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NATO Watch conducts independent monitoring and analysis of NATO and aims to increase transparency, stimulate parliamentary engagement and broaden public awareness and participation in a progressive reform agenda within NATO.

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NATO Watch Essay:

Is it inevitable that NATO must support Washington in the US-China Cold War?

The United States and China are now involved in a [complex and multifaceted Cold War](#) (Cold War II), albeit one that [differs significantly](#) from the Soviet-US Cold War (Cold War I). Is it inevitable then that NATO will fall into line behind Washington as it did during Cold War I? And what are the options for European governments and their citizens caught in the middle and perhaps looking to a navigate a middle path between the two protagonists?

Justified concerns about China

From the outset it should be acknowledged that there are aspects of Chinese policy, especially since Xi Jinping took power, which justify concern. There is real political repression of dissenting voices and the consequences are there to be seen in China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak and the stifling even today of anyone [asking questions](#) about it. The new [National Security Law](#) in Hong Kong, a move the [Economist described](#) as "one of the biggest assaults on a liberal society since the second world war", is leading to further instability and arrests of pro-democracy protesters. On the mainland violations of [human rights](#) and especially repression of the [Uighurs in Xinjiang](#) and [Tibetan communities](#), as well as curbs on independent journalism and rigorous policing of social media, are also major concerns.

Beyond these largely 'domestic' political issues, there is also an increasingly chauvinistic tone in China's foreign policy, which concerns some of its neighbours and the wider international community. So far, this has largely resulted in relatively limited uses of coercive statecraft – such as

[maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea](#), recent [border skirmishes](#) with India and at least two cases of 'hostage diplomacy' involving Swedish and Canadian citizens. China's refusal to release the [two Canadians](#), Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, held for more than 18 months on dubious spying charges, is particularly unfathomable.

Of course, all these developments are unwelcome, especially for the Chinese people and East Asian security, but are they grounds for regarding China as the enemy of the world order? This appears to be the view of the US military. The [2018 US National Defense Strategy](#) warned that China is "pursuing a military modernization program that seeks IndoPacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future", while in a more recent [news release](#) a senior US commander described China as "actively working to subvert the international rules-based infrastructure that has maintained peace since the end of World War II". And it is a view that seems to have found an echo chamber within NATO.

NATO's emerging policy toward China

At the June [meeting of NATO defence ministers](#) the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg noted that allies "expressed concern about the consequences of the rise of China" then went on to emphasise the threat posed by Beijing: "China has the second largest defence budget in the world and is investing heavily in new long-range weapons systems and missile systems that can reach all NATO countries. They are modernising their maritime capabilities with a more global reach of their naval forces... this is about China coming closer to us. We see them in the Arctic. We see them in Africa. We see them investing heavily in infrastructure

in our own countries. And, of course, we see them also in cyberspace”.

This ‘talking up’ of the alleged Chinese threat builds on a rich tradition of Soviet and Russian [threat inflation](#) within NATO, from the ‘missile gap’ during the late 1950s and early 1960s, to the ‘[hypersonic missile gap](#)’ today. China’s growth in its military spending has closely matched the country’s economic growth. It is [estimated](#) to have allocated \$261 billion to the military in 2019, as compared with \$732 billion by the United States. While China’s military expenditure has increased continuously since 1994 (for 25 consecutive years) and is 85 per cent higher than a decade ago, its military burden in 2019 remained at 1.9 per cent of GDP (i.e. below the NATO guideline that member states spend at least 2 per cent of their GDP on defence).

Arms control is not just a Chinese problem

So far there are two main areas where NATO is seeking to apply pressure on China: in arms control and investment in critical infrastructure, and both represent predominantly US agendas. President Trump has been demanding that China join what has for decades been a bilateral US-Russian nuclear arms control dialogue, but the Chinese government has refused. In part this is because its nuclear stockpile, currently estimated at 320 warheads (roughly the same number as France), is less than a twentieth the size of the US or Russian nuclear arsenals. Hence, it was no surprise that China refused to join the recent US-Russian [strategic stability talks in Vienna](#).

