

# ON THE ROAD TO NATO 2030

by Matthias Dembinski and Caroline Fehl

Excerpt from the study »Three Visions for NATO – Mapping National Debates on the Future of the Atlantic Alliance«, pages 8–14, full study available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/18013.pdf>

# ON THE ROAD TO NATO 2030: HOW THE ORGANIZATION VIEWS THE FUTURE OF NATO

**Matthias Dembinski and Caroline Fehl**

Institutionally speaking, NATO is a strange animal. Viewed from one perspective, it is an intergovernmental organization that respects national sovereignty and the veto rights of its member states. With the disappearance of the unifying Soviet threat and after several rounds of enlargement since 1999, finding common ground has become ever more difficult. Viewed from another perspective, NATO is characterized by strong mechanisms that facilitate coherence and compromises well above the level of the lowest common denominator of state interests. Those mechanisms include norms and codes of conduct, such as »all for one and one for all«, that entrap member states rhetorically (Schimmelfennig 2001), a permanently running consultation machinery, and, last but not least, a vast civilian and military international bureaucracy with usually rather »entrepreneurial« Secretary Generals at its top (Ostermann 2020).

Policy change within NATO is driven and restricted first and foremost by (coalitions of) member states. Yet NATO's bureaucracies, and the International Secretariat in particular, as well as attached bodies, such as the Parliamentary Assembly, influence decision-making processes as well. NATO's Secretary Generals, though with varying degrees of success, have tried to leave their imprint on the organization. Staff at the International Secretariat facilitate and influence negotiations and decision-making by preparing policy papers, chairing committees at various levels, from the North Atlantic Council in the format of Heads of State and Government down to specialized committees, by identifying possible compromises and by implementing and framing new concepts in ways that link them to the established »*acquis*« of shared norms and goals.<sup>1</sup> The International Secretariat does not necessarily represent fixed interests and positions. Fairly often, individual members and units present different views,

and the Secretariat, instead of pursuing a clearly defined line, merely states policy alternatives.

The London summit in December 2019 provided a unique opportunity for the Secretary General. Heads of State and Government »invited the Secretary General to present to Foreign Ministers a Council-agreed proposal for a forward-looking reflection process under his auspices, drawing on relevant expertise, to further strengthen NATO's political dimension, including consultation«.<sup>2</sup> Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg seized the opportunity. He tasked the Reflection Group, consisting of ten eminent persons under the chairmanship of Thomas de Maizière and Wess Mitchell, with developing recommendations for strengthening Allied unity and political consultation. However, he also emphasized that the work of the Reflection Group was just one part of a larger reform process that he is determined to lead. He presented some of his own ideas on NATO 2030 even before the Reflection Group published its report in November 2020. In his view, this process is about enabling NATO to remain strong militarily, for example, by retaining its technological edge, becoming more united politically, for example, by strengthening consultation and providing timely information on national policies that have repercussions for other members, and by taking a broader approach globally.<sup>3</sup> In his view, »going global« implies first and foremost a deepening of partnerships with states and organizations in Asia and the MENA region in particular. Beyond these catchwords, Stoltenberg's agenda aims at keeping NATO relevant, first and foremost in the eyes of the United States and other member states, but also of publics that are increasingly interested in policy issues beyond NATO's traditional realm of military defence. Thus, the eight thematic issues on his reform agenda also include the climate/security nexus, with a focus on reducing NATO forces' CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and improving societal resilience. NATO's efforts in this regard are aimed primarily at aligning national standards in a variety of areas, such as critical infrastructure. According to interviewees, other ideas, such as a common

<sup>1</sup> Energy security is a case in point. Since the mid-2000s, Eastern European member states have supported NATO's involvement with energy security, while states such as France and Germany have hesitated, fearing that NATO's involvement might lead to an unnecessary militarization of this policy field. In the run-up to the formulation of the 2010 Strategic Concept staff at the International Secretariat contributed to a compromise by linking energy security to established topics, such as cyber security. After the adoption of the Strategic Concept, NATO created an Energy Security Section within the newly established Emerging Security Challenges Division. As this unit implemented the new policy, the meaning of energy security shifted from its initial geo-strategic connotation to a narrow understanding closely related to Article 5 (Bocse 2020).

