

NEW GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES FOR NATO, STIPULATED IN THE MADRID DECLARATION AND UKRAINE'S FUTURE PLACE IN THESE REALITIES AS A SECURITY SHIELD FOR EUROPE

Group of authors:

Volodymyr Solovian, Yurii Poita

I. SITUATION ASSESSMENT

One of the key results of NATO's Madrid summit was the adoption of NATO's Strategic Concept. It is the eighth version of the Strategic Concept in the history of the Alliance. This document includes an assessment of security challenges, defines the basic parameters of strategic planning and counteractions to risks in the medium term.

The new Strategic Concept articulates the Alliance's three core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. These operational parameters reflect the main tasks of the previous 2010 NATO Strategic Concept, which included collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. However, in substance, the new Strategic Concept captures a number of significant changes in the Alliance's assessment of the security environment and response approaches. Underlying the new Strategic Concept is an effort to provide a comprehensive response to the challenges posed to the Alliance by the current crisis in international relations caused by the attempt of authoritarian regimes to undermine the existing world order. Therefore, according to the Concept, the main source of threats to the Alliance is the revisionist foreign policy of Russia and the People's Republic of China.

It is notable that the Strategic Concept was the first NATO policy document since the beginning of the current phase of Russia's war against Ukraine, in which the Kremlin aims to destroy the unity of the West and forcefully establish a zone of its geopolitical control. The new Concept recognizes the risk of involving third countries in hostilities (except Belarus, which has been participating in the war as a Russian ally since February 24). In fact, we cannot rule out a military scenario in which Russia would try to act within the "escalation for de-escalation" paradigm, which would involve partner countries or even NATO members themselves in an ongoing hot conflict. Simultaneously, the Kremlin will provoke armed conflicts in different regions of the world. Particular risks for NATO are presented by interethnic clashes in the Western Balkans and stepped-up fighting in the Middle East and North Africa, which will lead to an increased flow of migrants into Western European

countries, creating tension on the borders of member states. Also, shortly after the NATO Madrid summit, the Taiwan issue escalated to a level unprecedented in the past two decades, making the provisions of the Concept on the PRC all the more relevant.

Under the new realities, it is important for NATO not only to ensure the security of all member states, but also to join the formation of a new coordinate system for regional and global policies. The Strategic Concept, despite its framework nature, deserves our attention, being a meaningful snapshot of the collective opinion of NATO members against the backdrop of the largest war on the European continent since World War II. In view of this, it is useful to take a closer look at the Alliance's interpretation of the role of Russia and the PRC in the system of international relations.

Situation Assessment—Russia as the Main Threat

The new NATO Strategic Concept recognizes Russia as the most significant and direct threat to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, it notes that the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy raises "possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹

The authors of the Concept harbor no illusions that Moscow will keep resorting to hybrid practices of destabilizing the domestic political situation in the member states and undermining trust between the governments. In this context, the document prioritizes the activities of the Alliance to strengthen transatlantic unity and the ability to respond quickly and coherently to hybrid threats. At the same time, the provisions of the Strategic Concept rather casually define the potential dimensions of hybrid practices by unfriendly actors. According to NATO's vision, the means of hybrid warfare are used in the political, economic, energy and information planes. However, the document does not specify an algorithm for the Alliance's response to the combination of conventional means as an element of hybrid intervention, which Russia has used against Ukraine since 2014. We should note that these risks are growing for the Alliance, taking into account the accession of Finland, which will increase the common border between NATO and Russia by more than 1,200 km.

The resilience concept has been further developed and deepened. The new Strategic Concept places high emphasis on the formation of an integrated approach to building Alliance resilience as the next stage in the development of national resilience. In particular, it plans to identify and mitigate vulnerabilities and dependencies, including critical infrastructure, supply chains and health systems. The need to strengthen energy security is also indicated. Thus, NATO records its involvement in minimizing the consequences of Moscow's energy blackmail. Considering this, interaction with the EU acquires particular relevance. NATO views the EU as a unique partner, noting the importance of developing European defence capabilities².

¹ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. URL: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

² Hanna Ojanen. NATO and the EU's Strength Lies in Their Unity. URL: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/87403>

The Strategic Concept devotes special attention to upholding freedom of navigation, securing maritime trade routes, and guaranteeing the safety of major communication routes. The document defines the prospect of confrontation with Russia in the High North. Potentially threatening issues include the dispute over the ownership of the underwater Lomonosov Ridge (extension of the continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean), which, apart from Russia, is claimed by Canada and Denmark, as well as Russian maritime activities near the Norwegian Spitsbergen archipelago.

