

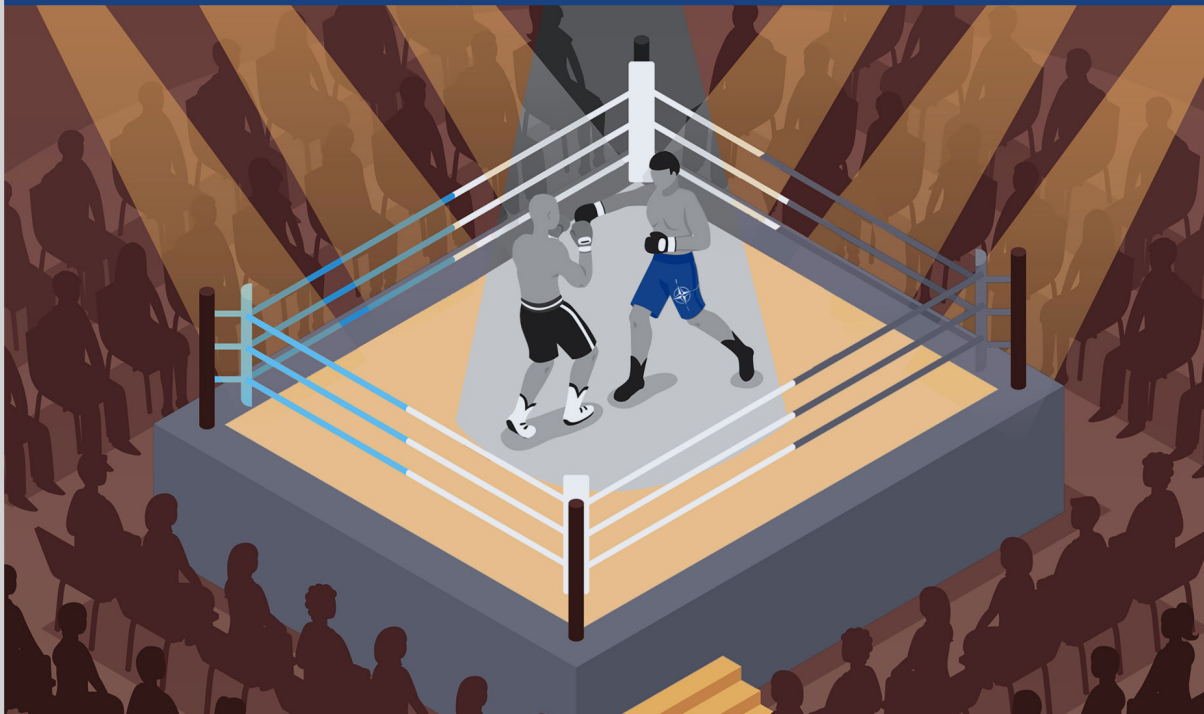
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Transatlantic Transition: Global Games in the Shadow of War

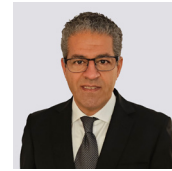


Contents

01	The World View of Olympians Versus the "Gods of Olympus" Hussein Askary	01
02	NATO's Global Ambitions: A Danger to Peace and Prosperity Warwick Powell	07
03	NATO's Strategic Dilemma: Balancing the "China Threat" Amidst Potential US "NATexit" Sebastian Contin Trillo-Figueroa	17
04	Plain and Simple: NATO Should Stay out of Asia Liang Yan	24
05	Where Is the Olympic Spirit Today? Ding Yifan	30
Youth Voices	NATO at a Crossroads: Balancing European Security with US Strategic Ambitions Angela Li Heyuan	35

The World View of Olympians Versus the "Gods of Olympus"

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My own dream of becoming an Olympian was crushed on August 2, 1990, when the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait. My colleagues and I in the Iraqi national handball team were preparing hard to participate in the Beijing Asian Games in September of that year. However, Iraq's membership in the Olympic Council of Asia was suspended due to the invasion. Thus, we were prevented from traveling to Beijing. The consequent and devastating war to "liberate Kuwait" started in January 1991, in the wake of which my family and I had to flee to Iran, and later Europe, never again to play handball as a professional for my country.

Exactly two years before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, on August 8, 1988, we were celebrating the end of the absurd war between Iraq and Iran (1980-1988), a conflict driven by regional tensions and broader concerns over the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Two weeks after the end of that war, our team was allowed to travel to Syria, an ally of Iran, to participate in the Arab Championship. That was my first major tournament as a 20-year-old player, but also the last major tournament we played before the terrible events starting on the morning of that fateful August 2, 1990. It put an end to not only the Olympic dream of thousands of Iraqi athletes, but also the dreams and lives of millions of Iraqis.

"Gods of Olympus" Intervene

The 1991 war of "liberation of Kuwait," also known as "Operation Desert Storm," led by a coalition spearheaded by the US, basically destroyed almost all

infrastructure that supported the lives of the 20 million Iraqi people. Iraq was bombed "back to the Stone Age" exactly as US Secretary of State James Baker promised in his meeting with the Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in Geneva before the war. This horrific war was followed by an unprecedented and equally horrific economic blockade for the next 12 years, causing the deaths of over a million Iraqis, half of whom were children. Then came the criminal and illegal invasion of Iraq led by the US on March 20, 2003. In the years since I left Iraq, the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" revisited Iraq time and again. Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State in the 1990s, infamously insisted that the death of 500,000 Iraqi children was a fair price for containing Saddam Hussein. This behavior by Anglo-American elites reflects an obsession with the power to control human lives, reminiscent of the depiction of the gods of Olympus in ancient Greek dramas. In epics like the Iliad and Odyssey, the clique of gods toys with the lives and destinies of the mortals below them.

Iraq is by and large still under occupation, with all its oil revenues channeled directly to a bank account in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which is controlled by the American president under the illegal Executive Order 13303. Since its initiation by US President George W. Bush in May 2003, every American president has renewed Executive Order 13303, like a god of Olympus, unchallenged by the international community and the Iraqi government. Iraqi assets from the export of oil in that bank account reportedly amount to 120 billion USD, but Iraqis are unable to use that for development or reconstruction efforts. Instead, the money is used to buy US Treasury bills (worth 43 billion USD today). Iraqis basically receive a monthly allowance from the US to cover the consumer needs of the people, because Iraq's capacity to produce goods domestically has been destroyed.

Nervous "Gods" of NATO

Despite their perceived all-powerful status, the gods of Olympus are, at the same time, nervously watching out for any potential challenges posed by the rise of the mortals who might acquire divine knowledge. The punishment of Prometheus with eternal torture for giving humans the "fire" and knowledge stolen from the gods is an illustrative case of the fragility of the gods of Olympus.

The nervousness of the leaders of NATO was expressed clearly, rather in a paranoid manner, during their Washington Summit on July 10. "Strategic competition, pervasive instability, and recurrent shocks define our broader

security environment," the Washington Summit Declaration stated. Although members of NATO have launched illegal wars either openly or in a clandestine manner in the past three decades, resulting in the deaths, maiming, and mass emigration of millions of people in the Global South, they continued to warn against imagined threats. "We will continue to ensure our collective defense against all threats and from all directions, based on a 360-degree approach," they stressed. Pointing at China this time, NATO leaders added, "The People's Republic of China's stated ambitions and coercive policies continue to challenge our interests, security, and values."

But thousands of kilometers away from the Atlantic region, China has been pursuing economic development peacefully.

China is doing something else that is considered an existential threat, as it challenges the arbitrary "rules-based order," imposed in violation of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Who Sets the Rules?

The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the horrific Thirty Years' War in 1648 and served as a model for the UN Charter, exemplifies a system of humane governance. The key principles of Westphalia are that nations are sovereign and equal, that nations are free to choose their religious, social, and political systems, and that nations must refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of others. Furthermore, nations are encouraged to cooperate to promote "the benefit of the other," not egoistically pursuing one's own interests to the detriment of peace and stability.

However, most wars that were conducted in the post-WWII period were in violation of the principles of the UN Charter, like the invasion of Panama by the United States in December 1989, the NATO bombardment campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 led by the US.

The attempts to undermine the Westphalian and UN Charter principles were launched in earnest in 1991, a year marking the emergence of the unipolar world following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Francis Fukuyama's thesis titled "The End of History?" then became an indisputable and almost "scientific theory" in the West. This thesis posited that there will be no other political system in the world other than liberal democracy and that the West will dominate the planet, forming a key element of unipolar world ideology.

Western leaders, especially in NATO, saw the principles of Westphalia as the main obstacle to achieving global hegemony. This sentiment was first publicly expressed by NATO Secretary General Javier Solana in November 1998 in a NATO symposium titled "On the Political Relevance of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia." Solana used the situation in Kosovo to push a new policy. "The atrocities that happen on our doorstep today remind us of the cruelties experienced during the Thirty Years' War," he said, adding that it was his "general contention that humanity and democracy - two principles essentially irrelevant to the original Westphalian order - can serve as guideposts in crafting a new international order, better adapted to the security realities, and challenges, of today's Europe." Solana specifically attacked the principle of sovereignty of nation-states as one of the "limits" of the Westphalian Peace. He envisioned a new security world order shaped and controlled by "the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), NATO, the Western European Union (WEU), and the European Union," with the UN as a subordinate institution to these. He declared, "I see today a need to re-examine fundamentally the concepts around which our security has been organized. 350 years after the Treaty of Westphalia, the conflict in Kosovo demonstrates that we stand at a crossroads: where does the sovereignty of a state end and where does the international obligation to defend human rights and to avert a humanitarian disaster start?" Less than a year later, NATO launched a massive aerial bombardment of Yugoslavia. That was the first major practical and ideological assault on the principles of Westphalia.