<sup>2</sup> NATO London Declaration, 4 December 2019; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching NATO 2030 – Strengthening the Alliance in an Increasingly Competitive World, 8 June 2020; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm?selectedLocale=en)

funding scheme for NATO operations, are unlikely to gain traction with member states.

The Reflection Group, too, stretched its mandate. It undertook a comprehensive review of NATO's challenges that resulted in 138 recommendations (NATO 2030). Given that the report had to take the red lines of its ten members into account,<sup>4</sup> it is a surprisingly forward-looking document. Yet, it presents the views of its members and does not necessarily reflect thinking within the International Secretariat or other NATO bodies. Since the publication of the report, the two chairmen and other members of the group have published their own interpretations of the report. The debate within the organization departs from the premise that the alliance's future should build on its past and the three core tasks of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security, as laid out in the 2010 Strategic Concept.

## RUSSIA: CONFRONTATION OR DIALOGUE?

After Russia's annexation of Crimea and the 2014 Wales summit, NATO went »back to basics«, that is, back to a more collective defence and deterrence-oriented posture. Its dual-track approach rhetorically combined the renewed focus on deterrence of Russia as NATO's »chief threat« (NATO 2020: 16) with the offer of dialogue. There is a sense within the International Secretariat that by creating, for example, the Enhanced Forward Presence, totalling about 4,500 troops, the »Tailored Forward Presence« in Bulgaria and Romania, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VHTF) and the NATO Readiness Initiative 4-30 the alliance has made considerable progress in restoring deterrence.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, the second element of the dual-track approach is lagging far behind. One of our interviewees acknowledged that divergences among states and the rather uncompromising stance of many Eastern European members toward Russia, plus Russia's intransigent position, limit the possibilities of a constructive dialogue on Russia's place in the European security order. In this view, an overly restrictive interpretation of NATO's dual-track approach overrates Russia's military might and pushes Russia further into a tight alliance with China. In contrast, the Reflection Group Report is an expression of this immobility. It tightly circumscribes the dialogue part of NATO's dual-track approach by arguing that »to be productive, such dialogue must be firm on principles and conducted from a position of unity and strength« (NATO 2020: 26). Instead, NATO should »tighten rather than merely renew sanctions (...). Evolving the strategy in this way would preserve cohesion within NATO, while providing a prospect for breaking the stalemate with Russia on NATO's terms« (ibid: 26). The report underscores NATO's open door policy and does not mention the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the report contains a critique of Donald Trump's unilateral policies but no critical words about Turkey's nationalist course.

<sup>5</sup> The NATO Readiness Initiative was agreed at the Brussels summit in 2018 and aims at putting 30 air squadrons, 30 naval combat units and 30 mechanized battalions on higher levels of alert, ready to deploy within 30 days. Brussels Summit Declaration, Press Release (2018) 074.

## REACTING TO CHINA'S RISE

Looking into the future, one of the most important challenges concerns NATO's reaction to China's rise and increased global presence. The Trump administration had pushed China onto NATO's agenda,<sup>6</sup> and President Biden will continue to call for transatlantic unity and solidarity against China. At the 2021 Munich Security Conference, he invited the European NATO members to »prepare together for a long-term strategic competition with China«.<sup>7</sup> At issue is how America's NATO partners assess the implications of China's rise and whether they coordinate responses primarily within NATO or the EU. Recent EU strategy papers describe China as a partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival,<sup>8</sup> and its High Representative Josep Borrell asked member states to develop an independent European approach and that the EU should do things on China »its own way«.<sup>9</sup>

NATO itself was rather slow to react to this geopolitical shift. China was not mentioned at all in the Communiqués of the Wales (2014), Warsaw (2016) and Brussels summits (2018). The unusually brief London Declaration (2019) contains a rather lengthy paragraph devoted to issues such as the »security of our communications, including 5G«, which concludes that China's growing influence presents »both opportunities and challenges«.<sup>10</sup>

Since then, China has been quickly rising up NATO's agenda. Sensing the American priorities and the changing mood within Europe, departments within the International Secretariat have begun to analyse China's rise and possible ramifications for NATO and transatlantic security. In numerous interviews and statements, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has explained that China's rise and growing presence in NATO's vicinity demands »a more global approach« from NATO.<sup>11</sup> In his view, going global does not imply a global presence – as a collective defence organization, NATO will

<sup>6</sup> In February 2017, Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis remarked to his NATO colleagues that »the transatlantic bond is essential to (...) addressing a more assertive China. (<https://nato.usmission.gov/february-15-2017-intervention-secretary-defense-mattis-session-one-north-atlantic-council/>).

