

NATO 2020

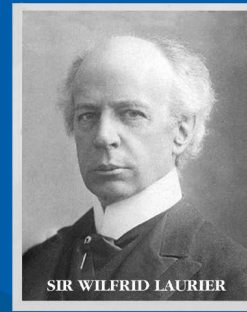
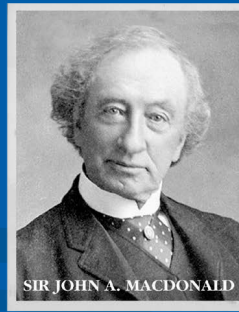


Dealing with Trump, Preparing for China

Brooke Smith-Windsor

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Executive Summary

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) entered 2020 as the senior of the world's collective defence alliances. Yet questions remain about the internal and external challenges now facing the 71-year-old multilateral alliance, especially in light of the past three-and-a-half years of the Trump presidency and the growing Sino-American strategic competition, the latter of which will likely only be accelerated in the post-COVID-19 international order.

President Trump has openly questioned the continued relevance of multilateralism and has threatened to withdraw the United States from NATO unless fellow allies increased their defence spending. Yet, this challenge stems less from Trump himself than from the structural factors that underlie his message.

Trump's populist constituency harbours an innate distrust of established politicians, including the European component within NATO. These sentiments are likely to persist irrespective of who wins the 2020 election. Many American taxpayers ask: Why support an alliance that secures a faraway European continent viewed as protectionist to American trade?

The answer lies in America's two vital geopolitical interests: ensuring its "continental integrity" and preventing the Eurasian landmass from being dominated by a single power. In this new era of Sino-American strategic competition, NATO is once again crucial to US interests and values. Hence, the *2018 National Defense Strategy* includes strengthening alliances among top US priorities. Notwithstanding Trump's rhetoric, the overall US defence commitment to Europe has increased. A shared transatlantic commitment to democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law is more relevant than ever.

Likewise, many European countries, faced with a resurgent Russia and a diminished EU post-Brexit, not to mention internal differences over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, have heeded Trump's call and are willing to pay more for their defence. The alliance, as a multilateral organ of *Pax Americana*, endures, resting on the tripod of performance, principled, and procedural legitimacy.

Russia is likely to remain the alliance's primary security preoccupation for the foreseeable future, given geographic proximity to Europe and Moscow's posture. Yet, as this paper argues, the much larger, global rivalry between China and the United States should be a central focus. The lack of shared values and Chinese authoritarianism mean the future NATO orientation will necessarily involve greater vigilance and crisis preparedness with respect to China.

NATO's European members are increasingly facing the security implications of China's global rise – from Europe's growing economic reliance on Beijing to infrastructure inroads to the question of allowing Huawei into the continent's 5G networks. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined Europe's supply chain vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China, followed by reports of Beijing's disinformation regarding the virus's origins and potential China-backed cyberhacking of Western laboratories working on a vaccine. A potential Sino-China strategic nexus in the European theatre, illustrated by their recent joint naval drills, is also a cause for concern.

Moreover, some European members, as well as Canada, are increasingly operating in the Asia-Pacific theatre and are thus confronting the reality of China's rise firsthand. There is a strong connection between NATO and its global partners in China's immediate neighbourhood: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea – all liberal democracies. NATO is therefore concerned about territorial tensions in the East and South China Seas.

However, rhetorical solidarity with the alliance's value-sharing partners aside, what would it take to move NATO to actual crisis management if violence erupted in the Asia-Pacific?

1. NATO is unlikely to intervene unless its values or interests are at stake. This could become the case if a threat or eruption of violence takes place in the East and South China Seas.
2. All NATO decisions are taken by consensus. With different threat perceptions and priorities across the alliance, a unanimous decision to intervene may be difficult. However, as the Libya example demonstrated, members could, while not contributing to a mission, acquiesce to other NATO allies intervening.
3. NATO usually seeks the support of regional states or organizations before launching a crisis management operation. Request by NATO's Asia-Pacific partners for intervention or assistance would be an important factor.
4. The decision to intervene also depends on the capabilities required to mount an effective military operation. Here the increasing maritime footprint of individual allies in the Asia-Pacific region, enabling interoperability with many official NATO partner nations, would likely play a crucial role.

5. NATO usually seeks international legitimacy, specifically a UN mandate for crisis intervention. However, with any Security Council resolution authorizing intervention unlikely due to Beijing's veto, NATO could pursue other mechanisms, as did in the case of Korea in the 1950s.

To conclude, the importance of NATO to American eternal interests and values has proven resilient. Meanwhile, momentum is building within NATO for a mature policy discussion about China. The COVID-19 global upheaval will only increase it. Simply put, it would be difficult for NATO to stand isolated from such issues at a time of accelerating strategic competition between China and the United States.

Sommaire

L'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique Nord (OTAN) débuta le 2020 comme l'une des plus vieilles alliances de défense mondiale collective. Toutefois, un grand point d'interrogation plane quant aux défis intérieurs et extérieurs auxquels l'alliance multilatérale de 71 ans, tout particulièrement à la lumière des trois dernières années et demie de la présidence de Donald Trump et de la concurrence stratégique de plus en plus forte entre les États-Unis et la Chine, concurrence qui ne pourra que s'intensifier dans l'ordre international de l'après-COVID 19.

Le président Trump a ouvertement remis en question la pertinence à long terme du multilatéralisme et a menacé de retirer les États-Unis de l'OTAN si les alliés membres n'augmentent pas leurs dépenses militaires. Or, cet enjeu a moins à voir avec Donald Trump lui-même qu'avec les facteurs structurels à l'origine de son message.

Parmi les idées populistes promues par les partisans de Donald Trump, il y a la méfiance innée à l'égard de la classe politique, qui comprend les membres européens de l'OTAN. Ces sentiments sont susceptibles de perdurer, peu importe qui gagnera les élections de 2020. En effet, de nombreux contribuables américains se posent la question suivante : faut-il soutenir une Alliance qui veille à la sécurité d'une Europe éloignée et vraisemblablement protectionniste à l'égard du commerce américain?

Deux importants intérêts géopolitiques de l'Amérique fournissent la réponse à cette question : la garantie d'« intégrité continentale » et la nécessité d'empêcher qu'une seule puissance domine l'énorme territoire euroasiatique. Ainsi, dans cette nouvelle ère de concurrence stratégique sino-américaine, l'OTAN redevient cruciale pour les intérêts et les valeurs des États-Unis. D'ailleurs, la stratégie américaine de défense nationale de 2018 priorisait le renforcement des alliances. Malgré la rhétorique du président Trump, dans l'ensemble, l'en-

gagement des États-Unis en matière de défense a augmenté envers l'Europe. Des deux côtés de l'Atlantique, l'engagement en faveur de la démocratie, des libertés individuelles et du principe de l'État de droit est devenu plus important que jamais.

De même, face à la résurgence de la Russie et à l'affaiblissement de l'Europe dans l'après-Brexit – d'autant plus que les luttes intérieures contre la COVID-19 divergent –, de nombreux pays européens ont répondu à l'appel du président Trump et se sont déclarés prêts à payer plus pour leur défense. L'Alliance, organe multilatéral issu de la *Pax Americana*, perdure et prend appui sur une approche tripartite fondée sur la performance, des principes et une légitimité procédurale.