The NATO Secretary General is now regularly calling on China to “engage constructively” in arms control. However, it is highly misleading to suggest that China does not already do so. For example, China has had a no first use policy—a pledge not to use

nuclear weapons as a means of warfare unless first attacked by an adversary using nuclear weapons—since 1964, while NATO has repeatedly rejected calls to adopt such a policy (as have all other nuclear-armed states except India). China is also a party to the major international agreements regulating biological and chemical weapons, and has also joined or enacted control lists consistent with export control regimes concerning proliferation-sensitive goods and technology. In addition, China recently [joined](#) the UN-sponsored Arms Trade Treaty, which seeks to regulate international trade in conventional military equipment.

Of course, China should be encouraged to take part in broader discussions on conventional and nuclear arms control, but this is only likely to happen when the United States is itself more committed to such a process. President Trump has pulled the United States out of the [INF Treaty](#) and the [Iran nuclear deal](#), [unsigned the Arms Trade Treaty](#), [abandoned the landmine ban](#), threatened to undertake the first [nuclear weapon tests](#) in America since 1992 and set in motion [withdrawal](#) from the Open Skies Treaty.

Huawei is not the only surveillance concern

In the area of critical infrastructure, the US concerns are centred on the activities of Huawei. While these concerns form part of a wider US-China trade war, the central [security concern](#) (and the one most often voiced by NATO officials) is that the Chinese Government could use this company’s devices as a back door into strategically vital networks or for spying. The United States has been pressing European allies to keep Huawei out of communication networks, and to this end the [UK recently announced a major policy reversal](#). Having initially said that Huawei equipment could be used on a limited basis in its 5G network, it will

now be banned from the UK's high-speed wireless infrastructure.

However, the revelations of [Edward Snowden](#), and more recently the [Cambridge Analytica](#) case, have demonstrated that worries about the negative consequences of information technology are not just limited to China. There are serious privacy concerns with US social media and tech companies, including so-called '[surveillance capitalism](#)', and the widespread eavesdropping activities of the UK's secret communication headquarters, GCHQ, the '[Five Eyes](#)' network and the numerous [US intelligence agencies](#) reveal that Western state agencies and corporations are at the heart of many of the secret and unaccountable systems of modern global surveillance.

The US and China in the international system

As regards upholding good standards in international affairs more generally, even a cursory comparison between recent US and Chinese behaviour shows that an equally damning case can be made against Washington. President Trump has pulled the United States out of the Paris climate agreement, contemplated cutting funding to the World Health Organization and then [announced](#) withdrawal from it, and imposed [sanctions against International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) officials in response to ongoing ICC investigations into alleged US war crimes in Afghanistan. Moreover, in the post-Cold War period, the United States has led or supported wars to determine the governance of at least a dozen countries.

While the United States remains the largest contributor to the United Nations and its peacekeeping work (despite [requested funding cuts](#) by President Trump), Beijing is now the [second-largest funder](#) and has deployed 2,500 peacekeepers, more

than all the other permanent members of the Security Council combined. The People's Liberation Army has not fought a war since 1979, not used lethal military force abroad since 1988, nor has China funded or supported proxies or armed insurgents anywhere in the world since the early 1980s.

Learning the right lessons from Cold War I

Analysts are now looking for lessons from Cold War I to apply to Cold War II, especially for [Europe once again caught in the middle](#). However, if the prevailing orthodoxies of Cold War I are followed—especially the narrative of US triumphalism: that military-build-up, the dynamism of Western ideas and its economic system led to the 'defeat' of the Soviet system—not only will the wrong lessons be drawn, but real chances for peace will be missed, as they were in the early years of Cold War I.

