



**STRONG STATES, RESILIENT
SOCIETIES AND A RENEWED
INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM**

**EQUIPPING NATO TO MEET THE
CHALLENGES OF THE NEXT DECADE**



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SNP WESTMINSTER DEFENCE TEAM



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'Today', declared NATO in its 2010 Strategic Concept, 'the Euro-Atlantic Area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low.' Much has changed since then.

A resurgent Russia is currently prosecuting an illegal war of imperialist aggression on European soil, while the Chinese government openly contests the liberal rules-based order which has ushered in an historically unprecedented era of global peace and prosperity. Our free and open societies are confronted by threats from within and without.

There is no document – no matter how prophetic – that will be a panacea for these problems. At the end of the month, NATO must adopt a strategy which recognises that Allies are in the early stage of a new era of global competition and which signals that the Alliance is committed to tackling these challenges. Below, we make several recommendations for facing up to these challenges at three levels: that of the state, of society and of the international system.

We argue for a clear operational focus within the Euro-Atlantic area with a strengthened and permanent presence on NATO's Eastern Flank, whilst making the case that the defence of our way of life can no longer be the sole preserve of the military when our societies and international system are also under threat. Recognising the vital role that citizens and private enterprise play alongside state institutions in upholding the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region, the Strategic Concept should explicitly commit to building society-wide resilience to hybrid threats such as cyber-attacks and disinformation. The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept must also be explicit about the Alliance's interest in upholding and strengthening the rules-based international order and must make a clear commitment to strengthening the waning frameworks of nuclear non-proliferation. The Concept must signal that Allies are willing to take action to uphold these interests and commit the Alliance to being more effective in creating consequences for breaches of international law.

NATO and the European Union are the twin pillars that buttress the Euro-Atlantic security order and I believe that an independent Scotland's interests will be best served as a full and active member of each organisation. Until Scotland secures its independence, I will continue to advocate for the closest possible relationship between NATO and the EU – including pushing for a comprehensive defence and security agreement between the UK and the EU – and will continue to ensure that the SNP remains an engaged voice in the Euro-Atlantic debate now taking place. The moment demands no less.

Stewart McDonald MP
SNP Spokesperson for Defence

I. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper calls for NATO to adopt a multi-scale approach to Euro-Atlantic security: protecting the populations and territories within the region, defending the free and open societies that safeguard our security, and strengthening the rules-based order which provide a framework for peaceful international relations. These recommendations are summarised below.

STATE LEVEL

1. NATO should commit to increased investment in territorial defence
2. NATO should commit to an operational focus in the Euro-Atlantic area
3. NATO should explicitly recognise the challenges posed by non-military threats

SOCIETAL LEVEL

1. NATO should explicitly recognise the role societies play in ensuring the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area
2. NATO should commit to building societal resilience to hybrid threats
3. NATO should commit to protecting and promoting democracy within the Alliance

SYSTEM LEVEL

1. NATO should commit to strengthening nuclear non-proliferation efforts
2. NATO should set clear red lines regarding breaches of international law
3. NATO should lead the way in developing norms around the use of new technology

II. STATES

Twelve states signed the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949, agreeing to collectively shoulder the burden of guaranteeing their freedom and security. Below, we will argue that NATO must adopt a multi-scale approach to its collective defence, defending its societies and the international rules-based order as well as Allied territory. In this first section, however, we make three recommendations regarding conventional territorial defence that NATO should consider when updating its Strategic Concept.

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2. NATO should commit to an operational focus in the Euro-Atlantic area
3. NATO should explicitly recognise the challenges posed by non-military threats

INVESTMENT IN TERRITORIAL DEFENCE

In November 2021, the UK Prime Minister stated that Allies *“have to recognise that the old concepts of fighting big tank battles on European land mass are over, and there are other, better things we should be investing in, in FCAS, in the future combat air system, in cyber, this is how warfare in the future is going to be.”*¹ These words reflected UK Government policy, which shrunk the UK Armed Forces to their smallest size since the 1701 War of the Spanish Succession while investing more funding into the development and purchase of emerging military technology. While recognising the continued need to invest in maintaining technological superiority, the return of land war to the European continent should banish the illusion that future conflicts will be fought primarily in cyberspace or with autonomous weapons: an armoured capability must be a necessary element of any equipment plan designed to defend Europe. **The next decade must see an end to the era of cuts to the Armed Forces, both in terms of funding and personnel numbers.**

However, military capability should not solely be measured in numbers – whether in terms of head counts or state spending. Finland, for example, maintains a “legendary” military capability despite historically not meeting the 2 per cent spending commitment.² The Finnish Armed Forces are well-equipped, highly trained and deeply integrated into the society they serve (with one third of Finns serving as reservists in the Armed Forces) while their resilience model brings in business and civil society leaders to ensure that all citizens are able to play their part in defending the state during national crises. **While retaining the 2 per cent commitment – as a floor rather than a ceiling – the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept should commit Allies to building strong and resolute conventional militaries which are integrated into the societies they serve.**