Pendant encore un certain temps, la Russie demeurera probablement la première priorité de l'Alliance en matière de sécurité, compte tenu de sa proximité géographique avec l'Europe et de l'attitude de Moscou. Cependant, comme on le fait valoir dans la présente étude, la rivalité mondiale de bien plus grande ampleur entre la Chine et les États-Unis devra se retrouver au centre des débats. L'absence de valeurs communes et l'autoritarisme de la Chine signifient que les orientations futures de l'OTAN devront nécessairement favoriser une vigilance accrue et une meilleure préparation aux crises en ce qui a trait à la Chine.

Les membres européens de l'OTAN doivent de plus en plus pallier les incidences de l'essor mondial de la Chine sur la sécurité – de la dépendance économique croissante de l'Europe envers Beijing jusqu'aux développements liés à la question de l'entrée de Huawei dans les réseaux 5G du continent. La pandémie de COVID 19 a fait ressortir les vulnérabilités européennes à l'égard de la chaîne d'approvisionnement chinoise, puis des rapports ont révélé la désinformation de Beijing quant à l'origine du virus ainsi que le cyberharcèlement – probablement soutenu par la Chine – pratiqué dans les laboratoires occidentaux travaillant sur un vaccin. Le lien stratégique potentiel entre la Russie et la Chine en Europe, illustré par les récents exercices navals conjoints sino-russes est une source supplémentaire de préoccupation.

En outre, certains membres européens, ainsi que le Canada, sont de plus en plus actifs dans la région indopacifique et donc aux premières loges pour affronter les réalités de la croissance chinoise. Un lien très étroit existe entre l'OTAN et ses partenaires mondiaux dans le voisinage immédiat de la Chine : l'Australie, la Nouvelle-Zélande, le Japon et la Corée du Sud – qui sont toutes des démocraties libérales. L'OTAN est donc attentive aux tensions territoriales dans les mers de Chine orientale et méridionale.

Cependant, mis à part la solidarité rhétorique avec les partenaires partageant les valeurs de l'Alliance, comment inciter l'OTAN à se concentrer sur la gestion des crises en cours si la violence éclate dans la région de l'Asie-Pacifique?

1. L'OTAN est peu susceptible d'intervenir à moins que ses valeurs ou que ses intérêts ne soient en jeu. Cela deviendrait le cas dans l'éventualité de menace ou d'éruption de violence dans les mers de Chine orientale et méridionale.

2. Toutes les décisions de l'OTAN sont prises par consensus. Compte tenu de la variété des menaces perçues et des priorités établies par les membres de l'Alliance, il pourrait être ardu d'en arriver à une décision unanime en matière d'intervention. Toutefois, comme l'a démontré l'exemple donné par la Libye, les membres pourraient, sans participer à une mission, acquiescer aux demandes d'autres alliés de l'OTAN.

3. L'OTAN cherche habituellement à obtenir le soutien d'États ou d'organisations régionales avant de lancer une opération de gestion de crise. Les demandes d'intervention ou d'aide de la part des partenaires de l'OTAN provenant de la région de l'Asie-Pacifique pourraient jouer de façon importante.

4. La décision d'intervenir dépend également des capacités requises pour mener à bien une opération militaire. Dans ce cas, la présence maritime croissante d'alliés dans la région de l'Asie-Pacifique jouerait probablement un rôle crucial en permettant l'interopérabilité avec de nombreux pays partenaires officiels de l'OTAN.

5. L'OTAN cherche habituellement à bénéficier d'une légitimité internationale et, tout particulièrement, à obtenir un mandat de l'ONU pour toute intervention en cas de crise. Cependant, comme Beijing dispose d'un droit de veto, ce qui rend peu probable toute résolution du Conseil de sécurité à l'appui d'une intervention, l'OTAN pourrait recourir à d'autres mécanismes, comme elle l'a fait lors de la guerre de Corée durant les années 1950.

En guise de conclusion, l'importance de l'OTAN pour les intérêts et les valeurs durables des États-Unis s'est avérée solide. Il y a au sein de l'Organisation une volonté croissante pour tenir une réflexion sérieuse à propos de la Chine. Le bouleversement mondial provoqué par la COVID-19 ne fera que l'aviver. En termes simples, il sera difficile pour l'OTAN de rester à l'écart de ces questions à un moment où la concurrence stratégique s'intensifie entre la Chine et les États Unis.

Introduction¹

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) entered 2020 as the senior of the world's collective defence alliances. In April the Atlantic Alliance turned 71, marking another milestone since its celebratory 70th anniversary summit in London last year. For some, these developments were to be expected. In March 2017, a few months into the presidency of Donald J. Trump, then NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller delivered an important speech about NATO's "effective multilateralism." The message? NATO represents a high standard of multilateral security cooperation with an unparalleled integrated military structure; global problems require global solutions, which includes NATO working with other multilateral organizations such as the UN and European Union; and NATO has been successful since its founding in 1949 due to its ability to adapt as the world has changed. She concluded, "In turbulent times, NATO's 'effective multilateralism' is more essential than ever" (NATO 2017a).

The address could not have contrasted more sharply, with the now infamous 2016 election campaign remarks of then presidential candidate Trump. The message? The UN is a political game, NATO is bordering on obsolescence, and European allies are taking advantage of US goodwill without paying their fair share for American protection (Parker 2016). As president, Donald Trump has shown little sign of toning down this message. And he has little patience for those who disagree. He reportedly tried (unsuccessfully) to have the career diplomat Gottemoeller removed (Rogin 2016).

At the July 2018 NATO summit, the president once more threatened to withdraw the United States from the Atlantic Alliance unless fellow allies increased their defence spending (Trump 2018a). Two months later at the UN General Assembly, Trump would preach the sanctity of state sovereignty, declaring, "America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism ... America's policy of principled realism means we will not be held hostage to old dogmas, discredited ideologies, and so-called experts" (Ward 2018).

Not surprisingly, three years into the Trump presidency many within NATO as well as outside it seek answers on this perspective. At its extreme, a 71st birthday aside, does the Trump presidency represent an existential threat to multilateral NATO from within? And if so, what, if anything, could or should be done about it?

Questions surrounding internal threats to NATO longevity are compounded with intensified discussion about external existential challenges to the alliance and the US-led post-war liberal international order (Buzan 2018; Ikenberry 2018). The 2017 US *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and 2018 US *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) proclaim a return to great power competition (United States 2017, 2018). Authoritarian and mercantilist Russia and China figure as the principal protagonists challenging American primacy. A recent RAND study nonetheless sees the evolving competition as essentially between China and the United States, “with secondary, largely regional contestations with other actors, including Russia” (Mazarr et al. 2018, 18).



We need to assess the major internal and external challenges facing the Atlantic Alliance.

While the statement was scant on details, NATO and its member states for the first time formally recognized that impending reality at their December 2019 London summit: “We recognize that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance” (NATO 2019a).

For an alliance of 71 years, we need to assess the major internal and external challenges facing the Atlantic Alliance. The former are tied to the challenge of navigating the Trump presidency, though the crux of this issue has less to do with the person himself and more to do with the structural factors that underlie his message, which will continue irrespective of who wins the 2020 election. The latter are often mentioned in reference to Russia. Yet, as this paper will address, the strategic external challenge posed by a rising China should be a central focus. The post-COVID-19 international order should only hasten this orientation.

NATO's internal challenge

Trump: Symptom or cause?