<sup>7</sup> The White House: Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference, 19 Feb. 2021.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, EU-China – A strategic outlook, 12 March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Josep Borrell 2020: The Sinatra Doctrine. How the EU Should Deal with the US-China Competition, IAI Papers 20 (<https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2024.pdf>).

<sup>10</sup> Shortly before the summit, defence ministers agreed to update NATO's baseline requirement for civilian telecommunications, including 5G and to undertake a thorough risk assessment regarding »the consequences of foreign ownership, control or direct investment. This is important, because next generation telecommunications will affect every aspect of our society«, including military operations. Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers, 25 Oct. 2019 ([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_169945.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_169945.htm?selectedLocale=en)).

<sup>11</sup> The Secretary General stresses that NATO and collective defence will remain geographically defined. However, he has also emphasized that, in a globalized world, the security of member states is affected »by events elsewhere. Economically. Politically. Or militarily« (cf. Berti and Diaz-Plaja 2018: 21).

remain geographically confined – but rather a global perspective and a multi-faceted response to a China that is coming closer to NATO, ranging geographically from the Arctic to the Mediterranean and functionally from the security of critical infrastructure to space to emerging disruptive technologies and arms control (Stoltenberg 2020). While Stoltenberg has been continuously repeating the »opportunity and challenges« formula,<sup>12</sup> the Reflection Report struck a slightly more critical tone. It puts China on the same level as Russia, referring to »two systemic rivals« (NATO 2020: 9). »NATO must devote much more time, political resources, and action to the security challenges posed by China« and should »consider establishing a consultative body to discuss all aspects of Allies' security interests vis-à-vis China« (NATO 2020: 12). In a subsequent article, the chairmen of the Reflection Group expanded this proposal and called for the establishment of a »consultative body modelled on the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls« to counter China's »military–civil fusion strategy which aims to systematically harness technology for military aims« (de Maizière and Mitchell 2021).

In contrast, the debate within the International Secretariat is more circumspect. Interviewees emphasize that China does not constitute an Article 5 threat and that NATO will show consideration for the close economic ties between member states and China. A coordination of existing US, UK and EU export control regimes appears more feasible than a renewal of the Cold War CoCom export control regime. Staffers expect that NATO will upgrade dialogue and partnerships with East Asian democracies. Moreover, NATO will monitor Chinese cyber activities, armament trends and investments in critical infrastructure in Europe and possible repercussions for NATO's capacity to move troops and resupplies during an emergency. Beyond these measures, however, a NATO policy on China has still to emerge.

## NATO AND THE MENA REGION

Debates within the International Secretariat acknowledge that the difference between the attention and resources that NATO has devoted to deterrence on the Eastern flank and to stability projection on the Southern flank might undermine the perception of solidarity and cohesion. Beyond the general acceptance that a more balanced approach is necessary, the debate reflects continuing uncertainty and differences among member states concerning the appropriate course of action to strengthen the Southern flank. NATO reacted to the increased instability in the MENA region in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the emergence of the Islamic State at the summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016). Building on the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, it launched the defence Capacity-Building Initiative in 2014 and adopt-

ed a 360-degree approach to deter threats in 2015.<sup>13</sup> At the Warsaw summit, NATO placed »Projecting Stability« rhetorically on par with »Deterrence and defence«. Stoltenberg had introduced the projecting stability concept in a speech in 2016, in which he had enumerated various challenges, such as refugee flows resulting from civil wars, state collapse and terrorism, and argued that »to protect our territory, we must be willing to project stability beyond our borders«. <sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of Warsaw, NATO developed the »framework for the South« to promote good governance, integrity and transparency in neighbouring countries, deployed a training mission to Iraq, and decided in February 2021 to increase its personnel from 500 to 4,000. Additionally, in 2018 the »Hub for the South« became operational at the Joint Force Command in Naples. The mandate of the Hub includes understanding regional challenges and improving dialogue and cooperation with partners such as NGOs and other regional organizations in the MENA region (Vershbow and Speranza 2019).

