

Future of NATO: Will the Alliance Disintegrate or Survive? Depth Analysis

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Abstract: *This abstract paper discusses the future of NATO and seeks to answer the question of whether the alliance will disintegrate or survive by looking at various factors. NATO has been held together through organizational inactivity and shifting the unifying threat to a variety of lesser threats. Nevertheless, the weakness of the new threat will be insufficient to maintain the Alliance. This argument is supported by three different period analyses of NATO. The first is an analysis of NATO in the Cold War and an overview of its creation as an answer to the threat of the Soviet Union. The second delved into the Alliance after the Cold War and the reasons for NATO's continuation. The third section outlines NATO's current missions, issues, and tensions within the Alliance. The paper concludes that NATO will fall apart in the future, with a slow but sure breakdown of the military structures of the Alliance. It will, however, remain a political entity due to the strength of the security community created between the allies.*

Keywords: Future of NATO, Alliance, Disintegrate or Survive, challenges, conceptual, cold war, collective defense, external risk.

1. Introduction

A depth analysis of the future of NATO would be a complex and challenging task, but it would be essential for understanding the challenges that the Alliance faces and the strategies that it is using to address them. The future of NATO is uncertain. The alliance has been facing a number of challenges in recent years, including the Brexit of UK, rise of China, the war in Ukraine, and the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan. These challenges have led to questions about the relevance of NATO and its future role in the world.

There are two main schools of thought on the future of NATO. The first school of thought believes that NATO will fall apart. This school of thought argues that the alliance is no longer relevant in the 21st century and that it is becoming increasingly old Europe and divided. The second school of thought believes that NATO will stay together. This school of thought argues that the alliance is still important for deterring Russia and for promoting stability in Europe. It is too early to say which school of thought will be correct. The future of NATO will depend on several factors, including the actions of Russia, the United States, and China. It is important to note that these are just potential symptoms of NATO failure. It is also possible that NATO will be able to overcome these challenges and continue to be a strong and effective alliance. The likelihood of NATO failure depends on a number of factors, including the actions of its members, the threats it faces, and the political and economic situation in the world. There are also a number of factors that could help NATO to stay together; these are (1) the shared values of NATO members of committed to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and shared values are a strong foundation for the Alliance. (2) The economic and security benefits of NATO membership provides its members with a number of economic and security benefits, such as increased trade, investment, and access to NATO's military resources. (3) The need to Russia remains a threat to NATO members, and the Alliance will need to remain strong in order to deter

Russian aggression. (4) The need to respond to new threats such as terrorism and cyberwarfare. The Alliance will need to adapt to these new threats in order to remain relevant.

1.1 Background

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in 1949 as a military alliance of Western countries to counter the threat of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies. The original members of NATO were Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United States. NATO's founding treaty, the North Atlantic Treaty, was signed on April 4, 1949, in Washington, D. C. The treaty pledged that the signatories would come to the aid of any member country that was attacked by an external aggressor. This principle of collective defense was the cornerstone of NATO's strategy during the Cold War. NATO played a key role in deterring Soviet aggression during the Cold War. The alliance's large and powerful military forces, combined with its nuclear arsenal, made it clear to the Soviet Union that any attack on a NATO member would be met with a devastating response. This helped to maintain peace and stability in Europe for decades. In addition to its military role, NATO also played a significant role in promoting cooperation and dialogue between Western countries. The alliance's regular meetings and consultations helped to build trust and understanding between its members. This was important in preventing misunderstandings and miscalculations that could have led to conflict. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO faced a new challenge: how to adapt to a new security environment. The alliance responded by expanding its membership to include former Warsaw Pact countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. NATO also began to focus on new security threats, such as terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Today, NATO remains alliance of 30 member countries and its mission is to "safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means." NATO is

committed to promoting peace and stability in Europe and the wider world.