President Trump's now commonplace, ill-tempered tweets or unexpected public outbursts provide no shortage of headlines for popular media outlets: "Trump ditches diplomacy, makes NATO summit all about deals" (Williams 2018); "Trump's message to NATO: We're the shmucks paying for the whole thing" (Calamur 2018); "Will Trump destroy NATO and every other American alliance?" (Waldman 2018). A cursory reading of such one-liners would suggest that Trump alone is the reason for turning contemporary international politics on its head, including multilateral approaches to Europe's defence.

Others have probed still further. Reputable psychologists, for example, have weighed in declaring, "We believe that Trump suffers from several psychological pathologies that render him a clear and present danger to the world" (Sachs and Lee 2018). An entire Brookings study devoted to comparing Trump's polarizing politics to his predecessors' concludes, "After Trump, the presidents perceived as the most polarizing include Abraham Lincoln, who ranks at the very top of the overall greatness scale, and James Buchanan, who joins Trump at the very bottom" (Eady, Vaughn, and Rottinghaus 2018).

Others have been more favourable in their assessment. Conrad Black's biography of America's 45th president asserts, "[Donald Trump's] pursuit of America's national interest – with no evangelical or Wilsonian notions of purifying other countries – has been successful to date" (Black 2018). Still more have chosen to draw parallels between Trump and other political leaders who have sought avowedly to change the course of history (and NATO along with it), such as French President Charles de Gaulle, who withdrew France from NATO's military structures in the 1960s due to perceived American excesses (Bosco 2017).

But whether one likes him or loathes him, worries about him or dismisses him, what if "Trump the messenger" is not the real challenge? What if it is "Trump the message" that demands the real attention? In other words, what if the current disruption to NATO and multilateralism is not Trump-dependent but representative of acute structural changes underway in the United States for some time now? In policy matters one should be careful not to exaggerate the role of single personalities. So, in sum, what if Trump is not the cause, but rather a symptom of much wider changes afoot?

Some compelling arguments to that effect have emerged. If correct, it is here where veritable answers to questions surrounding the durability of NATO lie. One such study is David Lake's 2018 presidential address at the American Political Science Association (Lake 2018), which has observations about US

legitimacy and upheaval in America that offer a useful starting point to help the NATO alliance navigate the Trump era.

In constructing *Pax Americana* in the aftermath of World War II, US authority derived from a high degree of legitimacy among Western European and Northeast Asian allies. “Absent legitimacy ... any international order and especially the dominant state that underlies it is likely to encounter resistance from subordinates who fail to benefit given their policy preferences” (Lake 2018, 10). In this regard, Lake asserts that three types of legitimacy – each mutually reinforcing – helped to consolidate the US-led post-war order: (1) performance legitimacy (mutual gains); (2) principled legitimacy (shared values); and (3) procedural legitimacy (established practices of decision-making).

“US authority derived from a high degree of legitimacy among Western European and Northeast Asian allies.”

As far as NATO is concerned, *performance legitimacy* stemmed from its historic role in collective defence and deterrence against Soviet expansion into Western Europe. NATO also was central to two of America’s vital geopolitical interests: ensuring its “continental integrity” by safeguarding the “sea and air approaches to America’s eastern seaboard and preventing the Eurasian landmass from being dominated by a single power” (Murphy 2017, 20). Moreover, NATO’s *principled legitimacy* derived from a common moral vision grounded in the advocacy of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. These tenets are enshrined in the preamble to the alliance’s founding 1949 *Washington Treaty*. Lastly, NATO’s *procedural legitimacy* sprung from multilateral decision-making procedures grounded in consultation and consensus. John Ikenberry sums up the approach: “At the heart of the American post-war order was an ongoing trade-off: the United States would agree to operate within an institutionalized political process and, in return, its partners [would] agree [to] be willing participants” (Mazarr et al. 2018, 10).

Since Trump’s election in 2016, all three pillars of legitimacy have been called into question in ways hitherto unseen. Uncertain presidential remarks surrounding the US commitment to NATO’s Article 5 (collective defence) in newer member states like the Baltics and Montenegro, the public dressing down of European and Canadian leaders over defence spending in May 2017, or the pointed criticism of President Barack Obama rather than Russian President Vladimir Putin for allowing Crimea’s annexation are but three examples. The

fact that the traditional “leader of the free world” is the perpetrator makes such pronouncements even more remarkable. As Lake and others explain, however, the reasons for them do not rest exclusively with the president, but also with power dynamics inside the United States to which he gives voice or reacts on behalf of contemporary America.

Inside the United States, the rise of populism propelled Trump to office. This populist constituency, we are told, is made up of the (often uneducated) disenfranchised when it comes to globalization and technological change. Its members harbour an innate distrust of the current political system, which they want not just shaken but recast. “Trump may be the angry voice of America First, but he is merely the front man for this new alignment of interests in the Republican Party and American politics more generally” (Lake 2018, 14). A disdain for political elites and newfound adherence to economic nationalism are key characteristics of this realignment.

NATO clearly is not immune to its effects. Former Republican President George W. Bush might have disagreed with several NATO members such as Canada over the Iraq invasion of 2003, but then it was a case (albeit serious) of “agree to disagree.” The enduring value of the NATO alliance – an unspoken American bipartisan consensus – was never seriously questioned (Laidi 2018). But no longer. Among Trump supporters, the European establishment within NATO is regarded with as much circumspection, if not derision, as the established politicians or so-called “experts” at home. And what is more, as many American taxpayers question, why support an alliance that secures a faraway European continent viewed as protectionist to American trade, made all the worse by the fact that the US foots most of the bill?

This is the message that Trump brings to NATO. And while it is perhaps unprecedented in motivation and mode of delivery, we should not be surprised. As a former Canadian ambassador to the United States once remarked, “‘Consultation with allies’ is apt to mean in US terms, briefing allies, lecturing allies, sometimes pressuring allies” (Iverson 2018).

Navigating the internal challenge

Since the Trump administration assumed office, the message coming from Washington has no doubt shaken the multilateral foundations of NATO. But has it caused them to crumble? While the rhetoric might lead the casual observer to answer in the affirmative, the reality is the opposite. Unlike the fate of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, or the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the US has not withdrawn from NATO. And Europeans’ defence spending commitments to NATO

are on an upward trajectory similarly unseen since the fall of the Berlin Wall. These developments stem from ongoing concern on both sides of the Atlantic with NATO's performance and principled legitimacy safeguarded through some adjustments to procedural approaches within the alliance.

Performance legitimacy

Outcomes matter and they must matter to both the leader and followers. Contemporary NATO under US leadership is no exception in this regard. Since Moscow's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea, several NATO member states (e.g., the Baltics, Poland) now regard Russia as an existential threat, with the US security guarantee under NATO (Article 5) more relevant than ever. And they have gradually heeded US calls for increased defence spending to the 2 percent of GDP threshold consensually agreed by NATO member states at their 2014 Wales Summit (Defence Investment Pledge). According to NATO's 2018 annual report, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland (alongside Britain and Greece) fulfilled that commitment.

Indicative of alliance solidarity, spending was up across most other member states as well. According to *Jane's Defence Budget* released by *IHS Markit*, "As 24 of the 29 NATO members increased their defence budget in 2018, the decline in the NATO share of global spending has stalled ... The recommitment to defence in Western states means the global balance of expenditure between NATO and non-NATO markets is now more likely to shift from the mid-2020s" (Macdonald et al. 2018). Or, as the 2019 London summit declaration noted, "Non-US defence expenditure has grown for five consecutive years; over 130 billion US dollars more is being invested in defence" (NATO 2019a).