¹ House of Commons Liaison Committee, [‘Oral evidence from the Prime Minister’](#) (HC 835: November 2021), p. 34

² Dr Jonathan Eyal, quoted in Larissa Brown, [‘Finland brings the military muscle to Nato’](#), *The Times*, 16 May 2022

II. STATES

AN OPERATIONAL FOCUS IN THE EURO-ATLANTIC AREA

International partnerships and operations outside of NATO territory can bring great value to the Alliance. Such partnerships are essential in a politically sensitive region such as the Arctic and High North, while intervention in Kosovo brought an end to an ethnic conflict marked by atrocities against civilian populations. However, out-of-area operations in Libya caused “*political and economic collapse, inter-militia and inter-tribal warfare, humanitarian and migrant crises, widespread human rights violations, the spread of Gaddafi regime weapons across the region and the growth of ISIL in North Africa*”, the legacy of the twenty-year operation in Afghanistan looks similarly disastrous.³ These failures bring harm to innocent civilians, increase regional instability, damage the Alliance’s legitimacy among Allied populations and provide easy fodder for hostile foreign states’ information operations. **In its 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO should outline a clear commitment to an operational focus within the Euro-Atlantic area.**

In renewing this focus on operations in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO should heed the requests and warnings of governments on the Alliance’s Eastern Flank. As the Estonian President has noted:

“The Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, when the Russian army invaded the Georgian cities of Gori and Poti just outside of South Ossetia, made the west flinch, but it was quickly forgotten. When countries on the eastern flank spoke of strengthening Nato’s defences, some dismissed this as tedious complaining. The wake-up call came as late as 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and started lending military support to the separatists in eastern Ukraine. People started to realise that perhaps there was some truth in the warnings issued by Poland and the Baltic states.”⁴

For too long Allies on NATO’s Eastern Flank have been canaries in the Alliance’s coalmine, their repeated warnings about Russian aggression and intervention in other states’ domestic politics going largely unheeded. A permanent NATO presence along its Eastern Flank has strong political support from Allied governments in the region and from the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁵ **NATO should fulfil the request of Allied governments along the Alliance’s Eastern Flank for a strengthened and permanent presence in the region to create credible, visible and effective deterrence against invasion.**

³ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, ‘[Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK’s future policy options](#)’ (HC 119: September 2016), p. 3

⁴ Alar Karis, ‘[Estonian president: Nato must bolster its eastern flank before it’s too late](#)’, *Financial Times*, 28 March 2022

⁵ Mark Milley, ‘[Milley Proposes Rotational Forces in Permanent Bases Across Eastern Europe](#)’, Defense.gov

II. STATES

RECOGNISE THE CHALLENGES POSED BY NON-MILITARY THREATS

Climate change is one of the primary non-military threats that Allies face. NATO has recently begun to formally recognise its relationship with climate change, both as an institution which produces significant amounts of greenhouse gases and as a defensive alliance affected by an external threat which *“puts our resilience and civil preparedness to the test, affects our planning and the resilience of our military installations and critical infrastructure, and may create harsher conditions for our operations.”*⁶ **NATO should outline a realistic and ambitious target for the reduction of greenhouse gases by NATO institutions and operations.**

Regarding state-linked threats, NATO has taken welcome steps towards countering hybrid attacks since the adoption of its hybrid warfare strategy in 2015. However, national responses to such threats remain ad hoc and piecemeal across the Alliance. For example, the problem of information operations has garnered wildly different responses across the Alliance and even within states. In the United Kingdom, despite the clear threat of Russian disinformation and political influence campaigns targeting the UK, the Intelligence and Security Committee noted in its 2020 Russia Report that the issue of defending the UK’s democratic processes has been *“something of a ‘hot potato’, with no one organisation recognising itself as having an overall lead”*.⁷

And just as greater efforts may be made to integrate the Alliance’s hybrid warfare strategy into domestic policy, so too should more be done to share best practice from individual Allies across the Alliance. For example, RESIST – the UK Cabinet Office’s counter-disinformation toolkit, developed with Lund University’s Institute for Strategic Communications and used to train over 500 communicators from over 20 countries – is a world leading framework which is only formally shared on a bilateral basis and not even with all NATO Allies. **NATO should commit to making greater efforts to facilitate interaction between domestic and Alliance policymakers in countering hybrid threats, while the 2022 Strategic Concept should clearly outline NATO’s role in dealing with Russian and Chinese actions that fall between conflict, crisis, and peace.**