Another potentially dangerous area indicated by the new Concept is the North Atlantic. Here NATO's attention is focused on the so-called GIUK Gap (the waters between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom). The strategic importance of these waters has been a Cold War constant. Since most of the new and modernized Russian naval (especially submarine) assets are deployed in the Northern Fleet, the area through which Russian submarines could get into the Atlantic will remain the focus of NATO command.

Another reference made by the Strategic Concept in the context of navigational security is the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the protracted war in Ukraine, Russia will try to maintain a presence in Syria. The naval base at Tartus on the Syrian coast remains Russia's logistical gateway to the Middle East and a stronghold for creating tension in the Eastern Mediterranean.

At the same time, in our assessment, insufficient attention is paid to the Black Sea. The new Concept does not provide a strategic vision of NATO's Black Sea policy. The document mentions the Black Sea region in conjunction with the Western Balkans. According to the Concept, both regions are of strategic importance to the Alliance. Pursuant to the provisions of the document, the Black Sea region is seen as a space of democratic transit and partnership with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. However, the articles of the Concept do not elaborate on how to restrain the policy of militarization of the region, which has been consistently conducted by the Russian Federation since the annexation of Crimea. It is likely that this position of the Alliance is connected with the policy of Turkey, which considers maintaining control over the Black Sea straits as its foreign policy priority due to the application of the Montreux Convention mechanisms.

Hence, given the attention paid to the topic of safety of navigation, NATO considers the maritime dimension as a likely theater of confrontation with Russia. Such an assessment is quite accurate in view of the confrontational nature of the recently approved Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation³.

Russia's military alliance with Belarus is also interpreted as a challenge to NATO's security and interests. The possibility for Russian troops to operate from the territory of Belarus, exploiting its logistics and military infrastructure, is a source of constant danger for the Baltic States and Poland.

³ Путин утвердил новую Морскую доктрину России. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/putin-utverdil-novuu-morskuu-doktrinu-rossii/a-62661821>

In addition, the Concept lists a number of risks, in relation to which Russia is not explicitly named, but they are fully or partially the result of its activities. In particular, these are challenges in cyberspace, including attempts to degrade critical infrastructure, interfere with government services, extract intelligence, steal intellectual property and impede military activities.

Also we can add restriction of access and freedom of activities in space to indirect threats from Russia. It should be noted that the new Concept for the first time suggests the possibility of using collective forces of the Alliance, referring to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in cases where malicious cyber attacks or hostile operations in space are able to reach the level of an armed attack. Such provisions of the Concept point to NATO's concerns about Russia's testing of anti-satellite weapons systems⁴.

Another dimension where NATO members see risks from Russia is climate change. The war in Ukraine has shown that Russia has not given up its use of environmental terror as an element of pressure on the enemy. At the same time, the environmental security of the High North and the Arctic is of particular relevance to NATO countries as a result of Russia's withdrawal from traditional platforms, in particular the Arctic Council, where Alliance member states and Russia agreed on a common policy for the protection of natural resources. Another example of the deteriorating situation is the termination of the Russian-Norwegian Commission on nuclear and radiation safety⁵. This move was initiated by the Russian side, so it is possible that Moscow will try to use the safety of nuclear waste storage as leverage over Denmark, Norway and Finland.

The war in Ukraine showed the disparity between NATO and Russian forces in conventional means. For most Western strategists, though, this is not a cause for excessive optimism, since the risk of Russia using its nuclear arsenal increases in the event of a direct confrontation. Moscow has consistently used nuclear blackmail as part of its power diplomacy. In the new Concept, the Alliance stated that the violation and selective implementation by the Russian Federation of its arms control obligations and commitments has led to a deterioration of the overall security landscape. Therefore, the Strategic Concept clarifies the key principles of NATO's nuclear deterrence policy. In particular, the document emphasizes that U.S. strategic nuclear forces, including U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe, form the basis of the Alliance's nuclear security.

In view of the above, initiatives by the U.S. administration to reestablish arms control deserve particular attention. Moscow and Washington are currently bound by the last of the current arms control agreements, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). In January 2021 the presidents of Russia and the United States agreed to extend the agreement for five years until 2026, and subsequently launched a bilateral "dialogue on strategic stability," which was to develop a new treaty or a series of treaties to replace the New START.