If Ottawa and European capitals are tempted to use the financial strain of the COVID-19 pandemic to reverse this trend, they will have to think again. Addressing the issue of defence budgets, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, whom President Trump recently described as "his biggest fan in the whole world" due to their close working relationship (Wingrove 2020), remarked in April:

The challenge is that the threats we saw before the COVID-19 crisis, the potential terrorist threats, a more resurgent Russia, cyberthreats, but also the shifting global balance of power with the likes of China – all these challenges are still there ... We don't have the luxury to say that we either address the health crisis or security challenges. We need to be able to do both at the same time. (Gramer 2020)

Furthermore, of the four NATO multinational battlegroups stationed in the Baltics and Poland to deter Russian aggression, it is noteworthy that following Brexit, three are led by non-EU allies – US, Canada, and Britain.² For those

wishing to speculate about prospects for the EU replacing NATO in reaction to Trump rhetoric, the foregoing observation about battlegroups provides ample indication that the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is simply not up to the task of Europe's collective defence. Internal EU differences over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic cast even more doubt on prospects for so-called "European Strategic Autonomy" from the United States (Ortega 2020, 8). The situation suggests that any attempt by Communist China to drive a wedge between Europe and North America will surely wither on the vine when practical self-defence calculations come into play. What is more, and in a point to be returned to in the next part, any signs of Sino-Russian defence cooperation in the European theatre will likely be met with trepidation by Europeans, and by an America and Canada, moreover, that remain committed to Europe in a new era of global competition. Campaign oratory and tweets aside, Trump's official policy says so.

“Sino-Russian defence cooperation in the European theatre will likely be met with trepidation by Europeans.”

Of the three prioritized lines of effort outlined in the 2018 US NDS, the second is about strengthening alliances, including NATO. There is good reason for this emphasis:

The NATO alliance and the American hub-and-spoke system in Asia are comprised of secondary states that provide the US with access to critical locations and augment its capabilities in various ways ... Clearly, the United States cannot forget the role of secondary powers in augmenting American strength. Without allies, no great power can hope to win a round of competition and conflict. (Cropsey and McGrath 2018, 22)

Words have been backed up with concrete action. An October 2019 report by the Heritage Foundation provides a comprehensive catalogue of the multifarious ways in which America has increased its commitment to European defence, including: the reconstitution of US Second Fleet (collocated with the new NATO Joint Force Command Norfolk) to address increased Russian submarine activity in the Atlantic; the placement of Ballistic Missile Defence assets in Poland, Spain, Romania and Turkey; more US marines in Norway; and more prepositioned US military stocks and improved infrastructure across Europe. Many initiatives are funded through the Congress-approved European Deterrence Initiative, which under Trump has witnessed close to

a twofold increase (\$US6.5 billion in 2019) compared to the last year of Obama's presidency (Heritage 2019). Moreover, before the COVID-19 pandemic stalled preparations, Europe was on the cusp of the largest deployment of US troops to the continent in more than 25 years for the *Defender Europe 2020* exercise. Elements of the exercise recently got underway taking advantage of the over 6000 soldiers and 3000 pieces of military equipment that had already been deployed from the continental United States earlier this year (Springer 2020).

So reports (Crowley and Barnes 2020) concerning Trump's decision to cap US forces permanently stationed in Germany at 25,000 must be considered in this broader context. Moreover, even if it were to translate into something more than a rhetorical threat against Berlin "to pay more for defense or else" (a line that may indeed play well for Trump on the US campaign trail) some of the troops would likely be redeployed to Poland. It is an open secret that Trump favours Polish President Andrzej Duda over German Chancellor Angela Merkel, not least because he has honoured NATO's Defence Investment Pledge. Warsaw has been in talks with Washington for some time to further increase America's military footprint on Polish territory. As one analyst put it in January, "Trump would love to make it a zero-sum game where you take assets out of Germany and put them in Poland 'to show the Germans'" (Abrams 2020).

Wherever the US forward presence is to be found, it serves not only to safeguard NATO's European members, but also America's two eternal interests mentioned previously. No wonder then that French President Emmanuel Macron's November 2018 musings about a pan-European army being constituted to "protect ourselves with respect to China, Russia and even the United States of America" (AFP 2018) met with the ire of the American president (France24 2018). The French leader's remarks were made in response to the US administration's public consideration to withdraw from the INF treaty.

Whatever Paris's views may be of that arms control treaty, however, the US president's indignation stemmed from France's apparent lapse in acknowledging America's sustained and in many respects increased security umbrella over Europe. Furthermore, it is widely held that Washington's decision to withdraw from the INF treaty was not so much about responding to Russian pre-existing violations in a European context, but rather to counterbalance a rising China elsewhere in Eurasia. China is not beholden to the treaty's missile constraints (Bercuson 2019). In this regard, Trump's frustration with Macron might equally stem from one European's seeming disregard for America's necessary *global* policy calculations and responsibilities as the preeminent world power.

Such episodes are not new to the alliance and have caused tension in the past but not its demise. There is no reason to expect otherwise this time

around. Five months since Macron made his remarks, NATO foreign ministers reaffirmed their commitment to Europe's and North America's "indivisible security" (NATO 2019b).

Principled legitimacy

Principled legitimacy derives from shared values or norms through which the leader promotes, and followers accept, a moral vision that justifies the mantle of leadership (Lake 2018, 9). As mentioned previously, a shared transatlantic commitment to democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law has been part of NATO's DNA since its inception. Despite the US president's penchant for transactional approaches to policy-making (which in the NATO context has led to the rise in European defence spending), principled legitimacy also has been receiving considerable attention lately. This is particularly the case with Europeans and Canadians reminding their American counterparts of its importance – and in terms they can relate to.

Upon Trump's election, German Chancellor Merkel's congratulatory letter reportedly concluded with an unprecedented call to US and German unity in defending NATO core values: "I offer the next President of the United States close cooperation on the basis of those values" (*Der Spiegel* 2018). And upon being named 2018's "diplomat of the year" by the influential American publication *Foreign Policy*, then Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland made a very modern appeal to icons and iconic moments of US history to make a similar point:

Remember those great words of Gettysburg. Government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. Preserving Lincoln's vision means striking back. It means resisting foreign efforts to hijack democracies through cyber meddling and propaganda. It means outshining the other models and encouraging those who are on the fence (*Foreign Policy* 2018).

Furthermore, in words echoed in London in December last year, at the 2018 NATO Brussels summit, a separate *Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity* was issued. It began by specifically recalling that "NATO guarantees the security of our territory and populations, our freedom, and the values we share – including democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law" (NATO 2018a). Such statements serve as important reminders of NATO as a multilateral community of values, an "alliance in being" to which it is sometimes referred, as much as a military collective defence alliance "in action."