Nevertheless, several factors are still being debated within NATO bodies. With regard to strategy, should the projecting stability approach be complemented with more robust deterrence and defence elements to counter the increasing presence of external actors such as Russia in the region? Or should NATO focus on the political and economic root causes of instability? Regarding partners, is the »Hub for the South« approach and working with societal actors the best way forward? Or will NATO, being a state-centric organization itself, continue to work primarily with partner states' security apparatuses and try to mainstream good governance and rule-of-law norms into its capacity-building and training programmes? And lastly, should NATO pursue its fight against terrorism agenda in parallel with, and under the same conceptual roof as, its projecting stability agenda (Berti and Diaz-Plaja 2018)? Or should NATO prioritize projecting stability and separate both agendas conceptually?

## ARMS CONTROL AND ARMAMENTS

Since the Harmel Report of 1967, NATO and the International Secretariat have taken a strong interest in arms control and non-proliferation. NATO's function in this policy area is twofold: it serves as a forum for allied consultations,<sup>15</sup> and it communicates common positions. For example, NATO's declaration that member states share the US assessment of Russian violations of the INF treaty gave credibility to the American position. President Biden's decision to extend the New START treaty has been welcomed within NATO, Stol-

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the Discussion with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Council on Foreign Relations, 11 March 2021; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_182132.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_182132.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Statement by NATO Defence Ministers, 25 June 2015, Press Release (2015) 094.

<sup>14</sup> »Projecting Stability: charting NATO's future«, Speech by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on 29 September 2018. Cf. Berti and Diaz-Plaja 2018: 20.

<sup>15</sup> A prominent example for NATO's consultative function was the Special Consultative Group on Arms Control that existed between 1979 and 1987 and allowed European allies to influence bilateral negotiations on intermediate-range missiles.

tenberg has given assurances that NATO will not deploy new land-based, nuclear armed missiles in response to the breakdown of the INF treaty, and interviewees hope that the Open Skies Treaty might somehow be rescued.

In contrast, NATO's declaratory policy on the future of nuclear disarmament and its own nuclear posture send rather mixed signals. Influenced by President Obama's disarmament speech in Prague in April 2009, NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept expressed the resolve to »create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons« (NATO 2010). However, when international momentum gathered behind the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) resulting in its adoption in 2017, NATO member states issued a statement condemning the treaty and claiming that it creates divisions and undermines the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). According to the statement, the TPNW would delegitimize NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements without engaging »any state actually possessing nuclear weapons« (NATO 2017).<sup>16</sup>

Members of the Secretariat share this critique of the TPNW (Rühle 2017), and the Secretary General has expressed his strong support for NATO's nuclear sharing policy and his expectation that Germany will continue to take an active part in this arrangement.<sup>17</sup> The Reflection Group Report is even more explicit. It repeats the familiar formula that NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements should be revitalized, »that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will never contribute to practical disarmament « (NATO 2020: 37), and that China must be considered in future arms control. Instead, debates within the Secretariat emphasize military *modernization* and the Reflection Group Report stresses that maintaining a technological edge in crucial areas, such as artificial intelligence, autonomous capabilities and space »is the foundation upon which NATO's ability to deter and defend (...) rests« (NATO 2020: 29).

## INTERVENTION OUT-OF-AREA

Against the background of the failed out-of-area interventions in Afghanistan and Libya, interviewed members of the International Secretariat share the sense that NATO is very unlikely to engage in such operations in the future. NATO will retain limited expeditionary capabilities, but is more likely to conduct training, capacity-building and observation missions. Nevertheless, NATO and the International Secretariat are developing a human security agenda aimed at protecting civilians, and women in particular, in armed conflict. Likewise, staffers emphasize that NATO will always seek broad international legitimization for military interventions.

<sup>16</sup> Among the member states analyzed, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey have US nuclear weapons stationed on their territories under NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements.

<sup>17</sup> Jens Stoltenberg: Germany's support for nuclear sharing is vital to protect peace and freedom, op-ed article originally published in German in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 May 2020; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_175663.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175663.htm?selectedLocale=en)

## HYBRID THREATS

As already mentioned, most staffers at the International Secretariat regard the likelihood of a Russian military attack as rather low. In contrast, a broad range of incidents summarized in NATO terminology as hybrid threats or hybrid attacks coming from different sources are regarded as much more likely.