Alternative explanations for the ending of Cold War I include the central role of Gorbachev, the wave of popular, [grass roots movements in both East and West](#) that discredited the principal ideas of the Cold War, and the 'Helsinki process', which broadened and redefined the meaning of security by giving added weight to its political, economic, ethical and other dimensions. The role of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, as it was then, now the OSCE) in developing the Helsinki process and reducing tension between the Soviet and Western blocs is particularly underrecognized in contemporary debates. Rather than using military power to resolve seemingly intractable international disputes, the OSCE emphasised, and continues to emphasise, the importance of ideas, norms, institutions and procedures.

An East Asian Helsinki Process has been [proposed](#) in the past, mainly as a tool to decrease tensions on the Korean

peninsula, but it might also offer a way of addressing the underlying challenges associated with the US-China Cold War. Starting a Helsinki-like process or creating an OSCE-like organization in East Asia would not be easy. But compared to East Asia today, Europe in the first half of the twentieth century had as deep, if not deeper, ideological divisions, national tensions and territorial disputes. Creating a security organization that included former World War II adversaries, as well as the Soviet Union and the United States, was as difficult as the set of security and ideological issues that now divide the United States and China, as well other countries in East Asia.

Another option is to develop stronger soft security and grassroots links between China and Europe. This might be possible, for example, at the city level where a plethora of networks linking European cities already have some tentative associations with Chinese cities, including the [Trans-Urban-EU-China](#) project and city-to-city pairings under the EU's [International Urban Cooperation](#) programme. Other European city networks covering energy, health, culture and transport issue could develop similar outreach programmes with Chinese cities. China's own [Silk Road Cities Alliance](#), which aims at promoting cooperation in various fields among cities lying along the 'One Belt One Road' route, already has four Italian cities and one German city as partners. Further cooperation with other European cities could be envisaged under this programme.

At the grassroots level, however, a series of laws introduced by Xi Jinping have granted the country's security apparatus sweeping legal powers over civil society and put foreign NGOs, especially human rights groups, under [tighter control](#). The Chinese leadership is clearly mindful of the role NGOs have played in recent 'colour revolutions' against authoritarian regimes, and it is

difficult to envisage at present the creation of a Sino-European alliance of peace and human rights movements of the kind that developed across both blocs in Cold War I. While that past does not chart tidily on to the present (not least because Western peace movements are a shadow of their former selves), there may be scope for enhanced Sino-European cooperation among security and peace-related think tanks and university departments.

Conclusions

Rather than going global and setting its sights on a confrontation with China, NATO should seek to work with China to create a more stable and secure world. China must be engaged, not contained. Despite the reality of a hardening of Chinese policy domestically and externally, especially in an East Asian context, this does not amount to a challenge to the global order. By exaggerating the Chinese 'threat' and casting the country as an 'enemy', the United States and NATO are likely to encourage an even harder line from Beijing. Given the undoubted mutual antagonism between Washington and Beijing, Europe's role should be to act as a diplomatic bridge between the two sides, as happened to limited extent during the first Cold War. This does not preclude European politicians speaking out and taking action over Chinese human rights abuses. And they should also continue to promote liberal democracy, humanism and internationalism in engaging with China. As the British journalist Jonathan Freedland [notes](#), perhaps the answer begins in finding allies and taking on the undramatic, often unglamorous work of diplomacy, and then "advancing bit by bit towards something better".

News, Commentary and Reports:

Arctic Security

The Arctic region, or High North, strategically important during the Cold War became less significant after the end of the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. However, due to both the warming climate in the Arctic and the re-emergence of geopolitical competition in the region, the Arctic is once again of growing strategic importance. Climate change is reportedly occurring at a faster rate than previously thought, which will have a significant impact on the Arctic and on the security of Arctic littoral states.