NATO's democratic credentials, shared by the EU, are not mere words. They have practical effect and contrast sharply with the authoritarian models of governance in practice in contemporary Russia and China. That is why even during episodic periods of transatlantic tension, musings about prospects for

a Sino-European strategic alternative to the US-European one face inherent limitations. After decades of continental bloodshed, Europeans have for over 70 years now benefited from the de-nationalization of defence policy-making through NATO. The Dutch scholar Rob de Wijk explains:

Over the course of half a century, European states created a kind of Kantian post-modern pacific union grounded in the idea that democratic states do not fight wars against each other (democratic peace theory) ... Indeed the present incarnation of the system, as embodied in the EU and the pacifying role of NATO, has some fundamental characteristics, including influence on domestic affairs, the obsolescence of force as an instrument for resolving disputes in Europe, and acceptance of jointly imposed rules of behaviour. (de Wijk 2015, 32-33)

To be clear: the shared values noted above do not render the foreign and security policy of NATO members beyond criticism. They are also self-interested states pursuing material benefits. However, the point is that a regular feature of restraint is observed in military policy and action, and the rule of law guides domestic and foreign decisions. Moreover, the objectives sought in defence policy reflect the public policy choices in domestic policy. NATO allies in Europe and North America renounce territorial expansion and aggression, while upholding respect for the rules-based international order (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016, 240).

[China] is the only rising power that is genuinely illiberal and authoritarian.

In this new era of great power competition, it is also important to acknowledge the strong “democratic values” connection between NATO and its so-called “global partners” in China’s immediate neighbourhood. Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea are all constitutional liberal democracies. Their foreign policies have an element of legitimacy and electoral accountability that matches the common norm in the alliance (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016, 240). This fact facilitates a closeness of relations between them and Europeans (and North Americans) which Communist China will simply never enjoy. Some analysts have gone so far as to implore, “To maintain the unity of the [NATO] alliance, we urge that the normative element serve as the common thread, as it represents the starkest delineation between the West and China” (Bechná and Thayer 2016, 77).

Similar petitions have surfaced in projections for a post-COVID-19 global order. An April 2020 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies titled “The US-China Race and the Fate of Transatlantic Relations” recently implored, “A transatlantic approach toward China should be underpinned by liberal values, including democratic freedoms, rule of law, freedom of expression and the process and support for human rights. Both sides of the Atlantic must make soft power competition a central part of their approach” (Ortega 2020, 3).

Similarly, it is worthwhile to recall that while China may be the largest and leading non-Western developing country, in contrast to Brazil and India for example, it is the only rising power that is genuinely illiberal and authoritarian (Ikenberry 2018, 27). A recent RAND study suggests that this situation places the United States at a tremendous competitive advantage if it can retain its position as the leader of an informal coalition of mostly value-sharing democracies, which includes NATO and the EU (Mazarr et al. 2018, 17). No wonder then that Trump lately moved to designate Brazil a “major non-NATO ally” (United States 2019) and that NATO’s secretary general took the occasion of a 2019 visit to Washington to open the possibility of Brazil becoming a formal alliance partner like Colombia (Brunnstrom 2019).

Procedural legitimacy

NATO has come to represent a dense set of connections among the member states in terms of defence policy-making, collective defence and security efforts, and decision-making. In the alliance, member states have added to their common democratic values an international type of regime by which they are committed to consult each other’s positions on a range of matters and to develop collective policies and actions on three core issues: collective defence, crisis-management, and cooperative security (partnerships). The NATO governance “regime” in this sense means a set of decision rules and interaction procedures that are added to facilitate the allies’ commitment to procure collective decision-making and defence (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016, 243). In Europe, this serves to legitimate US leadership and its security guarantee.

To paraphrase Lake for NATO purposes, violations of established practice call into question the legitimacy of US preeminence, whereas following the rules legitimates US leadership within the alliance (Lake 2018, 9). When President Trump appeared to challenge “the rules” early on in his tenure, Europeans and Canadians (and Americans) soon responded by shoring up procedural legitimacy. The following part explains how.

President Trump’s affront to traditional diplomacy has been referred to before and on July 10, 2018, one day prior to the NATO summit of heads of state and government, he took to Twitter once more: “Many countries in NATO, which we are expected to defend, are not only short of their current commitment

of 2% (which is low), but are also delinquent for many years in payments that have not been made. Will they reimburse the U.S.?” (Trump 2018b).

However, in contrast to the run-up to the June G7, when Twitter barbs over trade were exchanged between Trump and Macron, for example, the European airwaves remained largely muted or restrained. Serious diplomacy would be conducted in traditional fashion behind closed doors while the president’s inclination for public drama in giving voice to his political base back home would be carefully accommodated. A hastily called news conference on day two of the summit allowed the president to declare US victory in convincing NATO allies to spend more on defence. But there would be no repeat spectacle of an American president publicly lecturing Canadian and European heads of state or government over the same issue as experienced at the NATO leaders’ meeting in Brussels the year before. As cited earlier, a similar lecturing did occur at an unscheduled meeting; yet on this occasion it was far away from public view.

“ *Serious diplomacy would be conducted in traditional fashion behind closed doors.* ”

Furthermore, NATO policy pronouncements are traditionally contained in summit declarations and in the summer of 2018 great lengths were taken to ensure that this practice remained intact. As early as mid-June, then US National Security Advisor John Bolton had instructed US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison to secure agreement of the declaration before the heads of state and government arrived. “Two senior European officials and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and then Defence Secretary Jim Mattis were also keen to avoid another confrontation similar to the G7” (Cooper and Barnes 2018). This approach allowed key decisions deemed important to US defence policy and broadly supported by European allies and Canada to go forward without risking last minute derailment: a membership invitation for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (North Macedonia); a new NATO command focused on the Atlantic (Joint Force Command Norfolk); a new Cyberspace Operations Center; and the so-called “four 30s” – the collective pledge to provide 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat vessels ready to use in 30 days principally in view of the resurgent Russian threat in the European theatre.

Cognizant of the overarching concern of the president and his fellow American populists on defence spending, a reasserted commitment to increase it was profiled in the summit declaration's third paragraph compared the 33rd one in the previous 2016 Warsaw summit communiqué. Only the broad elements of the draft declaration were presented to the US president, and it was consensually endorsed without obstacle, allowing President Macron to publicly pronounce, "We are all leaving this summit stronger because the President of the United States of America reaffirmed his commitment and his desire to have a strong NATO" (Erlanger, Davis, and Rogers 2018).

By maintaining a good measure of procedural legitimacy, NATO emerged from Brussels largely intact to deliver on its performance and principled legitimacy. If there were any doubts, the previously referenced *Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity* issued by all 29 member states endeavoured to put them to rest: "Our alliance embodies the enduring and unbreakable transatlantic bond between Europe and North America to stand together against threats and challenges from any direction" (NATO 2018a).

NATO's external challenge

Russia or China?

If the Trump administration and the EU as a possible alternative do not appear to pose a serious existential challenge to NATO, the question remains: What of external actors in this new era of great power competition? As discussed earlier, for many NATO member states supported by their peers, Russia under President Putin poses an existential challenge to the Atlantic Alliance. No surprise, therefore, that the just quoted paragraph of the 2018 *Declaration on Transatlantic Security* followed immediately with the statement:

We face a prolonged period of instability. Russia is challenging the rules-based international order by destabilising Ukraine including through the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea; it is violating international law, conducting provocative military activities, and attempting to undermine our institutions and sow disunity. (NATO 2018a)

For the foreseeable future, it is reasonable to speculate that given geographic proximity to Europe and Moscow's posture, Russia will remain the alliance's (and the EU's) primary security preoccupation as far as inter-state relations are concerned. But as observed previously, this regional dynamic is likely to be played out against the backdrop of the much larger, global one between the two principal competitors, China and the United States.