Tony Blair Raises the Bar

Another "god of Olympus," British Prime Minister Tony Blair, dealt the most devastating blow to the Westphalia principles in a speech in Chicago in April 1999. As NATO was bombing Yugoslavia, Blair declared, "No one in the West who has seen what is happening in Kosovo can doubt that NATO's military action is justified." He emphasized that "values" were the basis of the intervention, even if it meant breaking international law. This marked a critical shift toward the "rules-based order," where the West claimed the right to intervene through military action outside the confines of international law and the UN Charter to protect "human rights" and "democracy." Blair stated that "non-interference has long been considered an important principle of international order," but that under certain circumstances deemed by Britain and its allies as necessary, interference will be legitimized.

After the invasion of Iraq, of which he was a key architect, Blair made it clear that the Peace of Westphalia principles are irrelevant.

Where to Go from Here?

In the decades since Blair's speech, the tension between the traditional principles of Westphalia and the emerging "rules-based order" has only intensified. This conflict has manifested in various global interventions, often justified under the guise of protecting universal values.

In a speech to the United Nations Office at Geneva in January 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed these issues, stating, "As modern history shows, to establish a fair and equitable international order is the goal mankind has always striven for. From the principles of equality and sovereignty established in the Peace of Westphalia over 360 years ago to international humanitarianism affirmed in the Geneva Convention 150-plus years ago; from the four purposes and seven principles enshrined in the UN Charter more than 70 years ago to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence championed by the Bandung Conference over 60 years ago, many principles have emerged in the evolution of international relations and become widely accepted. These principles should guide us in building a community of shared future for mankind."

China has demonstrated, in the recent decades of its peaceful rise, that there are other dimensions to international governance than merely pragmatically preventing a world war. The idea of building bridges of friendship among nations and peoples is to demonstrate the fact that humanity is one big family, although nations exhibit different cultural and social colors. There is something common that nations can strive toward together. Achieving common prosperity and establishing common goals of development are key parts of this global governance system. Harmony among nations with diversity is another aspect of such initiatives as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative announced by President Xi.

Friendship and the Olympic Spirit

As the Paris 2024 Olympic Games conclude, we are reminded of the Olympic spirit during this very uncertain moment in history, where the war in Ukraine, Gaza, and West Asia generally could lead to dire consequences for all humanity. The three values of Olympism, as defined by the Olympic Charter, are "excellence, respect, and friendship." They constitute the foundation on which the Olympic movement builds its activities to promote sport, culture, and education with a view to building a better world. It aims to "encourage effort," "preserve human dignity,"

and "develop harmony." The goal of Olympism is "to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity."

Economic and cultural cooperation falls into the same category as sports. The ultimate goal is not to undermine each other, but to lift all participants to a higher level. Seeing the other as an important complement to oneself rather than a threat is what sets apart the spirit of the Olympic Games and such efforts as the Belt and Road Initiative on the one hand and the spirit expressed by NATO in the July 2024 Washington Summit Declaration.

NATO's Global Ambitions: A Danger to Peace and Prosperity

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Not satisfied with the current tragic debacle in Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) - as the militarized embodiment of transatlantic colonial aspiration - has now set its sights on being a global neocolonial instrument. Today, NATO is an instrument of principally US foreign policy with European characteristics. However, extending from its north European footprint, NATO now seeks to expand, project, and entangle itself in the affairs of regions in Africa and, more particularly, Asia. This was the clear message emerging from the NATO congregation recently in the United States, marking the organization's 75th anniversary. In doing so, NATO exposes not only its colonialist roots but also its insecurities and limitations.

For nations and peoples that have struggled to shake the yoke of colonialism over the past century, this revitalized ambition of NATO is a cause for considerable concern. NATO's militarized ambitions, in conditions of material constraints, are likely to destabilize regions rather than bring peace and prosperity. These ambitions also divert the focus of resources from NATO member nations' own economic woes. Only by rejecting NATO's expansion can regions such as those across Africa and Asia stand a chance of crafting the local institutions necessary to sustain multipolar peace and prosperity.

Put plainly, NATO today evinces a hankering for Western unipolarity in a world in which multipolarity is already an existent reality. Its doctrine and the realities impacting its ambitions are anathema to prosperity and peace.

NATO's Colonialist Birthmarks

NATO was founded in 1949 ostensibly as an alliance of 12 states in Western Europe and the United States to deter Soviet aggression. Less remarked upon are NATO's colonialist connections, particularly in terms of its links to the exercise of colonial power in Africa. According to Guyanese historian and political activist Walter Rodney, in his 1972 book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*:

"In the 1950s, when most Africans were still colonial subjects, they had absolutely no control over the utilization of their soil for militaristic ends. Virtually the whole of North Africa was turned into a sphere of operations for NATO, with bases aimed at the Soviet Union. ... The colonial powers actually held military conferences in African cities like Dakar and Nairobi in the early 1950s, inviting the whites of South Africa and Rhodesia and the government of the USA. Time and time again, the evidence points to this cynical use of Africa to buttress capitalism economically and militarily, and therefore in effect forcing Africa to contribute to its own exploitation."¹

According to Kwame Nkrumah, a leader of the Ghanaian liberation movement and Ghana's first president, in his *Challenge of the Congo* (1970), NATO countries operated at least 17 air bases, nine naval bases, three rocket sites, and an atomic testing range in North Africa.² Additionally, NATO countries had military missions in at least 10 other African countries. Furthermore, Western European powers continued to exploit raw materials for the production of nuclear weapons in the mines of Congo, Angola, South Africa, and Rhodesia. The French footprint across West Africa continues today, though recent events in the Sahel suggest that the colonial footprint in that part of the world is in retreat.

In his 1968 *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare*, Nkrumah called for countermeasures to be taken by African nations to challenge NATO - clearly at the time with little impact.³ NATO's influence in Africa was at times indirect, as the case of Portuguese colonialism shows. Portugal is a founding NATO member. It was one of the least developed countries within NATO in the years after World War II, and yet it was able to launch colonial wars in Africa. It conducted wars in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde,

1 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972).

2 Kwame Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo* (New York: International Publishers, 1970).

3 Kwame Nkrumah, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (New York: International Publishers, 1968).

Angola, and Mozambique. It was able to do this, according to Guinea-Bissau's founding father Amilcar Cabral, because of NATO's assistance.⁴ Through Portugal and NATO, the US was able to maintain its domination over Africa.

NATO's military activities ran in parallel to the political and economic colonial dimensions of the broader "European project." Bar a few momentary "lapses," European elites continue to evince a collective amnesia in relation to the bloody origins of the post-war European project itself.⁵ When the EU's precursor, the European Economic Community (EEC), was formed in 1957 (by way of the Treaty of Rome), rather than signaling the death knell of European colonialism, it re-articulated a notionally more palatable form of integration of Africa into the European project on the back of Ghana's independence from the British that came into effect a few weeks earlier. However, rather than representing a so-called "year zero" in terms of relations between Europe and Africa, the Treaty of Rome marked out a new chapter on colonial subjugation within the broader historic frame of Eurafica.⁶ Indeed, at the time, Kwame Nkrumah described the treaty as little better than the Berlin Conference of 1885.⁷

European powers (and Western powers more generally) were deeply entangled in the "civilization" political culture that has dominated Western colonialism since the late 1400s, and the European project was a variation on this historical theme. Evidence of this could, for example, be found in the 1962 Declaration of Paris issued by the Alliance Convention of NATO Nations:

"The Atlantic peoples are heir to a magnificent civilization whose origins include the early achievements of the Near East, the classical beauty of Greece, the juridical sagacity of Rome, the spiritual power of our religious traditions, and the humanism of the Renaissance. Its latest flowering, the discoveries of modern science, allow an extraordinary mastery of the forces of nature. ... Thanks to that civilization and to the common characteristics with which it stamps the development of peoples participating in it, the nations of the West do in fact constitute a powerful cultural and moral community."

4 Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 82, https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/amilcar_cabral_return_to_the_source-ilovepdf-compressed.pdf.

5 Aline Sierp, "EU Memory Politics and Europe's Forgotten Colonial Past," *Intervention* 22, no. 6 (April 2020), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749701>.

6 Guy Martin, "Africa and the Ideology of Eurafica: Neo-Colonialism or Pan-Africanism?," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1982).

7 Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, "Eurafica Incognita: The Colonial Origins of the European Union," *History of the Present* 7, no. 1 (April 2017).

Far from merely being a defensive alliance created to forestall Soviet expansion, NATO and its allied European project were deeply imbricated in the Western civilizational mission that underpinned and rationalized historical colonialism. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO's principal role focused on European powers' ongoing relations across the African continent. After the end of the Cold War, however, NATO expanded its horizons. It acted in contravention of international law when it bombed Yugoslavia in 1999.⁸ It assisted the US in its illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. While the UN Security Council authorized NATO's intervention in Libya, NATO states violated that authorization to pursue their own objectives in that country.⁹ Consequently, Libya was destroyed, and instability catalyzed across North Africa.¹⁰ NATO is ostensibly a "defense alliance," but it's hard to imagine such an alliance undertaking these kinds of offensive activities.