Tone Skoge, [Bring allied attention to air power in the Arctic](#), Defense News, 6 August 2020

Joshua Tallis, [NATO is the right forum for security dialogue in the High North](#), Defense News, 28 July 2020

[Russian and NATO militaries are getting more active in the Arctic, but neither is sure about what the other is doing](#), Business Insider, 22 July 2020

[NATO maritime exercise Dynamic Mongoose ends in the High North](#), NATO News Release, 13 July 2020

[Panel: NATO Needs to Take Russian Offensive, Defensive Advances in Arctic Seriously](#), USNI News, 1 July 2020

Sherri Goodman and Katarina Kertysova, [The nuclearisation of the Russian Arctic: new reactors, new risks](#), European Leadership Network and The Polar Institute, June 2020

[Nordic militaries rekindle old alliances, as Russia warms to the region](#), Defense News, 22 June 2020

[Russia plans new exercises in Arctic](#), News in English.no, 2 June 2020

Zdzislaw Sliwa and Nurlan Aliyev, [Strategic Competition or Possibilities for Cooperation Between the United States and Russia in the Arctic](#), *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 33 no.2, pp.214-236

Arms Control and Disarmament: Open Skies Treaty and New START

President Donald Trump has announced that the USA will formally withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies, citing Russia's inability to adhere to the agreement. The nearly 30-year-old treaty reduces the risk of war by allowing the 34 member countries to conduct reconnaissance flights and collect data on their military forces and activities.

Washington informed the other 33 parties to the treaty of its intention to deliver a formal six-month notice of withdrawal on 22 May 2020. Moscow denies being in violation of the agreement. Russia is concerned that NATO members will share intelligence about their flights over Russia with the United States after Washington's withdrawal.

This will be the third arms control agreement that Trump has withdrawn from. He took the United States out of the [Iran nuclear deal in 2018](#), and the [Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty in 2019](#). There are also concerns for the future of [the last treaty limiting US and Russian strategic nuclear weapons](#), the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which is due to expire in February next year.

Russia has offered to extend New START, but the Trump administration hopes to negotiate a new arms treaty that would also include China. Beijing, however, has expressed little interest in such talks. Hence, despite strong pressure exerted by the United States, China did not attend a three-day arms control discussion in Vienna at the end of June. Instead, bilateral discussions took place between the United States and Russia.

The bilateral US-Russian arms control discussions were welcomed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg who [said that](#) arms control agreements are important for the security of all NATO

allies. The New START agreement was one of the main talking points during the negotiations in Vienna. In an [online press briefing](#) that took place directly after the Vienna talks, the US chief arms control negotiator Ambassador Billingslea said that the USA is willing to contemplate extending New START but only on the condition that a future agreement is multilateral. In principle, the USA and Russia agree that a future New START deal should take the changed security environment, including China's growing power, into account, [according to Ambassador Billingslea](#). Despite "tough discussions" Ambassador Billingslea [stated](#) that progress was made, including launching a US-Russian technical working group (although there seemed to be some confusion as to what it will discuss: nuclear warheads and doctrine, according to the US side, or just doctrine, according to Russia).

[According to the NATO Secretary General](#), "in the absence of any agreement which includes China, I think the right thing will be to extend the existing New START agreement to provide the necessary time to find agreement - US, Russia - but hopefully also with China". He stressed that failed New START negotiations would not be good for NATO allies, nor the world, stating that "the way to a world without nuclear weapons is balanced, verifiable arms control, disarmament". In the absence of a New START agreement, Stoltenberg fears a new arms race and a riskier world for NATO allies.

Finally, it was [reported](#) by Reuters in June that the Trump administration plans to reinterpret the Missile Technology Control Regime—a Cold War-era multilateral export control regime with 35 member states that seek to limit the proliferation of missiles and missile technology—with the goal of allowing US defence contractors to sell more armed drones to a more expansive group of countries.