That backdrop increasingly has been brought to the fore by the COVID-19 crisis. For North Americans and Europeans, the pandemic's disruption has rendered into stark relief their supply chain vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China. Compounded by growing concern with Beijing's alleged disinformation regarding the virus's origins and the West's response to it, the geopolitical atmosphere surrounding China is shifting. The US Congressional Research Service's latest assessment of transatlantic relations contends, "Attempts by China to control the COVID-19 narrative through disinformation could backfire and result in increasingly strained relations with Europe" (Archick 2020, 17). Reports of potential China-backed cyberhacking of Western laboratories working on a vaccine have done little to alter the current negative trend (Tunney 2020).

At worst, some have described the pandemic as a "casus belli for Cold War 2.0" (Unjhwala 2020) or at least "Cold War 1.5" (Johnson and Gramer 2020, 3-4). As recently as May, President Trump mused publicly that the United States "could cut off the whole relationship" with China (Zeballos-Roig 2020). Once more he was expressing what has been described elsewhere as "peacetime populist urges, exacerbated by a global coronavirus pandemic that has shaken decades of faith in the wisdom of international supply chains and the virtues of the global economy" (Johnson and Gramer 2020, 2). The administration already has been floating the idea of a so-called "Economic Prosperity Network" of like-minded countries and companies to decouple them from dependency on China.

The sentiment, which in an American election year appears to be broadly bipartisan, has raised eyebrows in Beijing. In the same month that Trump made his remarks, *Reuters* reported on an analysis sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of State Security for the senior leadership in Beijing. It counselled increased preparedness for armed confrontation with an emboldened United States. The reason? Courtesy of the pandemic, global anti-Chinese sentiment led by Washington is the strongest since the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy crackdown of 1989 (Reuters 2020). Outside Chinese and US circles, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has similarly presaged a post-COVID, bipolar world unbound by economic interdependence: "What we have now through the beginnings of economic decoupling is the removal of that economic ballast in the US-China relationship, which has historically differentiated it from the characteristics of the US-Soviet relationship in the Cold War" (Johnson and Gramer 2020, 18-19).

Going forward, is it feasible for NATO to be isolated from this global power dynamic involving its most important member?

To be sure, as the alliance's attention has focused on the threat posed by a resurgent, autocratic Russia, NATO has paid much less regard to China. Unlike the US NSS and NDS, for example, the 2016 and 2018 NATO summit declarations contained no reference to the country – and certainly not as a strategic

competitor. Where NATO has engaged on China, it has been in the context of largely inconsequential military-to-military talks, which began in 2010 and resumed in 2018 following a two-year hiatus (NATO 2018b).

Yet China has steadily appeared in NATO's political calculations as well. On a 2017 visit to Tokyo, for example, NATO's secretary general made the point of expressing solidarity with the alliance's Asia-Pacific partners:

In a globalized world ... we are not immune to events elsewhere. Economically. Politically. Or Militarily. Including in the Asia-Pacific region ... The Pacific may literally be on the other side of the world from NATO Headquarters in Brussels. But that doesn't mean we are not affected by what happens here. In fact, two NATO Allies are Pacific Nations. We also have close partners in the region whose security matters to us ... And with whom we share strategic interests. Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Our security is bound up with your security [sic]. (NATO 2017b)

The statement was made in the context of other remarks during the same visit. Those remarks contained a veiled reference to China by registering NATO's concern about territorial tensions in the East and South China Seas as well as its opposition to unilateral coercive actions that could alter the status quo and increase regional pressures. "Maritime disputes should be settled peacefully in accordance with international law. We are committed to maintaining a rules-based maritime order, including respect for freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea" (NATO 2017c). Recently, momentum for an even more mature policy debate within NATO about China, including its relationship to European security, has been gathering steam.

A NATO policy on China is under development, of which the 2019 London summit declaration's unprecedented reference to China is a harbinger. It is reportedly looking at six main issues: "cybersecurity; military deployments and Chinese military strategy; Afghanistan; Russia-China relations; Chinese investments in European critical infrastructure and strategic industries; and the impact of China on the rules-based global order" (Ortega 2020, 10). The Trump administration has been at the forefront of advocating for a stronger NATO approach towards China from within the alliance. At the 2019 foreign ministers' meeting mentioned previously, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo remarked, "We must adapt our alliance to confront emerging threats ... whether that's Russian aggression, uncontrolled migration, cyber attacks, threats to energy security, Chinese strategic competition, including technology and 5G, and many other issues" (Wroughton and Brunnstrom 2019).

The US think tank community increasingly has been following in lockstep with the emergent White House line. For example, Carnegie Europe has recently declared that it is time for NATO to talk about China: "Most Chi-

na-related issues are much better off addressed in other formats, such as the EU. Yet NATO – as the central military and political bond across the Atlantic – must also pay more attention from a civilian and a security point of view” (Brattberg 2019). It went on to catalogue a number of security concerns that should preoccupy the Atlantic Alliance, including: sensitive European advanced dual-use technology transfers to China; China’s growing economic influence in NATO member states and partner countries (e.g., Balkans) that can be channelled into political leverage; China’s efforts to harness artificial intelligence for political influence and for military purposes, coupled with Beijing’s predilection for exporting such technologies to other countries beyond the Asia-Pacific; the potential use of Chinese 5G platforms for espionage, which could undermine information-sharing and interoperability among NATO member states; growing Chinese-controlled European infrastructure that could conceivably be used to restrict US military operations; a potential Sino-China strategic nexus in the European theatre, illustrated by their recent joint naval drills in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Baltic Sea (Brattberg 2019).

The last issue has in fact already garnered the attention of individual NATO members. As the Chief of Staff of the Spanish Navy Admiral Teodoro Lopez Calderon remarked, “It is a matter of fact that we need to take [Chinese presence] into account in assessing the changed security environment. It also means improving our capability to deter possible future aggression” (Grady 2018). In the run-up to the 2019 summit, Secretary General Stoltenberg also noted China’s increasing proximity to the alliance: “We see them [Chinese] in Africa, we see them in the Arctic, we see them in cyber space and China now has the second-largest defence budget in the world. So of course, this has some consequences for NATO” (Ellyatt 2019).

Navigating the external challenge

Strategic vigilance at home, crisis management abroad

Any future NATO policy on China will by default be multilaterally negotiated and consensually decided, likely in consultation with the EU, given the significant overlap in European memberships in both organizations. It is safe to say that those member states with strong historic or geographic links to the Asia-Pacific region, coupled with globally deployable – principally maritime – forces, will shape the debate alongside the United States. For example, as a 2020 commentary in Washington-based *The Diplomat* recently observed:

... as leaders in the NATO alliance, the United States and France should develop a stronger bilateral understanding of shared threats in multiple regions. Increased coordination in the Indo-Pacific is critical ... One shared concern is over military basing. While China's economic and strategic activities are not as developed in Europe as they are in the Indo-Pacific, and are therefore not arousing as much suspicion, it is clear that France is concerned about maintaining its ability to operate from bases, as well as disruptions to international law. (Samaranayake 2020)

That said, official word from European capitals on NATO, China, and the Pacific is coy. In 2018, France launched its strategy for the "Indo-Pacific." In a veiled reference to China, the strategy stated:

Multilateralism is increasingly challenged, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Some major powers are choosing postures that overtly favour power-based relations, generating anxiety and unpredictability worldwide. The growing polarisation of the region threatens the upholding of the multilateral order that enabled the economic prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. (France 2018)

A permanent military presence in its territories there and military partnerships and arms agreements with countries such as Australia, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore profiled significantly in the strategy's avowed response. Mention of the NATO alliance, however, appeared only once and in a very general reference to building up France's cyber defence capabilities.