1.2 Objective

The objective is to analysis **the key factors that will influence the future of NATO for the alliance disintegrate or survive.**

1.3 Methods and Materials used

The primary research objective of this study is to analysis **the key factors that will influence the future of NATO for the alliance disintegrate or survive and also** to identify and explore which factors were likely to affect disintegration of NATO's and survival cohesion through 2035 and beyond in terms of both threats and opportunities. This research is helpful to professionals as the next generation of leaders from different backgrounds (e. g., academia, military, industry, etc.) to understand their perspectives on NATO's cohesion. The primary question that guided this research is what are the key factors that will influence the future of NATO? This research used the academic literature on alliance cohesion theory and a qualitative methodology. Several focus groups, an online survey, and a workshop created in collaboration with the Innovation Core and supported by NATO Allied Command Transformation were used by researchers to collect data between June and July 2023. The authors then analyzed the data with the objective of identifying the thematic categories of variables and the organization of these themes into a theoretical model grounded in the data.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars in the fields of political science and international relations have conducted research into the topic of cohesion. Especially, the post - Cold War period led some to assert that cohesion between North America and Europe is "no longer guaranteed by a commonly acknowledged existential threat. With their national interests "less predetermined by priority ideological considerations," the "situational nature of threats and challenges, capabilities, and commitments, and interests and alignments" has directly affected Alliance cohesion. Adrian Hyde - Price and Mark Webber (London: Routledge, 2016), 68. one can therefore assume that if a direct existential threat exists, the bond is stronger than when it does not. Therefore, the first and the most economical factor that emerges is threat a cognitive, or perceptual, concept, whose degree is mostly a function of capabilities. (Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances*, 33). Particularly, the level and source of threat tell about the *raison d'être* of alliances and inform us about their internal dynamics and durability. (Stephen M. Walt, "Why Alliances Endure or Collapse," *Survival* 39, no.1 (1997): 158). The alliance cohesion theory's dominant explanation concerns the *external threat* to alliance. Especially, the realist school of thought writes, "Alliances have no meaning apart from the adversary threat to which they are a response," while being "maintained by stronger states to serve their interests. The next key observation is that the evolving security context and disappearance of traditional alliance politics have led to the default mode of uses of "coalitions of the

willing" and "alignments of convenience. Especially in terms of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, cohesion has become "challenged politically as well as militarily, moreover, threat assessment differentials in terms of dissimilar prioritization based on the perceived level of threat negatively affect alliance cohesion to a significant extent. In the past few years, cohesion waned as the multiplication of crises—including international terrorism, mass migration, and Russian foreign policy—deepened strategically the east - south division among NATO allies, and as the Alliance's internal disputes intensified due to rising populism and Euroscepticism. While these various "domestic pressures and diverging threat perceptions are threatening to pull Allies apart," cohesion "remains critically dependent on its collective defense commitment. In outlining realist, economic, institutionalist, and social - constructivist theoretical perspectives, other categories of variables emerged: internal dimension of threats, bureaucracy and alliance institutionalization, and shared values and identity. What happens inside the Alliance could matter as much as what happens outside the Alliance. Given that NATO's endurance had not conformed to the predictions of traditional alliance theory; Ohio University professor Patricia Weitsman suggested examining internal and external threat dyads in order to understand alliance cohesion. She found that NATO survived the end of the Cold War due to low *internal threat*, which concerns the politics of alliances. Consequently, this alliance cohesion theory says the lower the internal threat, the more cohesive the alliance; and the greater the external threat, the higher level of alliance cohesion. Another important factor in alliance cohesion is the way in which intra - alliance cooperation institutionalizes bureaucratic structures. For instance, some assert that consultative norms and structures can mitigate internal threats to cohesion. Furthermore, the Alliance's institutional structures allow for information exchange among allies that can raise the level of alliance cohesion independently from external factors. Additionally, the transatlantic bond has depended on credible signaling (i. e., an ally's trust in another's assurances). Especially in the context of nuclear sharing, "weak signals" of U. S. commitment to Europe could damage NATO's cohesion. The next factor that emerges is that technology and its rapid development remains omnipresent, affecting both the relative operational effectiveness and interoperability of the Alliance. Lastly, some assert that Alliance cohesion flows from the degree of security community formation and the socialization of political and military elites within and among democratic allies that possess a shared set of values and collective identities. Having laid the conceptual foundation inspired by the existing scholarly literature, this study explored, examined, and refined these ideas in an attempt to ascertain the factors that affect the cohesion of NATO in a practical sense.