Reflecting this changing threat perception, NATO members put hybrid threats on the agenda of the Warsaw summit. They adopted, among other things, a »Cyber Defence Pledge«, agreed to strengthen societal resilience by achieving the so-called NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience<sup>18</sup> and adopted a strategy for NATO's role in countering »hybrid warfare«. <sup>19</sup> In this regard, they declared that the Council could decide to invoke Article 5 in such contingencies.<sup>20</sup>

Since then, the concept of hybrid threats has been elevated and has become increasingly blurred in NATO documents. The Reflection Report, for example, refers to the term »hybrid« 53 times in 20 pages (Ehrhart 2021: 44). Here hybrid threats include actions by third parties that range from propaganda and disinformation to the manipulation of elections to cyber-attacks against civilian networks and critical infrastructure of various magnitudes to covert intervention and cyber-attacks of military networks as a precursor to open warfare. Despite the attention devoted to hybridity, the debate within the Secretariat on such scenarios and possible responses is still characterized by uncertainty. Interviewees acknowledge the vast differences between such acts. Regarding hybrid threats in the lower and medium range of the spectrum, officials describe NATO's role in slightly different terms. Most policy papers concede that NATO is not the natural first responder. Prime responsibility for ensuring resilience and fending off disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks against networks and infrastructure rests with private actors, states and the EU.<sup>21</sup> NATO has a prime responsibility for protecting its own networks and for refuting malign misrepresentations of NATO's own activities.<sup>22</sup> Beyond that, NATO's focus is on building situational awareness and on monitoring and coordinating the

<sup>18</sup> Commitment to enhance resilience, NATO Press Release (2016)118, 8 July 2016. Cf. also Wolf-Diether Roepke and Hasit Thankey: Resilience: the first line of defence, in: *NATO Review*, 27 February 2019.

<sup>19</sup> The summit communiqué defined hybrid warfare as situations »where a broad, complex, and adaptive combination of conventional and non-conventional means, and overt and covert military, paramilitary, civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design by state and non-state actors to achieve their objectives«.

<sup>20</sup> Warsaw Summit Communiqué, 9 July 2016, press release (2016)100, para. 72.

<sup>21</sup> The EU has developed its own policies on »Cyber Security for the Digital Decade«; (<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/eus-cybersecurity-strategy-digital-decade>) and on resilience of critical infrastructure ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/15122020\\_proposal\\_directive\\_resilience\\_critical\\_entities\\_com-2020-829\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/15122020_proposal_directive_resilience_critical_entities_com-2020-829_en.pdf)).

<sup>22</sup> NATO has a website called »Setting the Record Straight« to correct this kind of disinformation.



responses of private actors and state agencies particularly with a view to ensuring the safety of critical infrastructure needed for the purpose of collective defence, such as the movement of NATO troops. In this view, NATO's approach to resilience is closely linked to Article 5. Other papers allude to a model in which NATO sits at the centre of a web of private and public actors in partner- and member states and coordinates their resilience activities.

Regarding the upper end of the threat spectrum, staffers agree that NATO has a primary role to play. However, they also point out that attribution in such scenarios is notoriously difficult, that there are no clearly defined red lines within this grey zone, and that here is a great risk of misperceptions and inadvertent escalation. In these circumstances, the invocation of Article 5 may thus not be a credible deterrent. So far, NATO has not developed a strategy on how to respond to hybrid attacks in the upper end of the spectrum (Rühle 2021).

## BROADENING NATO'S AGENDA

NATO's approach to projecting stability and to countering hybrid threats is related to the debate on whether NATO should focus on collective defence or should broaden its agenda even further and seek responsibility for a set of issues ranging from climate change and gender to NATO's role in pandemics or domestic terrorism. The thinking within the International Secretariat and among the members of the Reflection Group goes in different directions. The Secretary General has repeatedly stressed that security is not only based on strong militaries. »We need strong and resilient societies and economies, too.«<sup>23</sup> Some members of the Reflection Group, such as Marta Dassù, assume that by broadening the agenda and »more actively supporting human security and the resilience of democratic societies« (Dassù 2020), NATO will retain its relevance in the eyes of the public. Moreover, by expanding its agenda, NATO would be better able to accommodate the more diverse views of its Southern members on risks and security challenges. With regard to terrorism, for example, the Reflection Report argues that NATO should integrate the fight against terrorism into its three core tasks, »not least to maintain NATO's perceived relevance among concerned home audiences« (NATO 2020: 32).