At the international level, NATO and the European Union have a unique relationship based on shared values and shared interests. **In seeking to protect these shared interests, NATO and the EU should seek every opportunity for greater collaboration and sharing the burden of tackling common threats to the Euro-Atlantic area. In this spirit, the UK Government should seek to sign a defence and security agreement with the European Union.**

⁶ NATO, [Brussels Summit Communiqué](#), 14 June 2021, paragraph 58

⁷ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Russia](#), 21 July 2020, p. 7

II. SOCIETY

Globalisation and technological developments have transformed the nature of conflict since the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949: today, societies themselves have become targets for hostile powers, with private citizens and democratic institutions facing attack alongside state institutions and military actors. Recognising this, Allies should develop the resilience of their civilian populations and institutions with the same tenacity as they work to strengthen military capability. While the previous section focused on the military activity of NATO and its member states – the traditional domain of security – this section will make three recommendations which aim to put domestic societal resilience on par with conventional military defence:

1. NATO should explicitly recognise the role societies play in ensuring the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area
2. NATO should commit to building societal resilience to hybrid threats
3. NATO should commit to protecting and promoting democracy within the Alliance

RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF SOCIETIES

Article III of the North Atlantic Treaty commits its signatories to “*maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity*” to defend themselves. This commitment should go beyond states and their Armed Forces: it should be understood to include the individual and collective capacity of societies to resist external coercion and influence. The democratisation of defence – making everyone aware of their role in protecting national security – is the best bulwark against threats to liberal democratic societies and the principles upon which NATO was founded. **NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept should adopt a twin track approach to the principle of collective defence, which expands the Article III commitment to recognise the vital role that citizens, private enterprise and non-military state institutions play in upholding the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region.**

BUILDING SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

Following the 2016 Warsaw Summit, Allied leaders committed to building state resilience by agreeing seven ‘baseline requirements’ for civil preparedness:

1. assured continuity of government and critical government services
2. resilient energy supplies
3. ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people

II. SOCIETY

4. resilient food and water resources
5. ability to deal with mass casualties
6. resilient civil communications systems
7. resilient civil transportation systems

While the declaration states that NATO now faces a ‘broader and evolving range of military and non-military security challenges’, this drive to build resilience remains nonetheless bound to state-centric view of international security. As the past few years have shown, domestic and foreign mis- and disinformation poses a threat to national security from within: reports of citizens attempting to destroy 5G phone masts in the UK illustrate how this can begin, while the 2021 attack on the United States Capitol represents a cautionary tale of how it can end. **Recognising the vital role that private citizens and institutions have in protecting their societies, the 2022 Strategic Concept should explicitly commit states to building resilience to hybrid threats among private citizens and institutions as well as among state institutions.**

PROTECTING AND PROMOTING DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

As Moscow and Beijing seek to expand their influence beyond their borders, liberal democracies must take active measures to defend and strengthen their democratic institutions. There is much work to be done: in recent years NATO Allies have also undermined democratic processes, institutions, and the rule of law in their home countries. In 2019, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly proposed the creation of a Centre within NATO supporting Allied efforts to strengthen democratic resilience – a recommendation also backed by the independent Group of Experts on NATO 2030. In its own set of recommendations for the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, the NATO PA suggested that NATO create *“a Democratic Resilience Centre within NATO Headquarters to serve as a resource and a clearinghouse of best practices and cross-fertilisation on democratic benchmarks available to member, partner, and aspirant states upon request.”*⁸ This is a recommendation we also endorse. **The 2022 Strategic Concept must also explicitly recognise democratic backsliding as a threat to the resilience and security of the Alliance and should include a proposal to establish an internal body or ombudsman responsible for addressing democratic backsliding in Member states.**

⁸ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, [‘Contribution to NATO’s New Strategic Concept’](#), February 2022

III. SYSTEM

It is not only states and societies which face an increased threat from hostile powers, but the international rules-based order itself. The Russian government has spent years explicitly pushing at the boundaries of this order while the Chinese government looks set on creating a parallel architecture of global economic governance and security collaboration. If the liberal rules-based order is to endure, it must be strengthened from within and demonstrate its essential value to states across the world.