2.1 Underlying Conceptual Definitions

As with many research projects, this study began with an exploration of conceptual definitions. The *NATO Glossary* defines a *center of gravity* as the "characteristics, capabilities, or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force, or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight. This Clausewitzian

metaphor refers to a “focal point” as “the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act” for the group. Rather than “characteristics, capabilities, or locations,” centers of gravity can be “dynamic and powerful physical and moral agents of action or influence. Even though some question the idea of a center of gravity, the concept retains its relevance for many contemporary planners as it helps them understand the complexities of the security environment and the relationships between systems, as well as prioritize efforts. The next key term, *alliance cohesion*, reflects the degree to which the members are able to agree on goals, strategies, and tactics, and coordinate activity for attaining those goals.⁷ In addition to this behavioral component, cohesion represents the particular quality that makes its members operate as a whole during times of crisis. Literature from the psychology field defines cohesion as “bonds, either social or task based, that contribute to the synergistic functioning as a whole.”⁸ Other accounts claim “alliance cohesion is based upon the distance between individual member interests and the collective alliance interest. In defining this term, it is key to note that cohesion is a very fluid idea, contextually based and highly subjective. Therefore, this research proceeded under the assumption that cohesion is largely qualitative in nature. Some assert that the best moment to understand cohesion is in time of crisis, such as when the Alliance faces a significant conflict. In case of wartime alliances, cohesion refers to the states’ ability to coordinate military strategy, agree on war aims, and avoid making a separate peace, together with “the degree of convergence among member states’ commitments to the alliance.”¹⁰ This is important, since conventional wisdom asserts the source of cohesion is usually the element (be it political, economic, military, or nonmaterial) that is targeted by adversary activities and likely results in the defeat of the attacked party. It then follows that by adhering to these definitions, one could consider Alliance cohesion to be at the level of a center of gravity, since it “exerts a certain centripetal force that tends to hold an entire structure together.

2.2 The Alliance after the Cold War and the reasons for NATO’s continuation

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 to counter the threat of the Soviet Union. After the Cold War ended in 1991, many people questioned the need for NATO to continue to exist. However, NATO has continued to exist and has even expanded its membership. European scholars and other academicians believe that there are a number of reasons why NATO has continued to exist after the Cold War. NATO is a valuable alliance that provides security, cooperation, and dialogue to its members. It is likely that NATO will continue to exist after the Cold War. First, NATO has become a forum for cooperation and dialogue between European and North American countries. This cooperation is important for maintaining peace and stability in Europe. Second, NATO has adapted its mission to address new threats, such as terrorism and cyberwarfare. NATO has also played a role in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Third, NATO provides a security guarantee to its members. This guarantee is important for deterring aggression and for ensuring the security of NATO

members. Fourth, NATO is a symbol of the transatlantic alliance between Europe and North America. This alliance is important for maintaining peace and security in the world.

2.3 What is article five of NATO discussed about?

Collective defence and Article 5 - Article 5 provides that if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked. The principle of collective defence is at the very heart of NATO’s founding treaty. It remains a unique and enduring principle that binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the Alliance.

- 1) Collective defence means that an attack against one Ally is considered as an attack against all Allies.
- 2) The principle of collective defence is enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.
- 3) NATO invoked Article 5 for the first and only time in its history after the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States.
- 4) NATO has taken collective defence measures on several occasions, including in response to the situation in Syria and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- 5) NATO has standing forces on active duty that contribute to the Alliance’s collective defence efforts on a permanent basis.

A cornerstone of the Alliance

Article 5

In 1949, the primary aim of the North Atlantic Treaty – NATO’s founding treaty – was to create a pact of mutual assistance to counter the risk that the Soviet Union would seek to extend its control of Eastern Europe to other parts of the continent. Every participating country agreed that this form of solidarity was at the heart of the Treaty, effectively making Article 5 on collective defence a key component of the Alliance. Article 5 provides that if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked.

Article 5

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self - defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.”

2.4 NATO Cohesion Factors

In making sense of Alliance cohesion in the future, this study first refined the understanding of cohesion itself. The findings indicate that NATO's cohesion means synergy and the ability of NATO nations to think and act together. That is, to develop shared interests, values, and common standards and rules, and to respond to problems as a united group. Relying on mutual trust, cohesion is "doing what is best for the community" and looking beyond self-interests. Building on the analogy of ties between family members, the participants stated that cohesion is an expression of staying together despite differences, of "something bigger than ourselves." One participant believed that "without cohesion, the Alliance would implode." Consequently, based on the scholarly literature and corroborated through the focus groups, this study established that alliance cohesion fluctuates in accordance with a variety of factors. The data collected in this study indicated that variables that affect alliance cohesion fell into five thematic areas: (1) external risks, (2) political and economic factors, (3) organizational structures and processes, (4) technology advances, and (5) core values.