In a similar vein, there is much speculation (and influential think tank advice) about a post-Brexit Britain's enhanced forward military presence in the Asia-Pacific in the context of its current "Integrated Review" of its foreign and defence policy. Yet, when it comes to addressing an assertive China, the public debate seems principally focused on a "Global Britain" shoring up its bilateral security arrangements with the likes of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea, or multilateral ones like the Five Power Defence Arrangements (United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore; Nouwens 2020). While Commonwealth ties are highlighted, mention of any NATO implications rarely appear beyond tangential references like the one recently proffered by the Policy Exchange: "A sustainable and regular UK defence role within an Indo-Pacific framework would likely enhance British relevance and leadership in transatlantic relations" (Patalano 2019, 24).

NATO's other significant "Pacific member state" – Canada – also has shown increased interest in the Asia-Pacific region as of late, including force deployments to China's backyard. Transits of Royal Canadian Navy ships through the Taiwan Strait in 2019 (Wyeth 2019), for example, or their contributions to US-Japanese military drills in the Western Pacific a year earlier are notable examples. As the commander of the frigate *HMCS Calgary* remarked on the

latter occasion, “There’s an opportunity for Canada to demonstrate that we have experience working with allies within coalitions ... It’s a steady progression toward a mutual agreement to make sure we can share information, share logistics and be able to cooperate at a moment’s notice should our navies require” (Kelly 2018). However, when it comes to such naval assets one day contributing to a possible NATO presence or operation in the region, the word from Ottawa – like Paris and London – has been largely muted.

The reasons for Canadian and European reticence are perhaps not difficult to ascertain. For an alliance whose *Strategic Concept* affirms its preparedness “to develop political dialogue and practical cooperation with any nations and relevant organisations across the globe that share our interest in peaceful international relations” (NATO 2010), it is in not in NATO’s interest to unnecessarily provoke Beijing. Cooperative security is after all an avowed core task of the alliance alongside collective defence and crisis management.

“ *It is in not in NATO’s interest to unnecessarily provoke Beijing.* ”

Behind the scenes, however, every NATO watcher knows that there are inherent limits here given the lack of shared values and Chinese authoritarianism. Going forward in this new age of great power competition where Sino-American conflict is a very real possibility, the policy focus of NATO strategists will of necessity be greater vigilance and crisis preparedness with respect to China. The post-COVID-19 international order should undergird this posture.

In the first order, it goes without saying that greater strategic vigilance with respect to any Chinese activities that could potentially infringe upon the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area – particularly if undertaken in concert with Russia – may be expected in any future China policy. As we have already seen, collective defence is the avowed bedrock of the transatlantic alliance regardless of those who would choose to challenge it. In conventional, geographic terms, this means defence of the Euro-Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer, according to NATO’s founding treaty. Since 2014 and 2018 respectively, it also means defence against cyber and hybrid attacks. And in 2019 outer space was added to the equation when it was officially declared a NATO operational domain.³ Second, a contributory crisis management role for NATO in support of its indispensable ally, the United States, also cannot be discounted from alliance policy calculations about China. The reasons may be less obvious compared to collective defence and, therefore, warrant more explanation. This last part unpacks them.

Since the early 1990s, NATO has expanded its security portfolio beyond collective defence of the Euro-Atlantic area to include over a quarter of a century of expertise in global crisis management from the land, air, and sea in places as far afield as the Indian Ocean (counter-piracy), Libya (“Responsibility to Protect” against acts of genocide), and Afghanistan (counter-terrorism, stabilization, and reconstruction). NATO’s crisis management vocation is summed up in its overarching *Strategic Concept*:

Crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can pose a direct threat to the security of alliance territory and populations. NATO will therefore engage, where possible and when necessary, to prevent crises, manage crises, stabilize post-conflict situations and support reconstruction ... Where conflict prevention proves unsuccessful, NATO will be prepared and capable to manage ongoing hostilities. (NATO 2010)

The question about potential NATO involvement in preventing or responding to future conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region – whether over the Taiwan Strait, East or South China Seas – is a legitimate one, despite pronouncements on the part of the secretary general that for the time being at least NATO has no intention to move into the region (Ellyatt 2019).

The extent to which an increased NATO engagement could have an impact on the alliance network in the region is a worthwhile consideration. After all, some of the closest non-NATO allies of the United States – like Australia, Japan, South Korea – are in the Pacific. Greater NATO involvement could help strengthen American leadership of an informal coalition of value-sharing liberal democracies cited previously, assuaging some of the doubt that has emerged among allied capitals in Asia about US security guarantees. This author also has advocated previously for the establishment of a “NATO Asia-Pacific Forum” bringing together the alliance’s current bilateral partners (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea) in a multilateral format:

NATO as an organizational dynamic offers an important set of functions that are not found in Asia, not even in the most defense-oriented forums such as East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) ... A functional relationship between NATO and these Global Partners would give the latter a dynamic to construct a cooperative security regime based on collective actions ... In the NATO Asia-Pacific Forum, we can foresee how the “values and norms” perspective and the “technical and pragmatic” ... perspective could be joined. (Moens and Smith-Windsor 2016, 244-45)

Even if a NATO Asia-Pacific Forum proves too ambitious, the question remains: What would it take for NATO to intervene militarily if things “went south” and turned violent in the Asia-Pacific? What if one of NATO’s democratic partners in the region was (or felt) militarily coerced and threatened

by the People's Liberation Army forces? Or, what if the US called on European and Canadian support to visibly demonstrate freedom of navigation and overflight rights, or even to support it and US regional allies involved in an armed conflict with China over unlawful seizure of disputed territory? What would it take to move NATO from rhetorical support to actual crisis management in the Asia-Pacific just as it has embarked upon in so many other parts of the world since the 1990s?

To answer these questions, we must turn to five *de facto* criteria that figure in the consensual NATO policy calculus when it comes to crisis interventions: (1) values and interests; (2) political will; (3) regional support; (4) military capability; (5) international legitimacy.

First, NATO is unlikely to intervene if its own values or interests are not at stake. However, judging from the secretary general's remarks, it is fair to say that the alliance's values or interests could become at stake in the event of a threat or eruption of violence in the East and South China Seas – if such an occurrence limits rights of international overflight and navigation, or involves unlawful territorial grabs or coercion on the part of an autocratic state vis-à-vis liberal democratic partners.

Second, since all NATO decisions are taken by consensus, the alliance will not mount a crisis management response unless every ally agrees to it. Getting a crisis issue on the table is not too difficult. NATO's founding treaty provides for it in Article 4. As a result, if the US felt particularly concerned with developments in the South China Sea, for example, it could instigate deliberations with European allies and Canada at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. However, moving from discussion to decision might be trickier. With different threat perceptions and priorities across the alliance, a decision to intervene cannot be taken for granted. Some observers might even be tempted to go so far as to suggest that with the legacy of over a decade in Afghanistan, many NATO member states are simply too tired to contemplate more out-of-area operations.