In Europe itself, NATO has persisted in an expansion program after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This expansion exacerbated regional insecurities as NATO came to the Russian border. Russian leader Vladimir Putin had cautioned as early as 2007 that the eastward expansion of NATO would generate tensions and increase the risk of conflict. US political scientist John Mearsheimer drew attention to the risks of Western provocations as early as 2014.¹¹ He wasn't the only one.

Globalizing Ambitions and Material Limits

NATO is a military organization. It has buttressed the Western colonial project since its inception and, in more recent times, has acted as the military subordinate of American foreign policy. Much of this effort has, to date, focused on Europe and Africa, but is now turning toward Asia. The Asian turn has been rationalized through the linking of China's trade with Russia as representing a threat to European security. Ipso facto, in the name of protecting European security, NATO must by necessity train its sights on China.

NATO's Asian ambitions are coupled with American geopolitical considerations, particularly with respect to China. The concern is that China now threatens American primacy in the Western Pacific/East Asia and must be confronted. The argument, in its simplest terms, is that China has modernized its military and seeks to secure the position of

8 Christine Chinkin, "The Legality of NATO's Action in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (Fry) Under International Law," *International Comparative Law Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (January 2008).

9 Alan Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya Campaign," *International Security* 38, no. 1 (July 1, 2013):105-136.

10 Cynthia McKinney, *The Illegal War on Libya* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2012).

11 John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77-84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483306>.

the Asian regional hegemon. This is, for the American political elite, unacceptable; in fact, the idea of China as a peer is incommensurable with American exceptionalism. China's economic development was, for the Americans, something that was made possible by the generosity of the US. The expectation was that China would, through the effects of interacting with the post-Cold War global liberal economic order, transform itself in the image of the Americans and in ways that aligned with American interests. By the mid-2010s, however, the American establishment came to see that China had, in fact, not changed in the ways expected despite its economic development. Indeed, senior Washington figures in policy and strategic circles had come to the view that Beijing had "defied American expectations."¹² This view confirmed the assessment contained in the 2017 National Security Strategy that China was a "revisionist" force that sought to supplant the US in the "Indo-Pacific region."

In this context, China had to be contained militarily and economically. The Trump and Biden administrations have since embarked on a plethora of economic policies aimed at containing China's economic development and curtailing its growth. The effectiveness of these initiatives is doubtful, but I will not go into the economic issues in this essay. The issue that warrants consideration is, rather, the hard power dimensions of military capacity, which go to explain a number of US-led initiatives, including the proposed expansion of NATO to the Asia region.

If one part of the Washington consensus is that China is the greatest threat to US primacy in Asia, then the other aspect of the consensus is growing concern about the extent to which the American military system can meet the demands of the "two-theater war" doctrine. Michael O'Hanlon, Senior Fellow and Director of Research in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution, in a recent article in *The National Interest*,¹³ explicitly asks the question, evincing the evident concern and alarm across the defense fraternity. The assessment is not groundless but raises critical questions of both the American posture and that of NATO more generally.

Resource constraints explain why the US has actively sought to inveigle NATO into the Asia theater, along with other moves by Washington to secure the financial and productive support of client states, former

12 Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 2018):60-70.

13 Michael O'Hanlon, "America's Military Strategy: Can We Handle Two Wars at Once?" *The National Interest*, June 6, 2024, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america%E2%80%99s-military-strategy-can-we-handle-two-wars-once-211324>.

colonies, and subimperial allies. Yet, there are serious doubts whether any of these initiatives can meaningfully address the supply chain and productive capacity limitations that now beset the entire Western defense supply chain system.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of what can be called the 30 years of American unipolarity, few observers questioned the military dominance of the United States. Between 1991 and 2019, the US expanded its global military interventions under various guises. In this period, it initiated on average 3.7 military interventions per year. This compares with the annual average of 2.4 interventions between 1946 and 1990. American security doctrine saw all parts of the world as America's dominion. America's security was a question of global security. The US has around 800 military bases across the globe and pursues kinetic interventions wherever and whenever it sees fit. Its military and defense budget was designed to enable the United States to fight two wars at any one time.

America's regional and global military preponderance is now in disarray. Its productive and supply chain capacity limitations are now exposed to the steppes of Ukraine and the ever-expanding demands of the unfolding conflict in West Asia. US President Joe Biden once responded to doubts about America's capacity to "fight two wars," asserting that "we are the United States of America, for God's sake, the most powerful nation in the history of the world." That's hubris speaking.

The reality is a military-industrial complex that has insufficient repair and replacement capabilities when measured against the realities of peer conflict.

A recent Reuters investigation found that the collective West's capacity to manufacture 155 mm caliber artillery shells has been seriously depleted through years of miscalculation and neglect.¹⁴ Stockpiles have been depleted in the face of the war of attrition in Ukraine. Production defects are rife in existing manufacturing systems, contributing to an inability to ramp up production to meet the demands of a peer conflict. Even as efforts are made to increase production, capacity expansions across NATO (including the US) cannot match the output volumes and growth we see in Russia. According to a CNN investigation, in terms of artillery munitions, Russia is outproducing NATO by a factor of three.¹⁵

¹⁴ Stephen Grey, John Shiffman, and Allison Martell, "Years of Miscalculations by US, NATO Led to Dire Shell Shortage in Ukraine," *Reuters*, July 19, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-artillery/>.

¹⁵ Katie Bo Lillis, etc., "Russia Producing Three Times More Artillery Shells Than US and Europe for Ukraine," *CNN*, March 11, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/10/politics/russia-artillery-shell-production-us-europe-ukraine/index.html>.

In February 2024, the Pentagon received a report from Govini, a defense software company, that evaluated America's defense contractor supply chain risks. The Govini report "Numbers Matter: Defense Acquisition, US Production Capacity, and Deterring China" concluded that:

"US domestic production capacity is a shriveled shadow of its former self. Crucial categories of industry for US national defense are no longer built in any of the 50 states. With just 25 well-constructed attacks, using any of a variety of means, an adversarial military planner could cripple much of America's manufacturing apparatus for producing advanced weapons. Under the current US government approach, industry cannot meet production demands to support allies under fire and deter war in the Pacific."¹⁶

America's defense industrial supply chains are highly dependent on international supplies. The extent to which the sector is reliant on non-American supply chains is hard to fully catalog, given the complexity of the supply networks involved, but Govini notes - as a case in point - that the US defense sector imports various components and materials from over 10,000 Chinese enterprises.

The US Congressional Commission on the National Defense Strategy report, issued in late July 2024,¹⁷ concluded that the United States is no longer militarily capable of prosecuting its global ambitions. The report observed, for example, that "unclassified public war games suggest that, in a conflict with China, the United States would largely exhaust its munitions inventories in as few as three to four weeks, with some important munitions (e.g., anti-ship missiles) lasting only a few days. Once expended, replacing these munitions would take years." More generally, the report concluded that America's defense industrial capacity is inadequate for its strategic ambitions, confirming the assessments that have emerged over the past few years that the unfolding battleground failure in Ukraine began to raise serious doubts about Western military capabilities.

The Commission also recognized the inability of the United States to address its military production requirements on its own. Instead, mobilizing its various networks of allies globally was identified as

¹⁶ *Numbers Matter: Defense Acquisition, US Production Capacity, and Deterring China* (Arlington: Govini, 2024), <https://www.govini.com/insights/numbers-matter-defense-acquisition-u-s-production-capacity-and-deterring-china>.

¹⁷ Jane Harman etc., *Report of the Commission on the National Defense Strategy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2024), <https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/NDS-commission.html>.

necessary if the United States was to match capacity with ambition into the future. In this context, the growing array of minilaterals in the Asia Pacific is evidence of this strategic turn. American capacity limitations are being augmented by the resources of allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Australia.

In terms of the enlistment of Australia, the AUKUS arrangements are the most noteworthy. The proposed acquisition of American nuclear-powered (and nuclear-weapon-capable) submarines is synonymous with AUKUS. The shift away from conventional submarines, originally contracted from France, to US nuclear submarines has sparked intense public debate in Australia and, to some extent, has also amplified American concerns about its own resourcing requirements and limited capabilities. In the US, members of Congress have raised doubts about the capacity, let alone the wisdom, of providing nuclear submarines to Australia. The concern is simply that the American submarine sector is presently incapable of meeting America's own requirements, let alone being able to deliver for anyone else. An August 2024 Congressional Research Service report identified that the current submarine output capacity is between 1.2-1.4 per year, compared to the US annual procurement of 2 vessels. This situation has resulted in a "growing backlog of boats procured but not yet built."¹⁸

These American Congressional assessments have underscored the doubts that some Australian critics have expressed about the practicalities of the AUKUS submarine deal. In response to these doubts, Australian Submarine Agency (ASA) boss Vice Admiral Jonathan Mead recently pleaded for patience but acknowledged that the program will be slow, is likely to experience setbacks, and is expensive. These admissions did little to assuage concerns.

As for Japan's contribution of additional Patriot air defense missiles, there are serious doubts as to both capacity and timeliness. These aren't easy bottlenecks to resolve, especially when the adversaries continue to deliver expanded outputs.