Others are concerned that by expanding the agenda, NATO might create expectations that it cannot fulfil. The CO<sub>2</sub> footprint of armed forces is an important issue but will not help NATO to retain public support. Moreover, by broadening the agenda, NATO runs the risk of losing its focus and becoming involved in issues where it has no comparative advantage. Critics of an expanded agenda refer not only to an inflation of hybrid threats but also to terrorism as an example of this risk of distraction. They point out that NATO cannot add value with regard to preventing terrorist acts within member states. Regarding the fight against terrorism be-

yond NATO's borders, they argue that NATO as a consensus-oriented organization is simply not well placed to deal with such rapidly changing threats that are perceived by member states rather differently.

## RELATIONS WITH THE EU

After the EU adopted its Global Strategy in 2016, both Western organizations renewed their efforts to reform their relationship. However, despite the Joint Declaration on EU–NATO Cooperation of 2018<sup>24</sup> and agreement to work together on 74 concrete projects, relations are still not defined. The co-chair of the Reflection Group Thomas de Maizière laments the lack of focus and commitment to cooperation and criticizes the shallowness of concepts such as European strategic autonomy.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, functional overlap between the two organizations is actually increasing as NATO is broadening its agenda beyond territorial defence and as the EU is striving for strategic autonomy also in the field of security, defence and armament. Thus cooperation can no longer be achieved by a division of labour. Instead, functional cooperation requires agreement on hierarchy, authority and autonomy of decision-making. Are NATO and the NAC, where the United States wields a tremendous amount of influence and the United Kingdom has a strong voice, the predominant institutions where members consult and achieve agreement? Or are the European Union and the European Council the place where EU members forge agreement on foreign, security and defence policy?

The Reflection Group Report takes a rather traditional stance. It insists that »NATO remains (...) the essential forum for security consultations and decisions among Allies« (NATO 2020: 55). It asks for the »fullest involvement of the NATO Allies that are not members of the EU in its initiatives« (NATO 2020: 56)<sup>26</sup> and reminds that unnecessary duplication should be avoided. Members of the International Secretariat are more supportive of a balanced relationship between NATO and the EU. However, proposals for a European pillar within NATO or an overhaul of NATO's structure that would give European NATO members more voice collectively are not on the Secretary General's reform agenda.

## BURDEN SHARING

In 2006 NATO members agreed to a spending target of 2 per cent of GDP on defence and at least 20 per cent of de-

<sup>23</sup> Opening Remarks by Secretary General on NATO 2030, 4 February 2021; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_181208.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_181208.htm)

<sup>24</sup> Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, Press Release (2018)095, 10 July 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. De Maizière's statement at the 16 Petersberger Gespräche zur Sicherheit: Die Weiterentwicklung der NATO, 16 March 2021; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z28V25HqYoM&t=1s>

<sup>26</sup> This formulation links the Joint Declaration of 2018 but changes its wording. The paragraph in the Joint Declaration reads: »We encourage the fullest possible involvement of the NATO allies that are not members of the EU in its initiatives« and asks that EU member states that are not part of the alliance should equally be involved in its initiatives. Joint Declaration of EU-NATO Cooperation, para. 3.

fence expenditures on procurement, research and development. At the Wales summit in 2014, they transformed this informal understanding into a more formal pledge.<sup>27</sup> Although the European NATO members have increased defence spending substantially since 2014 – in 2021, nine member states are likely to meet the 2 per cent goal – burden sharing became the most divisive issue during the Trump administration.

Looking forward, the Secretary General and the Reflection Group support fairer burden-sharing. While the Reflection Group advocates the 2 per cent goal, members of the International Secretariat are more supportive of politically less divisive and more differentiated formulas, such as the cash, capabilities and contributions metric, to assess the fair sharing of the common burden. As already mentioned, the Secretary General has put forward ideas on a common financing of contributions, for example, to the Enhanced Forward Presence, as well as a NATO defence innovation fund. These ideas, although they might contribute to a fairer sharing of the burden, are unlikely to find support among member states.

