from recognizing that fact. They possess their own agency, intentions, and value systems that ought to be addressed constructively, as opposed to manipulatively or unduly antagonistically. In the final analysis, there remains a realistic and pragmatic path forward for all involved parties.

NATO Expansion

Impact on the Asia Pacific



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TI Youth Observer

Typhoon politics

First announced in 2011, the West's "Pivot to Asia" is increasingly seen by analysts less as a pipe dream and more of a current event. The West is doubling and tripling its alliances to serve as a counterweight to China in the Asia Pacific, while the new AUKUS (Australia-UK-U.S.) and the Quad (the U.S., Japan, India, Australia) have, on numerous occasions, identified China as a "competitor" and "threat" in the region.¹

However, these alliance reshuffles of the global order do not compare to NATO, which has historically acted as the "world policeman," including the invasion of Yugoslavia and disastrous escapades in the Middle East. Furthermore, the U.S.-led strategic alliance structure, which is now focusing on the Pacific to counter China, has been joined by alliance partner domestic security services.² For example, the FBI and MI5 are making joint statements about the so-called "China threat."³ All this begs the question of what will happen to the regional dynamics of the Asia Pacific.

The Atlantic is not the Pacific

Why is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization looking to China when its

¹ "NATO 2022 STRATEGIC CONCEPT" (Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid, June 29, 2022), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf.

² Ken McCallum and Chris Wray, "Joint Address by MI5 and FBI Heads," SECURITY SERVICE MI5, July 6, 2022, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/speech-by-mi5-and-fbi>.

³ Ibid.

main area of operation is on the other side of the planet? By mentioning China in its new strategy, it allows NATO to effectively re-arm Japan. Long wanted since the Korean War, a re-armed Japan destabilizes the region in an attempt to counter the mainland of China's potential seizure of the Island of Taiwan by force.⁴ As such, the PLAN (People's Liberation Army Navy) would need to counter both Taiwanese defenses and the Japanese Navy, one of the most powerful in Asia despite its Article 9 clause.⁵ Moreover, support by Japan of a legal break to the One China Policy by the U.S.-led web of alliances would constitute a dangerous escalation of tensions in East Asia and the entire Asia-Pacific region.

Japan's role in any conflict in China would be extremely unpopular. Since the death of Shinzo Abe, his legacy concerning modern East Asian relations has also been discussed, with many saying that his "right turn," Abenomics, and his opposition to China, helped stir the problem of current East Asian international relations.⁶ That being said, Japan's role, as a subordinate to the United States, has allowed it to remain a historically reactionary force to China's rise. Abe or not, Japan remains, to some degree, scorned by nations such as Korea and the ASEAN states. By further destabilizing the region, Japan and the U.S.-led alliance structure are attempting to undermine China's historic regional links, further strengthened by the extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and risking knock-on effects of any regional conflict to millions of lives across Southeast Asia.

Taiwan is completely different from Ukraine

While the conflict in Ukraine rages on, many voices in the West are declaring that a military operation in Taiwan is imminent. Despite a spotlight being shone on the region in recent years, a military operation remains unlikely. Furthermore, the Anglo-American weaponry sent to the Ukrainian front line demonstrates that large countries and their tactics do not necessarily guarantee military success. For example, mechanized assaults have been combated with portable rocket launchers.

4 Sheila Smith, "How Japan Is Upgrading Its Military," *Council on the International Relations*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-japan-upgrading-its-military>.

5 CHAPTER II Article 9 § (1946), https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

6 Nathan Park, "Abe Ruined the Most Important Democratic Relationship in Asia," *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/04/shinzo-abe-japan-south-korea-war-nationalism/>.

How does this all relate to Taiwan? First, China is extremely unlikely to repeat Russia's Ukraine quagmire. Second, any Asia-Pacific conflict would be globally unpopular and the new tactics of war, as seen in Ukraine, are being assimilated by both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Third, although saber-rattling is now the most intense it has been since the 90s, it is simply not feasible for the government of China to initiate a military take-over in the current geopolitical environment. China's economy requires a kickstart after the effect of the dynamic zero-Covid policy and it is unlikely to expend blood and treasure on a war that will receive global condemnation.

The British perspective

The United Kingdom has also been instrumental in shaping Western misconceptions of China and NATO, despite being a critically important partner for post-1949 China. The UK has recently pledged to increase defense spending in line with its agreed NATO target of 2% of GDP each year. Moreover, it is attempting to reach 2.3% of GDP in the wake of the Ukraine crisis.⁷ In NATO's most recent statements, the harking back to Cold War era rhetoric challenged Moscow, and the so-called "China threat" is gaining traction in UK media, such as the constant attacks by BBC on China Daily and any source linked to Chinese influence.

Scapegoating will most likely continue or worsen due to the forced resignation of Boris Johnson. The current Tory party tussle to replace Johnson contains hawks such as Foreign Secretary Liz Truss. One should expect further angry rhetoric from a Tory-controlled UK government, at least until the next general election.