Dangerous Times

NATO's expansion into Asia is taking place in conditions of heightened US displacement anxiety. The unfolding defeat in Ukraine and the

¹⁸ Congressional Research Service, *Navy Virginia-Class Submarine Program and AUKUS Submarine (Pillar 1) Project: Background and Issues for Congress*, August 5, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32418/282>.

failure of American naval power to contain the Houthis in the Red Sea are visible examples of the material limitations that exacerbate these anxieties. The US and the West broadly are no longer in a position to play catch-up, according to American commentator David Goldman; rather, Goldman's "Hail Mary" is to commit billions of dollars toward direct energy technologies that "may" enable the West to leapfrog their adversaries.¹⁹ This is a high-risk strategy that has not been accepted by the military fraternity. Rather, at present, the preferred response is to "double down." This means increasing military expenditure where possible, and enlisting allies and their resources, into the program of recovering American preponderance. Given the capacity gap that has now emerged between the Western military-industrial complex and those of the Russians and Chinese,²⁰ it is unlikely that the West can, in any meaningful period, re-establish a "balance of power in its favor" in Asia. That horse has already bolted.

The pursuit of a "balance of power in its favor" is likely to catalyze greater regional instability rather than bring stability to Asia. The idea of "balance of power" is a post-hoc descriptor, not an effective in-situ evaluation metric. Without perfect information, there can be no adjudication of the "balance of power," leading nations to pursue build-up strategies that trigger what is known as the "security dilemma." For the Americans, there can be no real balance of power in the strictest sense of the concept because "balance" is always oxymoronically understood as American primacy. Without preponderance, the US cannot be confident in there being a "balance" suitable for them.

In a recent lecture delivered in New Zealand, Australian scholar Professor Hugh White reflected on the dynamics impacting the security architecture of Asia.²¹ He proffered three broad scenarios:

1. A return to US primacy in the region;
2. The emergence of a new configuration in which the US remained in Asia as a "balancing power" but not a hegemonic power; and
3. The retreat of the US from the region overall.

19 David P. Goldman, "Why America Is Losing the Tech War with China," *The National Interest*, July 23, 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/techland/why-america-losing-tech-war-china-206664>.

20 Andrei Martyanov, *Losing Military Supremacy: The Myopia of American Strategic Planning* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2018).

21 Hugh White, "The Ultimate AUKUS Question: Can America Solve Our China Problem?," New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, filmed August 5, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7snPHhN45Y>.

White's assessment was that the first scenario had, in effect, zero chances of materializing. The demonstrable hard power constraints that are now evident cannot be wished away. But, so long as the US and its sundry allies in the region believe that the pursuit of American primacy remains both legitimate and possible, Asia will experience intensified geopolitical turbulence rather than less. NATO's entry into Asia doesn't improve the situation; it makes it worse. For White, given their druthers, the countries of Asia (except perhaps Japan, though I have suggested that this isn't necessarily the case) would prefer the US to leave the region altogether if it would be unwilling to embrace a new role as "balancing power."²²

The ambitions of NATO to expand to Asia must be understood in the context of American anxieties and the loss of US primacy in the region, coupled with the colonial hangover of the European project. The question for the countries of Asia broadly speaking is: if the US cannot accommodate China as a peer power in the region, what price to regional stability, security, and prosperity are they willing to pay to pander to unrealizable American and European colonial ambitions?

As an extension of American geopolitical ambitions, NATO's Asian expansion is anathema to the capacity of the region and its nations to craft and sustain the institutions necessary for a regionally meaningful peace. ASEAN centrality is at risk; the Western powers have not yet given up on the centuries-old ambitions of colonial subjugation, but perhaps it's time that they be told, politely but firmly, that it's time to accept a new settlement - a settlement of equals.

²² Warwick Powell, "Time for a New Approach for North Asia," *China-US Focus*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/time-for-a-new-approach-in-north-asia>.

NATO's Strategic Dilemma: Balancing the "China Threat" Amidst Potential US "NATexit"

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When the People's Republic of China and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) emerged in 1949, their trajectories seemed worlds apart. Yet, as these once-distant entities evolved into formidable powers, their paths are now increasingly converging, with some actively pushing for closer interaction.

NATO Has Guaranteed the European Security for Decades

NATO is a US-led alliance established to safeguard Europe from the Soviet Union, ensuring collective defense as outlined in Article 5 of its founding Treaty, an attack on one member is "an attack against them all," prompting the armed force to restore security "of the North Atlantic area."

Article 5 was first invoked after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001), marking a pivotal moment in its 52-year history of deterrence. Since then, NATO has evolved into one of the world's most exclusive security forces.

After the collapse of the USSR, former Warsaw Pact countries joined NATO to safeguard their independence and bypass Russian influence. Most European Union (EU) states are NATO members, except for Ireland, Austria, Cyprus, and Malta. The UK, Canada, Türkiye, Albania, Iceland, North Macedonia, Norway, and Montenegro are also full members of NATO.

Despite a period where NATO's purpose seemed diminished, the conflict in Ukraine (2022) sparked an unexpected revival. Russia is again a "threat," and partnerships once deemed obsolete by the US or France, are reactivated.

Contemporary Challenges NATO Confronts

US Unilateral Actions

Former US President Barack Obama's "Pivot to Asia" (2011) marked a shift in US geopolitical strategy, reducing its traditional commitment to the EU. Donald Trump's antagonism further strained relations, exemplified by his claim that "the EU was set up to take advantage of the US," equating it to China in harming American interests.

US President Joe Biden's deterrence policies have encountered criticism. The chaotic departure from Afghanistan, ineffectiveness in preventing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and struggles in the Middle East have raised doubts about their effectiveness and the notion of the "American pacifier," suggesting that the US is no longer capable of being a global stabilizer—if it ever was.

Trump's potential reelection could further destabilize NATO. He has questioned US commitments to "delinquents" failing to meet defense spending targets, "encouraging" Russian aggression and even sparking discussions of a "NATexit"—a US withdrawal from the alliance.

US administrations have often overlooked that they outspend all other NATO members, maintaining a network of 750 bases across 80 countries—largely beyond NATO's scope—a strategic choice of its own making. Meanwhile, the alliance operates with a modest budget, exemplified by the maintenance of 14 radar planes bought from the US in 1982, reflecting a common pattern in NATO member acquisitions.

Indeed, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg disclosed that in 2022-2023, more than two-thirds of European defense procurements, totaling 140 billion USD, were made from US firms, stating, "NATO is good for US security, good for US industry, and good for US jobs."

Additionally, the United States' China policy differs significantly from that of most transatlantic partners. Washington aims to maintain global hegemony against

Beijing and, since launching the Indo-Pacific Strategy (2022), has revitalized ties with regional players such as India, the Philippines, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand—the latter four ("AP4") being NATO's "partners across the globe."

Initiatives like the Quad, Five Eyes, and AUKUS strengthen security alliances in the Asia-Pacific to counter China, including efforts to decouple their technology and supply chains or at least de-risk them.

However, while a heightened NATO presence in the Asia-Pacific may appeal to American allies in the region, it might not align with Europe's priorities. Surely, Europe should act as the balancer within the alliance to prevent overextending efforts and resources beyond its designated operational area.

Europe's Enduring Reliance on External Security

Seventy-nine years after allied forces liberated Europe, the continent remains contingent on the US for defense through NATO. This dependence persists because it has benefited all parties, creating a stable security framework yet also perpetuating a European reliance on external forces.

Despite US advocacy for greater European security autonomy, significant advancements have been hindered by concerns over its arms industry. The American writer Robert D. Kaplan (2012) captured this paradox, "The more united Europe becomes, the greater its tensions with the US. A true European super-state with armed forces and a single foreign policy would be a US 'staunch competitor.'"¹

The US wants Europe stronger and more united, but not excessively so. The EU, conceived as a soft power emphasizing peace, solidarity, and multilateralism, was anticipated by Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997), former National Security Advisor to former US President Jimmy Carter, to rival the US if it became "truly united and powerful," potentially leading to divergent geopolitical interests.² However, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy is hampered by the need for unanimous consensus among its 27 states, outdated national visions, and internal divisions—those focusing on European integration, the transatlantic alliance, or neutrality. As Stoltenberg noted, "The EU cannot defend Europe."

1 Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2013).

2 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war dramatically impacted NATO, leaving the EU with no choice but to prompt a renewed US commitment to European security, leading to organizational improvements and expansion including Finland and Sweden. Trump's earlier threats had already highlighted the need for the EU to bolster security, resulting in 23 NATO countries increasing defense spending to exceed 2% of GDP.

Russia-NATO Tenuous Tango

Certainly not trending today, but several Russian leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, and Vladimir Putin, expressed interest in joining NATO. In 1994, Russia joined the Partnership for Peace, a NATO program designed to build trust and cooperation with non-members. The then US President Bill Clinton viewed it as a "track that will lead to NATO membership." As a result, in 2000, Putin asked Clinton in Moscow, "How America would react to accept Russia in NATO?"

On February 24, 2022, Putin announced the start of the military campaign in Ukraine, explicitly denying any connection to NATO in his address, "Of course, the question is not about NATO itself. It merely serves as a tool of US foreign policy. The problem is that in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile 'anti-Russia' is taking shape."³

Later, Russia claimed NATO was the cause of the war. Although this argument emerged extemporaneously, it resonated globally, even reaching China. This provided Washington with an opportunity to integrate NATO into its broader strategic rivalry with Beijing.