## POLITICAL COHESION

As already mentioned, member states' concerns about NATO's lack of cohesion and sense of purpose, culminating in Macron's »braindead« outburst, triggered the NATO 2030 reform process and the Reflection Report. There is a general consensus within NATO bodies that norms such as »one for all and all for one« pertain to collective defence. At issue is whether NATO should oblige members to also act together on non-Article 5 issues and how this could be achieved. The report of the Reflection Group strikes a carefully worded compromise between NATO's political cohesion and national sovereignty. On one hand, it proposes closer consultations as a means to secure the unity of the alliance. With regard to procedures, the report encourages the delegation of more competences to the Secretary General and raising the threshold for single country blockages. On the other hand, it argues that NATO should respect the different security cultures and outlooks of its member states, allowing more flexibility and the establishment of coalitions inside Alliance structures. Interviews with members of the International Secretariat reveal strong support for retaining NATO's intergovernmental character and that diverting from the consensus principle will not gain traction.

## NATO: A COMMUNITY OF VALUES OR INTERESTS?

Related to the issue of political cohesion is the debate on NATO's character as a community of democratic values. The Secretary General has repeatedly emphasized that NATO

will bolster its support for democracy abroad and should also strengthen democratic principles enshrined in the preamble of the NATO treaty within the alliance. A commitment to democratic principles is deemed necessary not least in order to make the alliance more immune against attempts by external powers to divide members and undermine collective defence. The NATO 2030 report recommends several mechanisms to strengthen NATO's character as a community of values. It proposes a code of good conduct to uphold democracy and the rule of law, as well as the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Democratic Resilience. NATO's Parliamentary Assembly, too, focuses on the danger of democratic backsliding and has proposed a centre for democratic resilience within NATO.<sup>28</sup>

Other members of the International Secretariat caution that NATO, in contrast to the EU, possesses no instruments to influence political developments within member states. Trying to enforce democratic standards within member states might be more detrimental to NATO's unity and cohesion than tolerating deviations from the democratic path.

<sup>27</sup> The relevant sentence reads: „Allies (...) aim to move towards the 2 % guideline within a decade (...) Wales summit declaration para. 4.

<sup>28</sup> See Gerry Connally, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Political Committee Report: NATO@70: Why the Alliance remains Indispensable.

## REFERENCES

**Berti, Benedetta and Diaz-Plaja, Ruben-Erik** (2018): Two ages of NATO efforts to Project Stability – Change and Continuity, in: Ian Hope (ed.): *Projecting Stability: Elixir or Snake Oil*. NDC Research Paper 1, 19–27. December. Rome, NATO Defense College.

**Bocse, Alexandra-Maria** (2020): NATO, energy security and institutional change, in: *European Security*, 29 (4): 436–455.

**Dassù, Marta** (2020): How NATO should plan for the next ten years, *ECFR*, 14 December; <https://ecfr.eu/article/how-nato-should-plan-for-the-next-ten-years/>.

**De Maizière, Thomas/Mitchell, Wess** (2021): NATO Needs to Deal with China Head-On, *Foreign Policy*, 23 February; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/23/nato-china-brussels-summit-biden-europe-alliance/>.

**Ehrhart, Hans Georg** (2021): Hybrid Warfare and NATO's primary role, in: NATO Watch (Ed.): *Peace research perspectives on NATO 2030*, 44–47, Gairloch; [https://natowatch.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/peace\\_research\\_perspectives\\_on\\_nato\\_2030.pdf](https://natowatch.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/peace_research_perspectives_on_nato_2030.pdf).

**NATO** (2010): Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

**NATO** (2017): North Atlantic Council Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Press Release (2017)135.

**NATO** (2020): NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General, 25 November 2020.

**Ostermann, Falk** (2020): *Die NATO: Institution, Politiken und Probleme kollektiver Verteidigung und Sicherheit von 1949 bis heute*. München, UVK Verlag.

**Rühle, Michael** (2017): The Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty: reasons for scepticism, *NATO Review*, 19 May; <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2017/05/19/the-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty-reasons-for-scepticism/index.html>.

**Rühle, Michael** (2021): Enlarging NATO's toolbox to counter hybrid threats, *NATO Defence Review*, 19 March; <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/03/19/enlarging-natos-toolbox-to-counter-hybrid-threats/index.html>.

**Schimmelfennig, Frank** (2001): The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union, in: *International Organization*, 55 (1): 47–80.

**Stoltenberg, Jens** (2020): Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 – Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world, 8 June; [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_176197.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_176197.htm).

**Vershow, Alexander/ Speranza, Lauren** (2019): More in the MED: How NATO Can Reform its Efforts in the South and Italy Can Lead the Charge. Atlantic Council; 22 October; <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/more-in-the-med-how-nato-can-refocus-its-efforts-in-the-south-and-italy-can-lead-the-charge/>