Overblown and overhyped

NATO's own "Pivot to Asia" is now well underway and demands analysis as to whether it is an appropriate response. Although China boasts one of the world's largest armed forces, NATO's new focus on the Asia-Pacific and linkages with regional US alliance partners from the Quad and AUKUS appear as overkill.

⁷ "PM to Tell NATO: Allies Must Dig Deep to Prepare for a More Dangerous Decade Ahead" (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, June 29, 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-tell-nato-allies-must-dig-deep-to-prepare-for-a-more-dangerous-decade-ahead>.

This is not a new tactic. Chinese media noted the similarity between the gathering of the G7 meeting, where the NATO states discuss their China strategy, and images of the National Alliance during the Boxer Rebellion⁸ over 100 years ago. NATO does not need to accept any more nations into its official organization and will simply work in tandem most likely with AUKUS and Quad allies. Other than from the North (Russia), this encircles China.

In reality, this is not an entirely new strategy. American bases had encircled the South China Sea long before the mainland had the technology to construct artificial islands. Furthermore, while the FBI and MI5 are beginning to focus on China, domestic terrorist plots and mass shootings are rampant. National security services exist to defend against threats, such as invasive cyber-attacks, but surely working with China will achieve better results. Clearly, a fresh reset is required to break the current deadlock in international relations. There is a genuine need for a proactive effort by Washington and Westminster to *not* engage China as a threat, nor necessarily as a friend, but rather as a benign competitor. Such a reset would result in mitigating risks from dangerous militaristic actions. However, the waning poll results of Biden democrats and Boris Johnson's resignation may make China an even easier target to distract voters.

Bridges and exit ramps

De-escalation should be taken very seriously before irrational decisions are made over the West's designated China flash points. As such, businesses should not be deterred from working with China for global action on climate change, and some progress to wind down tensions has been achieved. One of the first diplomatic missions of the new Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, was to prioritize the re-establishment of trade ties with China. This illustrates that even the most hawkish of nations, during the pandemic period, still prefers more socially focused domestic economic policies and diplomatic solutions in the post-lockdown environment.

⁸ Nordholt J.W. Schulte and Arkel D. van, *Acta Historiae Neerlandica IV Historical Studies in the Netherlands*. (E.J Brill Leiden, 1970), 160-161, 163-164.

Meeting halfway, looking to the past to fix the future

The source of the current problems is found in the post-WWII era. Western nations have felt overwhelmed by China in the region, especially in terms of defense spending where all nations are increasing their conventional and atomic arsenals.⁹ Both Beijing and the Western-allied powers need to coordinate extremely carefully and in unison to avert a full-blown arms race. For example, it is common knowledge that an attack against one NATO member can lead to the entirety of NATO returning a retaliation strike. What happens with the Quad and AUKUS overlap? Are these nations going to be under the NATO control umbrella?

Furthermore, China, with all its size, power and strength would not want to fight three entire alliances, plus American critics could argue that although the West may see China as a threat, no threat requires that much of an armed response. It has been reported many times¹⁰ that a war between China and the United States would be disastrous for both sides.¹¹ If anything, the NATO presence will deny a war that would never happen anyway.

In conclusion, a NATO presence in the Asia Pacific places a new thorn in China's side and exponentially increases the potential for military conflict. However, elevated geopolitical tensions require a serious commitment to diplomatic initiatives by all participants. Expanding a regional arms race into a global military build-up does not guarantee peace and plays into the selfish interests of global arms manufacturers. To ensure peace in a globalized world, greater effort for dialogue must be a priority. As such, education about the pitfalls of great power competition should be expanded. However, in the post-lockdown world, popularism and further pandemic outbreaks may critically slow the process of diplomatic dialogue.

NATO's ambition to expand its global policeman role by focusing on countering is a serious overstretch in both capacity and governance. Western politicians may find China a useful scapegoat to blame in the public arena and excuse their actions at home, but ultimately to improve the current international relations situation, a long-term solution is needed. Moving a naval flotilla, air fleet or missile launchers

9 The Stockholm International Peace Institute, "World Military Expenditure Passes \$2 Trillion for First Time," *Sipri*, April 25, 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>.

10 "Taiwan Minister: China War a Disaster regardless of Outcome," *AP News*, March 10, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-china-beijing-legislature-8b2cc1032dcb-6c88384519eb58b5841c>.

11 David C Gompert et al., *War with China: Thinking through the Unthinkable* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1140.html.

to the South China Sea will not deter China, nor will the words of the West's transitory politicians.

Diplomatic resets, like Australia's reset of economic cooperation with ASEAN and China, and frank and substantive diplomatic talks, which meet halfway, are far more effective than reactive tit-for-tat sanctions, or a disruptive tech-trade war, in rebuilding the world economy and enhancing global cooperation and governance in the emergent post-Covid processes of planarization.

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