Thus, Russia's transition from frustrated NATO membership to declaring it a threat illustrates a shifting strategy that has revitalized NATO and fueled global narratives. This evolution underscores how past spheres of influence and actions can morph into modern conflicts, creating unpredictable geopolitical effects.

Are the Sino-Russian Relations Shaping a NATO Narrative for the US?

Over the past five years, NATO's depictions of China have become increasingly assertive. Beijing first came into NATO's spotlight in 2019,

³ Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," transcript of televised address on Ukraine, Moscow, February 24, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

when Washington called for countering "Chinese strategic competition." Since then, the US has utilized NATO to address its primary geostrategic concern: containing China.

The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept identified Sino-Russian collaboration as a significant challenge yet did not classify China as a potential Article 5 threat, unlike Russia.

The 2023 Vilnius Summit was the first to interconnect the "Indo-Pacific," Atlantic, and Arctic regions, labeling China a "challenge." The 2024 Washington communiqué expanded this narrative, portraying China as a "decisive enabler of Russia" in Ukraine and issuing a direct warning about its alleged support for Russia, despite limited evidence. Truthfully, these claims highlight Western anxieties about China's rising influence and its impact on the conflict's balance.

China's export controls on military items signal a nuanced stance. Moreover, China has not recognized Russia's expansionism in Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia—conflicts where NATO did not intervene—and has warned against nuclear weapon use in Ukraine, instead promoting peaceful resolutions.

This balancing act reveals China's geopolitical priorities: subtly communicating with Russia through trade while avoiding commitments to Ukraine's territorial integrity. Scholars like Yan Xuetong, Director of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua, argued that Russia's invasion had inflicted lasting geopolitical and economic damage on China,⁴ while Feng Yujun, Vice Dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, condemned the war as a UN principle violation and dismisses NATO expansion as a justification.⁵

Despite its increased assertiveness, the United States faces two main defies. First, it struggles to equate China with Russia as a security threat. European capitals view Beijing's actions as less directly coercive and consider the label disproportionate. Including India—an ongoing major purchaser of Russian military hardware and oil—might have altered this perception. Yet, India escapes criticism due to its tactical role in the Asia-Pacific against China, revealing the underlying strategic priorities.

4 Xuetong Yan, "The World Is Likely to Experience Increased Confrontations Rooted in Deglobalization in 2024," interview by The Paper, December 29, 2023, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_25811704.

5 Yujun Feng, "The Ukraine Conflict Is Accelerating the Restructuring of the Global Political and Economic Order," interview by Phoenix, March 14, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mOATITjYQZP4NPH-l2lpQ>.

Second, American leaders have attempted to connect NATO's North Atlantic and Asia-Pacific strategies yet lack a clear rationale for this linkage. As a deterrence organization, NATO remains geographically focused, with its defense capabilities based in the Euro-Atlantic region for explicit reasons. Hence, while the US concentrates on the Asia-Pacific, Europe remains fixated on Ukraine.

NATO's China Focus Risks European Security and Global Stability

The US instrumentalization of NATO to address Asia-Pacific concerns neglects genuine European security threats and diverts attention from critical regions including the Atlantic and Mediterranean. This approach not only raises China's apprehensions by casting NATO as a security adversary but also exacerbates anti-Western sentiments and highlights Europe's dependence on US security.⁶ Furthermore, NATO's emphasis on China weakens its monitoring of Russian activities impacting the Asia-Pacific.

For a credible Asia-Pacific strategy, the US should engage key South Asian and ASEAN stakeholders, yet progress has been minimal, revealing a greater emphasis on countering China rather than addressing Asia-Pacific issues. It's crucial to understand how these countries view NATO's potential expansion into their region. Instead, the US relies on Western NATO members who are economically tied to China and less invested in the same concerns, suggesting a path to failure.

Lastly, NATO's focus on China could spark a nuclear arms race, undermine non-proliferation efforts, and escalate global tensions. Overall, if this strategy is not effectively deterring but rather exacerbating security issues, one must question whether this approach truly represents the pinnacle of strategic thinking.

Future Direction

China could bolster its global peace stance by advocating for Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine, thereby strengthening European security and countering NATO's potential Asia-Pacific expansion. China could also engage Moscow to illustrate how its actions harm Beijing's interests, while upholding the six principles of the Global Security Initiative.

⁶ Sebastian Contin Trillo-Figueroa, "Is China a Threat to Europe? NATO's China Stance May Rest on Its Answer," *South China Morning Post*, July 15, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/opinion/world-opinion/article/3270364/china-threat-europe-natos-china-stance-may-rest-its-answer>.

Europe must decisively evolve into a geopolitical entity. Reliance on US protection against Russia is unsustainable. The EU should develop a unified defense strategy, enhance capabilities, and tackle threats collectively, moving from nationalistic approaches to collective efforts. A comprehensive approach must integrate defense spending with diplomatic and economic initiatives across Ukraine and the Asia-Pacific, and balance military investment with diplomacy and trade partnerships.

The US should reassess its NATO strategy, prioritizing the North Atlantic and avoiding Asia-Pacific entanglements to prevent overreach and ensure balance. Expanding NATO into the Asia-Pacific heightens tensions with China and complicates European security. Washington should support European defense autonomy, enabling Europe to handle its own security while freeing the US to act elsewhere. Constructive engagement with China, despite competition, is crucial for global stability.

NATO should concentrate on its primary mission, defending Europe, and avoid overextension into the Asia-Pacific. It must also reidentify the true security threats. NATO's support for Ukraine has been non-interventionist, reflecting Europe's reluctance to engage in distant conflicts, especially without formal agreements. Europe's limited interest in the Asia-Pacific, highlighted by France blocking a NATO office in Tokyo, shows NATO's operational limits. Expanding beyond its core region only heightens unnecessary tensions with China.

Ultimately, *realpolitik* reveals that stability requires more than diplomacy: if you want peace, prepare for war—yet target the right adversaries and battlefields.

Plain and Simple: NATO Should Stay out of Asia

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NATO's self-declared goal was to deter Soviet expansionism and the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe in the aftermath of World War II. Despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO did not fade away. Instead, it has been directly and indirectly involved in a number of military interventions, often without UN mandates, notably in countries like Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Libya, causing death and destruction. In the midst of instigating and fueling the Ukraine conflict, NATO continues to escalate its efforts to expand eastward beyond Ukraine, leading some analysts to argue that its true ambition is to encompass the so-called Asia-Pacific Four (AP4): Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), New Zealand, and Australia, in forming a "North Asia Treaty Organization."¹ What is the motive behind NATO's eastern expansion? Is the *raison d'être* of eastern expansion justifiable? How could this impact Asia's peace and security, and how have Asian countries responded? These are high-stakes questions that warrant critical analyses.

The 2024 NATO Summit concluded in July, and the subsequent Washington Summit Declaration mentioned China or the People's Republic of China (PRC) 14 times. Notably, it stated that "the PRC continues to pose systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security." By labeling China as a systemic challenge, NATO seeks justification for increasing its presence in Asia. However, how exactly does China pose these systemic challenges? The Declaration lavishes groundless and inflammatory accusations, such as claiming, "The PRC has become a

¹ Daryl Guppy, "Paused, but Not Abandoned," *China Daily*, July 25, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202307/25/S64bf199fa31035260b81843b.html>.

decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine through its so-called 'no limits' partnership and its large-scale support for Russia's defense industrial base." However, such accusations are not backed by any substantive evidence or intelligence. Russia has been a major trade partner with China for decades, and the sanctions against Russia by the US and its European allies were not endorsed by the UN, leaving no legal basis for China to comply. China's trade with Russia is based on normal commercial interests, and NATO has failed to provide any concrete evidence that China is supplying the so-called "dual-use materials" to support Russia's war efforts. In contrast, NATO has been actively providing weapons to Ukraine, escalating and prolonging the war. Furthermore, India, a close ally of the United States, has been trading with Russia, importing Russian crude oil by over 13 times its pre-war amounts and exporting billions of dollars worth of metal, electrical, electronic, and other industrial products.² Yet, neither the US nor NATO has raised concerns over the Russia-India trade. Also, ironically, while there is no evidence of China supporting Russia's military capabilities, China has been a key supplier to the United States' military-industrial complex, especially for laser and microwave weapons, as well as critical minerals and cast products. It is, therefore, hypocritical for the US and NATO to accuse China as a "Russian enabler."

If the alleged China's role in the Ukraine conflict is not the true motive for NATO's attempted expansion, what is? To answer this question, we need to examine the context and process of NATO's Asia pivot. The shift began with the 2019 London Declaration, where NATO recognized China's growing influence and international policies as both opportunities and challenges. Then, in the 2021 Brussels Summit Communiqué, NATO stated that China's "ambitions and assertive behavior presents systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to alliance security." NATO reiterated that China posed geopolitical challenges in its 2022 Summit, and invited the AP4 to attend the summit for the first time. NATO 2023 Vilnius Summit discussed the possibility of establishing a liaison office in Tokyo as a hub for cooperation with the AP4. As mentioned earlier, the 2024 Summit made numerous accusations against China, including support for Russia's war efforts, "sustained malicious cyber and hybrid activities," and rapid expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal. In recent weeks, NATO officials have also been uttering, without any legal foundation or operability basis, that NATO would "reclaim" some

2 Nick Paton Walsh and Florence Davey-Attlee, "The Kremlin Has Never Been Richer – Thanks to a US Strategic Partner," *CNN*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/europe/russia-oil-india-shadow-fleet-cmd-intl/index.html>.