⁴ Россия сбила спутник в ходе испытания противоспутниковой ракеты. URL: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-ponedeljnik-v-rossii-ispytana-raketa-unichtozhivshaya-svoy-sputnik/31562942.html>

⁵ Russia pauses nuclear safety cooperation with Norway in the north. URL: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/nuclear-safety/2022/06/russia-pauses-nuclear-safety-cooperation-norway-north>

After the full-scale Russian invasion, these contacts were suspended, but given the longstanding nature of the conflict, it is possible that Washington will consider various scenarios for Russia's return to the strategic arms control negotiating table. At the same time, in his speech at the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), President Joe Biden noted the importance of involving Beijing in the arms control process⁶. Thus, the Biden administration is focused on trilateral talks in the U.S.-RF-PRC format. However, given the mutual lack of trust in relations with Moscow and Beijing, the White House will not be able to implement its ambitious program in this field before the 2024 presidential election. Recognizing this, Washington will focus on the minimum program—preserving the current status quo in means of delivery and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In light of this, the NATO Strategic Concept proposes a non-confrontational approach to resolving tensions with Russia. It states that the Alliance “does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to the Russian Federation.”⁷ An important element of this approach is recognized to be maintaining contacts with the Russian leadership and increasing transparency to prevent random incidents due to lack of information about the other side's intentions. At the same time, it should be noted that the Strategic Concept lacks items that could be interpreted as an attempt to covertly propose a compromise, taking into account the so-called “security guarantees demands,” which the Kremlin laid on the table last December.

Situation Assessment—China as a Long-Term Source of Challenges

The Strategic Concept has considerably updated the issues related to the PRC, identified as a systemic challenge to the Euro-Atlantic security of the Alliance. The list of specific actions against NATO member states mentions so-called “authoritarian actors,” “strategic competitors,” apparently also related to the PRC⁸.

The mentioned approach of NATO to China stands in stark contrast to the current state of Ukraine's relations with the PRC, characterized as a “strategic partnership.”⁹ Given the aggravation of strategic competition between the U.S. and China, Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and aspects of China's position on the Russian-Ukrainian war¹⁰, there is a need to adjust Ukraine's foreign policy approaches in accordance with those of the NATO, and taking into account challenges from China, which may be relevant to Ukraine as well.

⁶ President Biden Statement Ahead of the 10th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/01/president-biden-statement-ahead-of-the-10th-review-conference-of-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/>

⁷ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. URL: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ МЗС України. Політичні відносини між Україною та Китаєм. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobotnictvo/185-politichni-vidnosini-mizh-ukrajinoju-ta-kitajem>

¹⁰ Most leading experts consider China's current position on the Russian-Ukrainian war to be “pro-Russian-neutral,” while Russian experts call it “Russia-friendly neutrality”

According to the Concept, China's goal is to increase its global presence and expand its zone of influence, using a wide range of political, economic and military means, while keeping its strategy, intentions and plans of military build-up under wraps¹¹.

The general aspects of China's activities against member states that are detrimental to the Alliance's security can be summarized as follows:

- hybrid and cyber operations, dissemination of confrontational rhetoric and disinformation;
- attempts to establish control over key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, as well as materials of strategic importance and supply chains of foreign countries;
- using economic leverage to create strategic dependence and increase its influence;
- attempts to disrupt the rules-based international order, including in space, cyberspace and the maritime domain;
- deepening its strategic partnership with Russia and their joint efforts to destroy the rules-based international order that is contrary to the Alliance's values and interests;
- efforts to cause a rift within the Alliance;
- China's rapid build-up of its nuclear arsenal and development of more advanced nuclear weapon delivery systems, carried out non-transparently, and "without engaging in good faith in arms control or risk reduction."¹²

There are also a number of reservations in the Concept that do not name China explicitly, yet they probably apply in whole or in part to China. In particular, these relate to the spread of authoritarianism and the activities of "authoritarian actors" that constitute a challenge to the interests, values and democratic way of life of Alliance members, improve conventional weapons, missile and nuclear capabilities, thereby violating international norms and obligations.