Alexander Graef, [The End of the Open Skies Treaty and the Politics of Compliance](#), Lawfare, 6 July 2020

For a Russian perspective see: Andrei Kelin, [Open Skies Clouded by Sham and Ambiguity](#), RUSI Commentary, 2 July 2020

Tanya Ogilvie-White, [Post-INF Arms Control in the Asia-Pacific: Political Viability and Implementation Challenges](#), IISS Discussion Paper, June 2020

[US-Russia nuclear disarmament talks to begin, but no sign of China joining in](#), The Guardian, 21 June 2020

Tomáš Petříček, [Strengthening Arms Control Through Multilateralism, and Multilateralism Through Arms Control](#), RUSI Commentary, 19 June 2020

[Trump aims to sidestep another arms pact to sell more U.S. drones](#), Reuters, 12 June 2020

Matt Field, [Why is tear gas banned in war but not from peaceful protests?](#) Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, 4 June 2020

[Moscow certain NATO will share information about flights over Russia with US - ambassador](#), TASS, 6 June 2020

Justin Key Canfil, [The U.S. Will Exit the Open Skies Treaty and it's Unclear Why](#), Lawfare, 3 June 2020

Belarus Crisis

After the longtime president of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, claimed 80% of the vote in what many Western governments said was a sham election on 9 August, protesters across the country have continued to turn out in large numbers, only to be met with a fierce police crackdown. On 16 August NATO dismissed allegations by President Lukashenko that it was conducting a military buildup near the country's western border but said it was closely monitoring the situation. Russia has [reportedly](#) offered unspecified security assistance to Lukashenko.

[NATO Secretary General discusses Belarus, Eastern Mediterranean with EU defence ministers](#), NATO News Release, 26 August 2020

[Belarus: Nato denies foreign troops are on border](#), BBC News, 22 August 2020

[U.S. Allies Watch Borders Closely as Belarus Sends Military, Russia Presses West](#), Newsweek, 22 August 2020

[A neutral Belarus? Country's opposition insists it doesn't want either NATO or Russian troops inside its borders](#), RT, 21 August 2020

Carl Bildt, [The Armenian model for Belarus](#), ECFR Commentary, 19 August, 2020

Ian Anthony, [The Belarus election: A challenge to stability and security in Northern Europe](#), SIPRI Commentary, 19 August 2020

Gustav Gressel, [Russia's military manoeuvres at the Belarus border – a message to the West](#), ECFR Commentary, 18 August 2020

[NATO Secretary General discusses Belarus with President of Poland](#), NATO News Release, 18 August 2020

[How to Help Belarus](#), Statement by the International Crisis Group, 18 August 2020

[Belarus is flexing its military 'muscles' close to NATO's borders](#), Defence Blog, 18 August 2020

[NATO rejects Lukashenko claim it's positioning forces near Belarus borders](#), Stars and Stripes, 17 August 2020

[Vigilant on Belarus, ready to deter aggression on allies, NATO's Stoltenberg says](#), Reuters, 17 August 2020

[NATO denies Belarus claim of military buildup, but watching situation](#), Reuters, 16 August 2020

Frederick W. Kagan, [A knife at NATO's throat: Why Belarus matters to the US](#), The Hill, 16 August 2020

[Belarus: Rival rallies as Lukashenko claims NATO deployed to border](#), Deutsche Welle, 16 August 2020

Book Reviews

Michael Rühle, [Book review – “Future NATO: Adapting to New Realities”](#), NATO Review, 30 June 2020

Alexander Graef, [The Rise and Fall of Cooperative Arms Control in Europe](#), Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament, 2020

China-NATO relations

NATO has maintained a dialogue with countries that are not part of its partnership frameworks, on an ad-hoc basis, since the 1990s. One such country is China. At the NATO Leaders' Meeting in December 2019, the [London Declaration](#) recognised China's growing influence and international policies and suggests that these “present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an alliance”. The NATO Secretary General said that it was the first time that NATO had addressed the rise of China. At the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in June (see below and the essay above) and during the meeting of the Political Committee (PC) of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on 15 July, further concerns were expressed about this issue.