Chinese-owned infrastructure projects in Europe should a wider conflict with Russia break out.

Amid NATO's eastward turn, an alphabet soup of security alliances has been created, revived, or elevated in Asia, spearheaded by the United States. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), a security dialogue platform involving Australia, India, Japan, and the US, was revived in 2017 when Trump entered the US presidency and China was declared a "strategic competitor." The AUKUS, a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US, was established in 2021 to develop joint advanced military capabilities to deter and contain China. Additionally, the emerging US-Japan-ROK trilateral dialogue aims to confront China's "dangerous and aggressive" behavior in support of its "unlawful maritime claims." Connecting the dots, it is painfully evident that NATO's Asian footprint is not intended to ensure regional peace and security, nor to find a new "threat" to justify its continuous existence, but rather to orchestrate a China containment campaign under the United States' directive.

While the plan to establish a NATO office in Tokyo was deferred at the Vilnius meeting, NATO's assiduous efforts to grow influence in Asia persist, just as the US has doubled down the efforts to ramp up military capabilities in Asia. The US has renewed basing agreements with the Philippines and encouraged Japan's remilitarization. Japan, on the other hand, seems to embrace NATO with open arms. It has already upgraded its representation to NATO by creating a new ambassador post. Yet what would NATO bring to the Asia-Pacific region? NATO's outgoing Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg claimed that what is "happening in Europe today could happen in Asia tomorrow." The irony is that what is happening in Europe today wouldn't have transpired without NATO's provocation. As some have pointed out bluntly, there is no conflict in Asia, but NATO might pave the way for one. NATO's interest seems less about regional peace and more about maintaining the US hegemony by containing and suppressing China's rise.

As Warwick Powell, Professor at Queensland University of Technology and Senior Fellow of Taihe Institute, incisively points out, "Security is found through peace, and peace is built with collective prosperity."³ However, the US has neither the intention nor the capability to promote collective prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It has excluded itself from

³ Warwick Powell, "A Time for Multipolar Peace," *Substack*, July 10, 2024, <https://warwickpowell.substack.com/p/a-time-for-multipolar-peace>.

key economic partnerships like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Its Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) lacks substantial economic engagement. Instead, its focus on defense spending and militarization could only divert crucial resources from economic development, leading to increased instability and anxiety and hindering the pursuit of collective prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

This leads to critical considerations about NATO's future prospects in Asia. For decades, Asian economies have thrived in a peaceful environment, contributing over 70% of global GDP growth in the past decade,⁴ and China has been a major driving force and partner for regional economic growth. Other than the AP4, almost all other Asian economies are wary of NATO's presence in the region. ASEAN countries, following the long tradition of non-alignment, prefer not to take sides in global power dynamics. They value their economic partnerships with China and are uninterested in joining the encirclement and containment of China. Even if there are disagreements and tensions between countries, such as the skirmishes surrounding the South China Sea, these are regional issues and should be resolved among regional members through dialogue and negotiations. Introducing external military forces would only escalate tensions. As the former Singaporean Ambassador to the United Nations Kishore Mahbubani affirms, the Asia-Pacific region has turned many "seemingly intractable conflicts" between countries into "lasting cooperation," and "countries in this region have demonstrated that enmity can be turned to amity." Further, Mahbubani sees NATO's presence in the region as playing a counterproductive role by exporting its "destructive militaristic culture" to East Asia.⁵ Mahbubani's view was shared by many Asian leaders. India's External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, referred in 2021 to the use of the term "Asian NATO" as a "mind game" and asserted that India has never had a "NATO mentality."⁶ Former Prime Minister of Australia Paul Keating stated his views in more colorful terms, "Of all the people on the international stage, the supreme fool among them is Jens Stoltenberg, the current Secretary General of NATO. ... Stoltenberg, by instinct and by policy, is simply an accident on its way to happen."⁷

In fact, many European countries are not willing to support a NATO mission to contain China. As French President Emmanuel Macron

- 4 "The Rise and Rise of Asia," *World Economics*, August 28, 2024, <https://www.worldeconomics.com/Thoughts/The-Rise-and-Rise-of-Asia-2030.aspx>.
- 5 Kishore Mahbubani, "Asia, Say No to NATO: The Pacific Has No Need of the Destructive Militaristic Culture of the Atlantic Alliance," *ARI*, June 28, 2021, <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/app-essay-kishore-mahbubani-2/>.
- 6 Javier Piedra, "For India's Top Diplomat, the Emperor Has No Clothes," *Asia Times*, June 28, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/09/for-indias-top-diplomat-the-emperor-has-no-clothes/>.
- 7 Paul Karp, "Paul Keating Labels NATO Chief a 'Supreme Fool' and 'an Accident on Its Way to Happen,'" *The Guardian*, July 9, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/09/paul-keating-labels-nato-chief-a-supreme-fool-and-an-accident-on-its-way-to-happen>.

insisted, the French were not in favor of NATO's expansion into Asia "as a matter of principle," and NATO should be confined to the North Atlantic by the treaty that defines it. Macron explicitly resisted a NATO focus on China, stating that China "has little to do with the North Atlantic."⁸ Similar views are shared by other NATO members who are focusing on Russia, who have extensive economic ties with China, and who simply do not consider Asia as an area where existential threat to Europe exists. Indeed, Europeans do not have to engage in the United States' power games to their own detriment. The Eurozone economy entered a technical recession in the last two quarters of 2023 and has just barely achieved positive growth so far this year. European economies face several challenges, including the immigration and refugee crisis, climate change, persistent inflation, and energy insecurity, in addition to a stagnant economy. Addressing these thorny issues should be a top priority for European leaders, as it is critical not only for ensuring economic prosperity, but also for countering the rise of the far right and maintaining internal political stability. Committing to another military theater on a continent oceans apart simply makes no economic, political, or strategic sense. It is time for Europe to reclaim its strategic autonomy and act in its own interest.

Some clear-minded scholars and strategists also understand the mistakes of NATO's expansion into Asia. Center for Strategic and International Studies Visiting Fellow Mathieu Droin, Stimson Center Senior Fellow Kelly A. Grieco, and Associate Professor of Diplomacy and Disarmament at Jawaharlal Nehru University Happymon Jacob argue that European NATO members simply do not possess the military assets, including maritime and air capabilities, needed to project power into the Asia-Pacific region. Their analysis leads to a sobering conclusion: "NATO's Asian proposition, in short, is the worst of all worlds: it feeds fears about the alliance's intentions and infuriates Beijing without giving Asian partners the means to further deter China. Half-measures meant to counter China could end up sparking the very conflict the alliance is seeking to defuse."⁹

8 Karp, "Paul Keating Labels NATO Chief."

9 Mathieu Droin, Kelly A. Grieco, and Happymon Jacob, "Why NATO Should Stay out of Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, July 8, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/why-nato-should-stay-out-asia>.

No doubt, China plays a key role in countering NATO's Asian expansion. China has made its position plainly clear. China does not take sides in the Ukraine conflict, and consistently calls for ceasefire and peace negotiations. China has vehemently condemned NATO's unfounded accusations and reiterated that China has "always been a force for peace and force for stability." It has warned repeatedly that China's different political system and values "should not be used as a reason for NATO to incite confrontation with China," and called for NATO to "stay within its bounds."¹⁰ China remains committed to promoting regional peace, indivisible security, and collective prosperity through diplomatic engagement and economic partnerships. The nation continues to be an anchor for regional peace and a driving force for regional development. Therefore, there is no room or point for NATO to contain China or to set foot in Asia. It is in the best interests of Asia and Europe that it stays that way.

10 Tessa Wong, "China Hits Back at NATO over Russia Accusations," *BBC News*, July 12, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cxx24850k8yo>.

Where Is the Olympic Spirit Today?

Ding Yifan



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During the Paris Olympics, many events captured global attention. The bold and romantic atmosphere of the opening ceremony drew widespread international commentary. Also, the Chinese delegation's outstanding performance became one of the highlights. Among their achievements, the Chinese swimming team's performance in the men's 4x100m medley relay, which ended the American swimming team's 60-year winning streak, was the most surprising. Yet, this success has been questioned by the Western media.

America's Focus on Olympic Performance

American athletes have dominated the Olympics for years. As early as the bipolar world era, the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for Olympic medals had become an important part of the Cold War. In order to prove superiority, both sides invested heavily in athlete training, sometimes resorting to measures like performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs). Despite the known risks to health, the allure of becoming a sports champion, along with the lucrative advertising deals that follow, was too strong for many to resist.

The United States is a major country in the research, development, and production of biopharmaceuticals, including PEDs. In the 1960s, Americans discovered that anabolic steroids could quickly improve strength, and the substances became favorites among bodybuilders and weightlifters. However, these substances can cause severe and long-lasting damage, including early onset heart attacks, strokes, tumors, and countless other complications. Though these substances were banned

by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), drug prohibition has struggled to keep pace with biopharmaceutical innovations. A typical example was the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative (BALCO), a private athletics lab caught providing doping programs to Olympic athletes throughout the 1990s-2000s. BALCO represented a troubling "don't ask, don't tell" doping collaboration between bad actors in specialized enterprises and Olympic athletic teams.