Moreover, so-called "strategic competitors,"¹³ by enhancing their technological capabilities, can target civilian and military infrastructure, impair defence and harm the Alliance's security. They conduct malicious activities in cyberspace and space, spread disinformation, use economic pressure to undermine multilateral norms and institutions, and spread authoritarian governance models. For this purpose, "strategic competitors" and malign actors exploit the openness, interconnectedness and digitalisation of societies of NATO member states, interfere in the democratic processes of Alliance countries, use hybrid tactics and cyber attacks, attempt to damage critical NATO infrastructure, gain access to intelligence data, and steal intellectual property that threatens the security of Alliance member states' citizens.

¹¹ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. URL: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

¹² NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. URL: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

¹³ NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. URL: <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>

II. FORECASTS AND PROSPECTS

NATO will strengthen the defence and security of its members, respond to systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security from Russia and China; improve overall situational awareness; enhance resilience and preparedness as well as defence against the power practices of Russia and the PRC in international relations and attempts to sow discord within the Alliance; defend shared values based on international law.

As part of the development of the concept of resilience, NATO will improve logistical arrangements and infrastructure modernization to provide operational reinforcements to any member of the Alliance. At the conventional level, NATO will pursue these objectives by providing technological supremacy in weapons, communications and intelligence systems. In order to provide a conventional deterrence to Russia, a significant increase in the number of troops deployed in Europe was announced at the NATO summit in Madrid. As of next year, around 300,000 troops across the continent will be put on high alert in case of a threat from Russia (the NATO Response Force currently consists of 40,000 troops).

A notable innovation of the Strategic Concept is the intention to increase the capacity of the joint air and missile defense system. It is also openly declared about invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in case of hostile actions in cyberspace, space or hybrid operations, if they have consequences equivalent to an armed attack.

In the context of confrontation with Russia and the PRC, the Strategic Concept pays special attention to maritime security, freedom of navigation, and maintenance of maritime trade routes. The above is especially relevant in the context of Russia's militarization of the Black Sea. At the same time, the absence of a new version of the Maritime Strategy of the North Atlantic Alliance (the last version was issued in 2011) and the lack of a unified policy of NATO on Black Sea security indicate significant gaps in the planning of these activities by the Alliance.

China's actions in the South and East China Sea are aimed at solely revising existing maritime borders, building artificial islands on self-declared territories, creating the A2AD zone and changing the status quo in the region¹⁴. In this aspect, NATO will deepen dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific region to respond to transregional challenges and promote common security interests.

Closer coordination with the EU to jointly counter hybrid threats to Euro-Atlantic security from Russia and the PRC will also be relevant to NATO. At the same time, NATO will remain open to constructive contacts with Moscow and Beijing to avoid unintended incidents and maintain strategic stability.

¹⁴ Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea. Center for Preventive Action. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>

The Place of Ukraine in NATO's Strategic Concept

Ukraine-NATO relations need new approaches under war conditions. The Strategic Concept states that “a strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.” It is also notable that the new Concept of the Alliance, despite the changing security environment, confirms an open door policy, in particular the decision of the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit, for Ukraine and Georgia.

In practice, these provisions contrast with the real actions of the Alliance and statements by a number of Western European leaders, which disavow Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic prospects. Before and after the full-scale invasion, NATO has been demonstratively passive in its practical support of our country—the bulk of the aid comes from arrangements at the level of bilateral relations between Ukraine and the member states. This strategy of NATO is altogether reasonable, given the separate position of some member states and the desire to avoid a direct confrontation with Russia.

Another factor constraining NATO in the issue of Ukraine integration is the unwillingness to influence the course of negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow. Ukraine's rejection of membership in the Alliance emerged as an acceptable compromise on the Ukrainian side from the very first rounds of these talks. At present, NATO is aware that the future format and dynamics of Ukraine-NATO relations will depend on the outcome of the war.

As for policy towards China, Ukraine as a nation declaring the goal of Alliance membership should: a) refrain from any actions allowing China to create the above mentioned challenges for the Alliance; b) bring its approaches to China in line with the geopolitical environment, its own national interests and vision as well as the NATO Strategy.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the Concept actualized the challenges of Russia and China and listed specific actions that threaten the Alliance. This indicates a consensus among NATO member countries on a common vision of the place of Russia and China in the security architecture. This will form the basis for NATO's future actions against Moscow and Beijing in the cyber, information, economic, technological and military domains.

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Group of authors:

Volodymyr Solovian, Yurii Poita

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Email: info@newgeopolitics.org

<https://www.newgeopolitics.org/>