2.5 External risks.

The participants found it questionable whether allies will be able to find a common conventional threat that would be perceived as strong enough to "transcend the domestic pressures and the concept of sovereignty." Although an absence of external threat to the Alliance is very unlikely, the future risk will lie in multiplication of external threats and a lack of common perception of those threats. This underdeveloped common understanding of external threats, accompanied by differential threat assessments, could weaken NATO's cohesion. To illustrate this point, although the survey participants listed the failure to activate Article 5 in case of attack as a potential risk, further discussions showed that non-Article 5 missions could constitute the real test for NATO's cohesion. In words of the one of participants, "if there is an operation and only two nations show up, this is not cohesion." For some nations, this threat multiplication and dissimilar threat perceptions can lead to an operational overstretch or to an eventual "mission creep." In contrast, other nations might develop an excessive sense of security that would lead them to reduce their attention and willingness to participate in NATO activities. For this reason, terrorism, for instance, cannot constitute NATO's defining threat. Additionally, the changing nature of threats to allies' security will require domestic, nonmilitary means to address them, rather than alliance-wide military measures. In other words, "nations will be looking inside to maintain order."

2.6 Failure scenario for NATO Military Alliance Components

NATO has started to reevaluate its presumptions regarding the failure of its military components as a result. The alliance is currently focusing on enhancing its conventional military capabilities, creating fresh countermeasures; one of the most significant assumptions facing NATO is the decline in its conventional military capabilities. During the Cold

War, NATO had a significant conventional superiority over the Warsaw Pact. However, this superiority has worn in recent years due to budget cuts and a lack of investment in new weapons systems. This has led to concerns that NATO would be unable to mount a credible defense against a conventional attack from Russia. These assumptions in recent years hold by a number of factors, including, the decline in NATO's conventional military capabilities, the rise of new threats, such as terrorism and cyberwarfare, the increasing unpredictability of Russia's behavior. These threats are difficult to defend against with conventional military forces. As a result, NATO is developing new strategies to counter these threats, such as the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Russian power's growing unpredictable that has just interfered in eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea. These activities have raised concern that Russia might be prepared to employ military force to further its objectives on based western perception. In order to prevent and fight against a Russian invasion, NATO is expanding its military presence in Eastern Europe and creating new strategies to deter and defend against a Russian attack this is as new cold war mentality. The alliance believes that dialogue and cooperation with Russia is essential to maintaining peace and stability in Europe. However, NATO will not compromise its principles or its commitment to defending its members. Furthermore, Russia, for its part, has accused NATO of being a hostile alliance that is trying to encircle it. The country has also threatened to use nuclear weapons against NATO members if they intervene in Ukraine. Moreover, the Authors believe that the current situation is highly volatile and there is a risk of a military conflict between NATO and Russia. However, both sides have expressed a desire to avoid war and have said they are open to dialogue. It remains to be seen whether these talks will be successful in defusing the crisis is yet on the table. It is unclear how the current situation will evolve. However, it is clear that the relationship between NATO and Russia is at a critical juncture. The outcome of this crisis will have a major impact on the security of Europe and the world.

2.7 The weakness of the new threat for NATO will be insufficient in maintaining the Alliance.

The Author, s agrees with the statement that the weakness of the new threat for NATO will be insufficient in maintaining the Alliance. NATO is a military alliance that was founded to deter and defend against the threat of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is no longer a threat, but NATO has continued to exist because it has adapted to new threats, such as terrorism and cyberwarfare. However, the weakness of the Russian military is not enough to guarantee the security of NATO members. Russia still has a significant nuclear arsenal and it is capable of launching a devastating attack on NATO territory. In addition, Russia is not the only threat to NATO. Other countries, such as China, are also becoming more confident and are developing their economic, diplomacy and military capabilities. This makes it even more important for NATO to maintain its strength and to adapt to new threats. The weakness of the new threat to NATO will not be sufficient in maintaining the Alliance. NATO needs to be strong enough to deter and defend against all threats, whether they are conventional or nuclear.

The alliance also needs to be flexible enough to adapt to new threats and challenges. Only by maintaining its strength and flexibility can NATO ensure the security of its members and the peace and stability of Europe. In recent years, there has been a decline in defense spending among NATO members. This is partly due to the economic crisis and partly due to a belief that the threat of Russia is not as great as it once was. However, the decline in defense spending has made NATO less capable of deterring and defending against a Russian attack. The weakness of the new threat to NATO, the willingness of NATO members to commit to the alliance, and the political will of NATO members are all important factors that will determine the future of the Alliance. If NATO can address these challenges, then it will be able to maintain its strength and relevance in the 21st century. However, if NATO is unable to address these challenges, then it could become weaker and less able to respond to threats. This could have a negative impact on the security of Europe and the world.