This section will highlight three areas in which NATO should focus its efforts to shore up the international rules-based order:

1. NATO should commit to strengthening nuclear non-proliferation efforts
2. NATO should set clear red lines regarding breaches of international law
3. NATO should lead the way in developing norms around the use of new technology

STRENGTHENING NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION EFFORTS

The international architecture of nuclear arms control was once a cornerstone of the rules-based order; today only the “New START” agreement remains of what was once a comprehensive system of arms control treaties. When this agreement expires in 2026, it looks unlikely to be replaced. With all of the nuclear-armed states increasing or upgrading their arsenals and giving nuclear weapons a more prominent role in their military strategies, there are clear indications of a general erosion in global efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Equally worrying is the sharpening of nuclear rhetoric and the use of nuclear weapons for domestic political positioning, as exemplified by a recent interaction between the UK Defence Secretary and an opposition MP:

Opposition MP: After the conference on disarmament in March, the UK representative said that while the situation in Ukraine would clearly have an impact on countries’ security calculations, it also “makes it more important than ever for the international community to revitalise our commitment to arms control and disarmament.” Can the Secretary of State tell us what discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts since then on reinvigorating multilateral nuclear disarmament talks?

Defence Secretary: None.

This statement and sentiment stand in stark contrast to the tone adopted by Secretary General Stoltenberg when he addressed the NATO Conference on Arms Control and Disarmament, stating that:

III. SYSTEM

“NATO’s goal is a world without nuclear weapons. And the Non-Proliferation Treaty is the only way to achieve this. The fundamental bargain of the NPT remains sound: that all states will work towards general and complete disarmament – to a world without nuclear weapons. All states will work to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.”⁹

The SNP oppose the development and use of nuclear weapons and strongly support this statement from NATO’s Secretary General voicing his commitment to working towards a world without nuclear weapons. It is therefore disappointing that, following this clear and unequivocal statement, the UK Government has lifted the ceiling on its nuclear weapons arsenal and appears to be using nuclear proliferation as a rhetorical tool to position themselves as credible on national security issue vis-à-vis opposition parties. **The 2022 Strategic Concept must explicitly outline the role that the Alliance and its member states have to play in protecting and enhancing the infrastructure of nuclear disarmament and working to create the conditions for a nuclear-free world. It should make clear that nuclear proliferation is not in the long-term best interests of Allied states or the rules-based international order.**

SET CLEAR RED LINES ON BREACHES OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

The attempted murder of Sergei Skripal – the first offensive use of a nerve agent on Alliance territory since NATO’s foundation – resulted in the largest co-ordinated expulsion of Russian diplomats from Western countries since the Cold War. As Secretary-General Stoltenberg noted, these expulsions sent a *‘clear and very strong message there is a cost to Russia’s reckless actions.’*¹⁰ Welcome as those expulsions were, the statement that Russia had ‘underestimated NATO’s resolve’ should be acknowledged as a failure to signal this resolve in advance. **The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept must be explicit about the Alliance’s interest in upholding and strengthening the rules-based international order. It must signal that Allies are willing to take action to uphold this interest and commit to being more effective in creating consequences for breaches of international law.**

As well as signalling its willingness to uphold and protect existing international law, the Alliance must also be proactive in updating its position in new domains such as cyber and space. The 2014 Wales Summit Declaration issued by Allied governments

⁹ NATO, [‘Speech by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg at the High-level NATO Conference on Arms Control and Disarmament’](#), 23 October 2019

¹⁰ Quoted in Patrick Wintour, [‘Nato expels seven staff from Russian mission over Skripal poisoning’](#), *The Guardian*, 27 March 2018

III. SYSTEM

noted that

“Cyber attacks can reach a threshold that threatens national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security, and stability. Their impact could be as harmful to modern societies as a conventional attack. We affirm therefore that cyber defence is part of NATO's core task of collective defence. A decision as to when a cyber attack would lead to the invocation of Article 5 would be taken by the North Atlantic Council on a case-by-case basis.”¹¹

However, eight years on, NATO continues to lack clear rules of engagement for cyber warfare and Allies lack a commonly agreed upon threshold for that which would constitute an Article V level cyber attack. **Explicitly recognising this, the 2022 Strategic Concept should commit to defining what cyber activities would merit an Article V response and articulate what form(s) of response(s) would follow.**

DEVELOP RULES AND NORMS AROUND THE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The emergence of cyber as a distinct domain of conflict and the development of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) such as lethal autonomous weapons systems pose both a challenge and opportunity to NATO. While the Alliance must seek to achieve dominance in key EDTs and in cyber, it also has the opportunity to coordinate efforts among Allies to agree laws and norms governing their use. **NATO should take a proactive lead in working with Allies and international partners in developing rules and norms around the use of novel military technologies, including by clearly laying out the Alliance's own rules on their use.**

As well as developing rules around the use of new technologies, NATO Allies must also adapt to the changing nature of warfare – in particular the increasing urbanisation of armed conflict. As momentum gathers around a Political Declaration to address the humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, NATO Allies should be encouraged to fully engage in the Irish-led process which aims to agree a political declaration to promote actions designed to enhance the protection of civilians in populated areas during conflict and reduce humanitarian harm from explosive weapons with wide area effects.

¹¹ NATO, [Wales Summit Declaration](#), 5 September 2014