The US government established the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) to inspect and penalize US athletes. However, there are concerns that the USADA may or may not enforce these rules with selective leniency or simply be unequipped to deal with new-school doping methods, as it is hard to overlook false negatives of the past. The US is not the only nation with athletes potentially engaging in questionable programs, but they are the loudest voices accusing other athletes of PED use.

The Rise of Chinese Athletes

In recent years, Chinese athletes have set some new records at the Olympic Games. The gold medals they won at the Paris Olympics were the same as those of American athletes. This caught the attention of American political scientist Graham Allison, who compared the rise of Chinese athletes in the Olympics to China's rise on the world stage. He suggested that China has become a peer competitor to the United States, not just in sports, but in global influence as well.

During the Paris Olympics, the results achieved by Chinese athletes were impressive, especially in swimming. This prompted Western athletes and media to suggest that the Chinese athletes might have taken PEDs and call for further investigation. During the Olympic Games, Chinese swimmers were reportedly subjected to more than 600 doping tests. The issue with this is not the concerns over doping, or even the thoroughness of the testing, it is the grossly uneven application of testing.

The motto of the Olympic Games was originally "Faster, Higher, Stronger," and in 2021, "Together" was added. This addition emphasizes the importance of unity and cooperation in overcoming global challenges. However, when Chinese athletes achieve significant success, the West often responds with doping allegations. Chinese athletes consider these accusations at best hypocritical, and at worst outright slander. Intense competition has always been a feature of the Olympics and doping has been a problem for years, but this new transition feels increasingly

like a partisan debate colored by geopolitical bias rather than a celebration of international cooperation.

America's Long-Arm Jurisdiction

On November 16, 2020, the US Congress passed the Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act, named after Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of Russia's anti-doping laboratory who exposed Russia's state-sponsored doping program. This act expanded US jurisdiction, allowing the prosecution of foreign citizens in the US if they were found to be participating in a doping program that affects competitions involving American athletes.

After the US Senate passed the act, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) issued a statement expressing concerns that "some very important elements of the act will have unintended consequences and will disrupt the global legal anti-doping framework recognized to date by 190 nations, including the US, through the UNESCO International Convention Against Doping in Sport." They cautioned that "by unilaterally exerting US criminal jurisdiction over all global doping activity, the act will likely undermine clean sport by jeopardizing critical partnerships and cooperation between nations."

Another issue arose when the United States allowed athletes who had previously doped to continue competing. WADA information shows that USADA permitted several athletes it had caught between 2011 and 2014 violating drug rules to go undercover and keep on competing without prosecution in exchange for information on other offenders. As a result, at least three serious doping incidents were ignored, and USADA did not notify WADA. When WADA exposed these actions, USADA admitted the facts but defended that pursuing appeals could endanger the involved athletes' safety and asked WADA not to make the issue public. Though it is worth noting that these scandals, whilst galvanizing, are a universal problem.

The United States' performance at the Olympics shows some parallels to its attitude on the world stage, which is to refuse to acknowledge shortcomings that all nations struggle with.

The various bizarre phenomena that occurred at the Paris Olympics reflect the changes our world is undergoing. The revival of the Olympic Games, initiated by European powers in their heyday, was, for a long time, a stage for Europeans to

showcase their power. As the United States rose, European athletes were forced to share the stage. Now, with Chinese athletes catching up, Western countries, accustomed to dominating for two centuries, feel uneasy with the new situation.

Sports competitions should not be overly politicized. The success of athletes is often bound by time, and no one can dominate the stage forever. No matter how strong an athlete is, retirement is inevitable. The essence of sports competitions lies in the idea that each new generation surpasses the previous one. It would be useful for Western strategists to draw more inspiration from sports competitions when considering the dynamics of great power competition.

Youth

Voices



NATO at a Crossroads: Balancing European Security with US Strategic Ambitions

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For decades, NATO has been the cornerstone of European security. It was conceived as a response to the Soviet threat during the Cold War, ensuring that Western Europe remained free from Soviet domination. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO did not dissolve but rather expanded. Former Warsaw Pact nations and former Soviet republics like the Baltic states, eager to solidify their independence from Moscow, sought NATO membership as a means of securing their sovereignty. This expansion was seen by many as a logical extension of NATO's mission to promote stability and security in Europe.

However, debates arose around NATO's purpose after the Soviet threat dissipated. Critics argued that without a clear adversary, NATO's relevance had waned. Yet, the resurgence of Russian assertiveness, particularly with the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the 2014 Crimea crisis, and the 2022 Ukraine conflict, reinvigorated NATO. Once again, Russia is viewed as a significant threat, and NATO has responded by strengthening its commitments to member states, proposing membership to new states, and even expanding its reach beyond Europe into the Asia-Pacific.

A Realist Take

Political scientists John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz offered insights into the underlying forces driving NATO's growth. According to Mearsheimer, the expansion of NATO was a rational response to the anarchic nature of the international system, where states sought to maximize their security and power. From this

perspective, NATO's expansion is not merely a response to Russian aggression but a strategic move to maintain American primacy in the post-Cold War world. Waltz's balance-of-power theory further explains the dynamics at play. As the global hegemony enjoying moments of unipolarity after the Cold War, the US had to ensure that no other power could challenge its dominance. NATO, functioning as an instrument of American foreign policy, served to inhibit the emergence of a rival power in Europe or Asia. This viewpoint sheds light on why NATO has persisted in its expansion, even without the presence of an immediate and obvious threat like the Soviet Union.

From Russia's perspective, however, NATO's eastward expansion is a direct threat to its sphere of influence, leading to heightened tensions culminating in the current conflict in Ukraine. Russia's narrative that NATO's expansion provoked its aggressive actions has gained some traction, even outside of Russia. This narrative has allowed Russia to frame NATO as an aggressor, justifying its own military intervention in a neighboring country.

NATO's Focus on China

In recent years, NATO has increasingly turned its attention to China and the broader Asia-Pacific region, largely at the behest of the United States. NATO officially pointed to China as one of the alliance's "challenges" and a security concern in 2019, shifting away from its traditional emphasis on Europe.¹ NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that "for the first time in NATO's history, we will ... address the rise of China." Many scholars agreed that the deteriorating relations between China and the US prompted the US to urge NATO to directly confront China, driven by concerns that China could outpace the US in technological advancements.² In 2019, Mike Pompeo, then-US Secretary of State, warned that if European NATO members did not exclude Chinese systems from their security networks, the US would be unable to share certain information with them.³

Since then, NATO has continued to characterize China as a security challenge, particularly in the face of growing cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept identified Sino-Russian collaboration as a significant challenge, with China being labeled

- 1 "NATO Recognizes China 'Challenges' for the First Time," *DW*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-recognizes-china-challenges-for-the-first-time/a-51519351>.
- 2 Jeffrey H. Michaels, "A Very Different Kind of Challenge? NATO's Prioritization of China in Historical Perspective," *International Politics* 59, no. 6 (July 16, 2021): 1045–64, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00334-z>; Sten Rynning, "NATO's Struggle for a China Policy: Alliance, Alignment, or Abdication?," *Asian Affairs* 53, no. 3 (May 27, 2022): 481–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2074729>.
- 3 Sherisse Pham, "The US Is Stepping Up Pressure on Europe to Ditch Huawei," *CNN*, February 12, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/11/tech/huawei-mike-pompeo-hungary/index.html>.

a "systemic challenge" at the 2023 Vilnius Summit. More recently, the 2024 Washington Summit Declaration deployed stronger language against China, calling it a "decisive enabler" of Russia in Ukraine and explicitly identifying Beijing as part of the threat to the Euro-Atlantic region.⁴ This change in focus has sparked debate over NATO's future direction and its ability to manage threats beyond its traditional Euro-Atlantic domain.

China, for its part, has reacted ambivalently to NATO's increased attention. Although Beijing has not openly endorsed Russia's territorial ambitions, it has also refrained from condemning them, choosing instead to strike a balance that preserves its strategic ties with Moscow while steering clear of direct conflict with the West. This careful stance aligns with China's broader geopolitical goals and its intention to avoid entangling itself in conflicts that could disrupt its own development.

Labeling China as a "systemic challenge" and a "threat" represents a new episode, an enduring conversation within NATO itself about whether NATO should be a "dynamic" or a "static" alliance.⁵ In other words: should NATO legitimize itself as an alliance concentrated on its European deterrence mission and avoid deviating from its original purpose? Or should NATO remain flexible and respond to evolving global threats? A significant pivot toward China and the Asia-Pacific suggests a departure from European security priorities, profoundly reshaping NATO's mission and expanding its geographical focus.

A Global NATO? History of NATO Overexpansion

The 2023 Vilnius Summit reinforced NATO's focus on the Asia-Pacific region. That meeting introduced customized partnership programs for the "Asia-Pacific 4" (Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and the Republic of Korea). While NATO officials emphasized that it remained primarily an Atlantic alliance, this has not prevented member states from developing their own Asia-Pacific strategies.⁶

European members are less enthusiastic than the US about confronting China, which has caused some tension within NATO. For example, the suggestion to establish a NATO liaison office in Tokyo drew significant pushback both within the alliance and externally—French President

4 Ken Moriyasu, "NATO Labels China a 'Decisive Enabler' of Russia's War Efforts," *Nikkei Asia*, July 11, 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/NATO-labels-China-a-decisive-enabler-of-Russia-s-war-efforts>.