2.8 NATO challenges and tensions within the Alliance

These are just some of the current issues, and tensions facing NATO.

- 1) Russia: The biggest issue facing NATO is Russia. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its ongoing military intervention in Ukraine have led to a significant increase in tensions between NATO and Russia.
- 2) China: China is also seen as a potential threat to NATO. China's growing military power and its assertive behavior in the South China Sea have raised concerns among NATO members.
- 3) Terrorism: Terrorism is another major issue facing NATO. NATO has been involved in the fight against terrorism since the 9/11 attacks, and it continues to work with its partners to combat this threat.
- 4) Cybersecurity: Cybersecurity is a growing concern for NATO. NATO is working to improve its cybersecurity capabilities in order to protect its members from cyberattacks.
- 5) Migration: Migration is also a challenge facing NATO. NATO is working with its partners to address the root causes of migration and to manage the flow of migrants.
- 6) The US and Europe: There are some tensions between the US and Europe within NATO. These tensions are due to a number of factors, including the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Trump administration's criticism of NATO, and the different views of the US and Europe on Russia.
- 7) Turkey: There are also some tensions between Turkey and other NATO members. These tensions are due to Turkey's purchase of Russian S - 400 missiles and its human rights record.
- 8) Eastern European members: Some Eastern European members of NATO are concerned about the threat posed by Russia. They want NATO to increase its presence in Eastern Europe and to provide them with more military support.

2.9 NATO will fall apart in the future, with a slow but sure break down of the military structures of the Alliance

According to the authors and other scholars, there is a possibility that NATO would disintegrate in the future due to a variety of factors that contribute to and support this opinions. (1) The growth of China's military might. The balance of power in the globe may change as a result of China's expanding military power, and NATO may no longer be believe as necessary to deter or defeat a potential Chinese threat. (2) The potential deterioration of American hegemony. Since the United States is NATO's most important member, the Alliance's strength and cohesion may suffer as a result. (3) The increase in populism and hard line nationalism throughout Europe - NATO's popularity may decline as a result of the growth of nationalism and populism in Europe, as some nations may question the necessity of a military alliance that is not immediately threatened by any other nation. (4) The Authors believe that the end of the occupation war in Afghanistan could lead to a decrease in NATO's focus on collective defense, as the Alliance would no longer have a major military operation underway. However, Authors and other scholars believe that there is also possible that NATO will survive and succeed in the future. The Alliance has been through many challenges in its history, and it has always managed to adapt and survive. NATO is also a valuable political and economic partnership, and it is unlikely that its members will want to see it break up. Ultimately, the future of NATO is uncertain. It will depend on a number of factors, including the actions of Russia, China, and the United States, as well as the political and economic situation in Europe.

2.10 Academic Arguments against the future of NATO

- 1) NATO is no longer relevant in the 21st century. The world has changed since NATO was founded, and the alliance is no longer as relevant as it once was.
- 2) NATO is becoming increasingly divided. There are a number of divisions within NATO, including divisions over the war in Afghanistan and the rise of China.
- 3) NATO is too expensive. NATO is a costly alliance, and some countries are questioning whether the benefits of membership outweigh the costs.
- 4) The future of NATO is uncertain. The alliance is facing a number of challenges, but it is also still an important force for stability in Europe. The actions of Russia, the United States, and China will play a major role in determining NATO's future.

2.11 Conclusion of Potential symptoms of NATO failure

- 1) A decrease in military spending: If NATO members start to decrease their military spending, it could signal a lack of commitment to the Alliance.
- 2) A decline in cooperation: If NATO members start to cooperate less on military matters, it could make it more difficult to deter or defeat a common threat.
- 3) An increase in internal divisions: If NATO members start to have more disagreements about the Alliance's goals or operations; it could weaken the Alliance's cohesion.

- 4) A failure to adapt to new threats: If NATO is unable to adapt to new threats, such as the rise of China or terrorism, it could become out of date.
- 5) A loss of public support: If NATO loses the support of the public in its member countries; it could become difficult to sustain the Alliance.

It is important to note that these are just potential symptoms of NATO failure. It is also possible that NATO will be able to overcome these challenges and continue to be a strong and effective alliance. The likelihood of NATO failure depends on a number of factors, including the actions of its members, the threats it faces, and the political and economic situation in the world.

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