But, NATO is still in Afghanistan, and the same conservative line of reasoning was heard in 2011 over Libya. Yet, enough political will was mustered to launch NATO's *Operation Unified Protector* (OUP) there. And here the Libya example offers the most plausible way forward in the event of a crisis in the Asia-Pacific. In the Libya case, several member states, such as Germany, did not wish (or in other instances were simply not able) to contribute to the mission. Nevertheless, they did not disagree with the prospect of other NATO allies doing so with the imprimatur of the moral authority of the alliance. Thus, OUP was endorsed by all member states, enabling a smaller air and maritime coalition within NATO (commanded by a Canadian general and operationally led by France and the United Kingdom with US support) to conduct the operation, while taking full advantage of the alliance's standing military structures and arrangements.

Third, it has come to pass that NATO is generally desirous of the support of regional states or organizations before launching a crisis management operation. Such backing can involve the invitation of an affected state for intervention or a regional organization openly endorsing outside intervention or even supporting it directly. Here again the Libya case is instructive. While the African Union was divided on the issue of NATO intervention, the Arab League offered vital political support (and some of its members, forces) to help tip the balance in favour of a NATO decision to act militarily (Norton-Taylor, Rogers, and Hopkins 2011). If NATO's Asia-Pacific partners called for intervention or assistance, or if the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also voiced support, for example, this would be an important factor in any NATO decision to engage in crisis management in the Asia-Pacific theatre.

Fourth, even if the political will of NATO member states and the support of regional players are assured, a further calculation about whether to intervene necessarily turns on the capabilities required to mount an effective military operation. Here policy evaluations focus on available lethality, operational reach, and logistical support for example. Such questions are answered in the strategic military advice provided to the NATO civilian political authorities. Every theatre of operations is considered on its own merits. The Asia-Pacific would be no different. But as far as the potential employment of NATO maritime forces there is concerned, the 2011 *Alliance Maritime Strategy* offers at least some clues as to their intended capabilities for global crisis management. These encompass:

Leveraging the inherent agility of [NATO's] maritime forces to provide a flexible and graduated response in crisis or emerging crisis situations, ranging from simple presence, through demonstrations of force, to specific tasks applying tailored forces [such as] logistical support for joint force operations in austere or hostile land environments and the deployment of joint command and logistical bases afloat. (NATO 2011)

The increasing maritime footprint of individual allies in the Asia-Pacific region to forge interoperability with many official NATO partner nations – including a potential UK “resident” presence in Australia post-Integrated Review (Patalano 2019, 26) – would, if required, surely figure in such contingency planning. Moreover, even if a NATO military operation was not mounted in the Asia-Pacific, it is important to remember that enabling a US one to be launched remains on the cards. Reminiscent of what the NSS had to say about NATO, the US NDS affirms, “Allies and partners also provide access to critical regions, supporting a widespread basing and logistics system that underpins the [Defense] Department’s global reach” (United States 2018).

Fifth, international legitimacy refers to NATO's general preference for a UN mandate for crisis intervention. While NATO is not a regional “arrangement or agency” under Chapter VIII of the *UN Charter*, its founding treaty and succes-

sive *Strategic Concepts* consistently acknowledge the “primary responsibility” of the UN Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security. So, this understandably prompts the question: If Beijing’s veto were likely to thwart any Security Council resolution authorizing intervention in a regional crisis in which communist China was involved, would NATO decline to act even if the other four criteria were met? Not necessarily. NATO’s 1999 intervention in Kosovo (*Operation Allied Force*) to stop mass atrocities there was undertaken without a UN resolution. The situation was so grave an assault on alliance values to do nothing was deemed unacceptable (Mason 1999).

But, even if Kosovo is considered a historic anomaly, would NATO action in the Asia-Pacific be off the table? Once more we can hypothesize the answer to be: Not necessarily. Here we may refer to the earlier example of Korea in the 1950s. Faced with the prospect of a Soviet veto in the Security Council, when NATO action to push back aggression on the Korean Peninsula was contemplated, one of the legitimizing mechanisms considered was the then novel Uniting for Peace Resolution of the UN General Assembly (Smith 1995, 66). In the future, should the Security Council be deadlocked due to a Chinese veto, a Uniting for Peace Resolution conceivably could offer a way to circumvent it.

Conclusion

President Trump’s oratory has increasingly questioned the continued relevance of multilateralism and NATO. Yet, as this paper has shown, to identify “Trump the man” as the cause is misplaced. The questioning of multilateralism is rooted in changing political undercurrents in the United States’ populace to which the Trump administration gives voice and reacts. These changes have already witnessed the US withdrawal from a variety of international fora.

In a NATO context, however, the rhetoric about US withdrawal has not matched the reality. The importance of NATO to American eternal interests and values has proven resilient and where Europeans have been challenged to pay more for their defence, overall, they have heeded Trump’s call. For them, the US security umbrella over Europe continues to be just too essential to their security and stability when faced with a resurgent Russia and a diminished EU post-Brexit, not to mention post-COVID-19, which is simply not up to the collective defence task. While not to discount the existence of transatlantic tensions, in NATO’s case at least, the “tripod of legitimacy” on which it rests as a multilateral organ of *Pax Americana* endures.

By the same token, in the renewed epoch of great power competition, which is upon us, an external existential threat to NATO is more readily identifiable

in contemporary Russia. The alliance is responding to this immediate, regional challenger. At the same time and at the Trump administration's behest, NATO is at the cusp of paying even greater attention to America's likely global challenger, China. In that respect, the 2019 London summit declaration that China's rise represented both "opportunities *and* challenges" is an important signal of what may lie ahead.

Momentum is building within NATO for a mature policy discussion about China. The COVID-19 global upheaval will only increase it. Simply put, it would be difficult for NATO to stand isolated from such issues at a time of accelerating strategic competition between China and the United States. And European members of NATO are increasingly being confronted by the security implications of China's global rise – from Europe's growing economic reliance on Beijing to infrastructure inroads made through China's Belt and Road Initiative to the question of whether to allow the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei into the continent's 5G networks. Some European countries like the UK and France are increasingly operating in the Asia-Pacific theatre, often in close cooperation with the United States, and are therefore confronting even more acutely the reality of China's rise. Fortunately, as this paper reveals, they, alongside Canadian and other European allies, also have NATO to delineate an appropriate response.

About the author



Dr. Brooke Smith-Windsor has over 20 years of professional experience in defence strategy, capability development and interagency crisis management including time spent on field deployments in combat zones. His previous positions comprise Director of Strategic Guidance at the Canadian Department of National Defence, Commanding Officer and Senior National Representative (Canada) at the NATO Defense College, and Senior Research Leader and Senior Fellow at The RAND Corporation (Europe).

Dr. Smith-Windsor has served as the political advisor, both ashore and afloat, to senior General and Flag Officers including the former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and former US Chief of Naval Operations. He is the principal editor of three volumes on NATO's evolving international partnerships and has been published in leading current affairs journals including *Security Dialogue*, *Financial Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, *Defense News* and *Canadian Military Journal*. Dr. Smith-Windsor is a graduate of China's National Defense University International Symposium Course, the NATO Defense College Senior Course, and the NATO Executive Development Program (ESCP Business School). He holds degrees from the Universities of Toronto (B.A. Hons.) and Leeds, U.K. (Ph.D.).

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Endnotes

- 1 The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of any of his professional affiliations.
- 2 The fourth is led by Germany.
- 3 The associated decisions were taken at the 2014 Wales, 2018 Brussels, and 2019 London summits.



CONTACT US: Macdonald-Laurier Institute
323 Chapel Street, Suite #300
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K1N 7Z2

TELEPHONE: (613) 482-8327

WEBSITE: www.MacdonaldLaurier.ca

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