5 Veronica M. Kitchen, *The Globalization of NATO* (London: Routledge, 2010), 322.

6 Jason Moyer, "NATO Needs Allies in Asia but Does It Need an Indo-Pacific Presence?," *South China Morning Post*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/opinion/asia-opinion/article/3261440/nato-needs-allies-asia-does-it-need-indo-pacific-presence>.

Emmanuel Macron criticized it as overstepping NATO's bounds, while China issued a statement declaring that NATO is "not welcomed" in the Asia-Pacific region.⁷

However, NATO's pivot to and potential involvement in the Asia-Pacific is not the first time NATO has acted like a global alliance and engaged in "mission creep," taking it beyond its commitment to European security at the wish of the United States. After extensive debates about the future of American internationalism in the post-Cold War era, the US not only reaffirmed its commitment to NATO but also initiated programs for its renewal and expansion. NATO broadened its scope by engaging in "out of area" operations in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya.⁸ In 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan as part of the War on Terror with the full support of NATO states, many of which committed "boots on the ground." The United States formulated a doctrine addressing "new threats" that expanded NATO's role beyond just military responses, incorporating effective strategies for resolving disputes and coordinating foreign and political policies.⁹

In August 2003, NATO officially assumed control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan and committed to a security-force training role in Iraq. At the time, NATO's actions were more about preserving alliance solidarity than pursuing shared geostrategic interests.¹⁰ What should have been a primarily "overwatch" military operation escalated into a war that NATO could not afford to lose. It is unsurprising that European leaders struggled to reach a consensus on NATO's security interests in Afghanistan. European countries recognized that their direct interests in the region were limited but felt compelled to support the United States in maintaining alliance unity during a challenging period.

In addition, NATO's 2011 military intervention in Libya sparked controversy due to its failure to outline what the intervention's objectives were. Although the intervention was framed under the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, many argued that regime change was NATO's actual priority—though it did not follow from this that NATO failed to protect the Libyan population from Muammar Gaddafi regime's responses to uprisings.¹¹ NATO's shift in objectives during the Libya intervention raised doubts about the legitimacy of both the operation and NATO as an organization.

7 Stuart Lau and Laura Kayali, "Macron Blocks NATO Outpost in Japan amid Chinese Complaints," *POLITICO*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-block-nato-outpost-japan-china-complaints/>.

8 Yanan Song, "Ironclad US Commitment to NATO? From NATO Expansion to the Ukraine Crisis," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (December 8, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2282734>.

9 Song, "Ironclad US Commitment."

10 Michael Clarke, "The Global NATO Debate," *Politique étrangère* (May 2009), <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2009-5.htm>.

11 Matthew Green, "To What Extent Was the NATO Intervention in Libya a Humanitarian Intervention?," *E-International Relations*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/02/06/to-what-extent-was-the-nato-intervention-in-libya-a-humanitarian-intervention/>.

NATO's emphasis on regime change in the Libyan conflict has been portrayed as a form of US-backed imperialism. According to Maximilian Forte, a professor of anthropology at the Concordia University, Canada, the establishment of the Africa Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG) in 2002 laid the groundwork for the prioritization of regime change.¹² The ensuing creation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) allowed "a more comprehensive US approach in Africa, and establishment of US Army Africa enables AFRICOM to more effectively advance American objectives for self-sustaining African security and stability."¹³ AFRICOM's mission was described as consisting of "Diplomacy, Development, and Defense," however, Forte argued that without "window-dressing" AFRICOM's mission was "infiltrate, enlist, and expropriate." This observation was significant, as there was clear evidence suggesting that the United States was both concerned about Libya's influence and seeking ways to diminish Gaddafi's leadership, while also focusing on the "absolute imperative to secure African resources for the United States' own interests."¹⁴ Prior to NATO's intervention, Libya produced some 1.6 million barrels a day and boasted Africa's largest proven crude oil reserve. Therefore, if Libya's leader favored other nations over the United States in opposition to AFRICOM, this could provide an underlying justification for the US to back regime change, effectively involving NATO in a strategy that might have otherwise been met with skepticism by its members.

The NATO Dilemma

When US President Joe Biden introduced AUKUS, a defense alliance that seeks to involve Britain and Australia in a wider US initiative to counter Chinese influence, it implicitly posed a challenging question for Europe: Which side will you choose?¹⁵ European members have long favored maintaining a stable relationship with the US and China, allowing them to balance their interests between the two powers and achieve the "strategic autonomy" frequently advocated by Macron. While many NATO members do not share Washington's eagerness to confront Beijing, the US is determined to frame it as a crucial next step for the alliance.¹⁶ As a result, the current sharp US pivot to Asia under the Biden administration is provoking a moment of choice, requiring European allies to decide whether they are willing to follow the US steps in the Pacific, which simultaneously raises questions about the cohesion

12 Maximilian Forte, *Slouching Towards Sirte: NATO's War on Libya and Africa* (Montréal, Québec: Baraka Books, 2012).

13 William B. Garrett, Stephen J. Mariano, and Adam Sanderson, "USAFRICOM and the US Army in Africa," *US Army*, February 26, 2010, https://www.army.mil/article/35030/usafricom_and_the_u_s_army_in_africa.

14 Forte, *NATO's War*.

15 Steven Erlanger, "The Sharp US Pivot to Asia Is Throwing Europe Off Balance," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/17/world/europe/biden-china-europe-submarine-deal.html>.

16 Eli Stokols and Tracy Wilkinson, "'Watch Me.' Biden Assures NATO Allies After Trump Mocked Alliance as 'Obsolete,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-06-14/biden-heads-to-nato-for-bridge-building-after-trump-mocked-alliance>.

and purpose of NATO as well as the necessity for the US to remain committed to the alliance, a question that has arisen as both Democratic and Republican presidents have proposed modifying America's formerly iron-clad commitment to European security.

Indeed, one of the primary challenges NATO faces is tension within the alliance regarding the United States' leadership role. Historically, the US has been the leading force in NATO, but recent years have seen fluctuations in American commitment. Former US President Barack Obama's "Pivot to Asia" in 2011 signaled a shift in focus away from Europe, and former US President Donald Trump's antagonistic stance toward NATO further strained relations. Trump's questioning of US commitments to NATO, particularly regarding defense spending, raised concerns about the future of NATO, concerns that increased as report went that Trump might consider withdrawing the US entirely from the alliance.

Trump's transactional approach to foreign relations left US allies with profound unease, particularly vis-à-vis its NATO allies. Conventionally, previous US administrations had worked to maintain what scholars called a grand strategy of "liberal hegemony," where the US sought to maintain its hegemonic status by leading a "rules-based international order" defined by multilateral institutions and free trade, working to ensure its alliance network benefit from and stay within the US-led order. However, Trump seemed to disregard the US commitment to the order in favor of a purely transactional approach. Barry Posen, Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT, US, argued that Trump departed from his predecessors by creating an "illiberal hegemony," where he withdrew from various multilateral trade agreements, upholding his money-first principle. At a 2018 NATO alliance summit, Trump reportedly asked his advisors whether the US should "make history here" and "pull out of NATO."¹⁷ Moreover, Trump did not endorse Article 5 of NATO's North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an attack against one is an attack against all. During his presidency, Trump's lack of commitment to his European allies left most of them in distress. At a campaign rally in February 2024, Trump said he would encourage Russia to do "whatever the hell they want" to NATO member countries, and said "everybody's gonna pay," re-emphasizing his transactional politics.¹⁸ The world is now standing at a crossroads between the return of Trump's faux isolationism or what Posen called "illiberal hegemony"

17 Isaac Arnsdorf, Michael Birnbaum, and Josh Dawsey, "Trump Didn't Quit NATO, but a Potential Second Term Alarms Allies," *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/02/19/trump-nato-russia-republicans-europe/>.

18 Kate Sullivan, "Trump Says He Would Encourage Russia to 'Do Whatever the Hell They Want' to Any NATO Country That Doesn't Pay Enough," *CNN*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html>.

and the conventional American grand strategy represented by Kamala Harris, Vice President of the US and the Democrats' candidate for the 2024 US presidential election. Uncertainties regarding US commitment to NATO now pose serious challenges for the alliance.

The Biden administration has attempted to reaffirm the US commitment to NATO, but challenges remain. The chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and tensions in the Asia-Pacific region have all tested NATO's cohesion and purpose. Additionally, the US strategic focus on China, especially through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Strategy, has created friction with European allies who are less inclined to view China as a direct threat.

NATO's expansion, particularly into areas traditionally considered outside its purview such as the Asia-Pacific, has been the subject of concern among European members. While the US pushes for a more global NATO, European members are wary of overextending the alliance's resources and focus. The potential for NATO to become embroiled in conflicts in the Asia-Pacific, where China's influence is strong, could divert attention from more immediate threats in Europe, such as Russia's actions in Ukraine. Furthermore, NATO's focus on China risks exacerbating global tensions and potentially sparking a new arms race. Using NATO to counter China may undermine global stability, especially if it leads to increased militarization in the Indo-Pacific.

While NATO has undoubtedly played a crucial role in ensuring European security, its future is uncertain as it faces new challenges and shifting global dynamics. The alliance's emerging focus on China, driven largely by the United States, risks diverting attention from more immediate threats and could destabilize global security. As NATO continues to evolve, it must carefully balance its traditional role of collective defense with the realities of a multipolar world where new powers are rising, and old alliances are being tested.

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