During the pandemic, Beijing continued to expand its global clout, including continued regional brinkmanship, intensification of its ‘wolf-warrior’ diplomacy, and waging cyber hacking and propaganda campaigns in allied and partner countries, said [Congressman Gerald Connolly](#) (US), introducing the [draft PC General Report The Rise of China: Implications for Global and Euro-Atlantic Security](#). “NATO must do more than just take note”, Congressman Connolly's report said. “NATO must develop the capabilities to monitor, engage, and when necessary counter the threats posed by China”.

Emil Avdaliani, [China's Effect: A Global NATO](#), BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,684, 10 August 2020

Peter Martin, Gordana Filipovic and Alan Crawford, [China Muscles Onto NATO's Turf, Roiling Alliance Frayed by Trump](#), Bloomberg, 4 August 2020

Anthony Vinci, [How to Stop China From Imposing Its Values](#), The Atlantic, 2 August 2020

[In the post-COVID world, there can be no return to “business as usual” with China](#), NATO PA News Release, 15 July 2020

Lauren Speranza, [China Is NATO's New Problem](#), Foreign Policy, 8 July 2020

Yang Zhongjie, [Internal strife dims NATO's prospects](#), China Military, 8 July 2020

[US-led NATO says clear pattern of China's authoritarian behaviour at home and bullying abroad](#), Zee News, 1 July 2020

[China Becoming Concern for U.S. Commanders in Europe](#), US Department of Defense News Release, 26 June 2020

Timothy Garton Ash, [China: Lessons for Europe from the Cold War](#), ECFR Commentary, 22 June 2020

[NATO Targets China: Says 'China Is On Our Radar More Than Ever Before'](#), Eurasia Times, 18 June 2020

[NATO's Jens Stoltenberg sounds warning on China's rise](#), Deutsche Welle, 13 June 2020

NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Political Committee (PC), [The Rise of China: Implications for Global and Euro-Atlantic Security](#), Draft General Report, Gerald E. Connolly (United States) General Rapporteur, 036 PC 20 E, 12 June 2020

Michael T. Klare, [The New Cold War with China: How Will It Affect You?](#) Tom Dispatch, 11 June 2020

Ian Brzezinski, [NATO's role in a transatlantic strategy on China](#), Atlantic Council, 1 June 2020

Nada Kovalčíková and Gabrielle Tarini, [Stronger Together: NATO's Evolving Approach toward China](#), Women in International Security, Policy Brief, May 2020

Luis Simón, [Between punishment and denial: Uncertainty, flexibility, and U.S. military strategy toward China](#), *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 41 no3, 2020, pp.361-384

Climate Change

NATO has recognized the adverse effects of climate change on international security. NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, for example, said that environmental and climate change will shape the future security environment and have significant implications for the alliance's planning

and operations. Similarly, the Wales Summit Declaration in 2014 identified [climate change, water scarcity and increasing energy needs](#) as future disruptors of security. While there is a growing willingness in NATO to discuss and explore responses to climate-related dangers, the policy road ahead on this issue within the alliance remains uncertain.

The UK's Ministry of Defence (MOD) recently commissioned [RAND Europe to examine climate change's effects on the UK MOD's activities](#), and its attendant security implications, to assist the UK MOD in creating an updated climate change strategy. This examination produced a proposed [framework](#) for UK MOD's leaders to use for assessing climate change risks to its mission, as well as multiple policy recommendations for addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities climate change presents to the UK MOD. As the UK MOD writes its climate change strategy using the results of the RAND Europe study, it can also offer other NATO defence ministries advice on this issue.

Marc Kodack, [A Climate Change Framework for the UK's Ministry of Defence - Lessons for NATO?](#) The Centre for Climate and Security, 29 July 2020

Collective Defence

At successive summits since 2014, NATO leaders have agreed a range of measures to enhance their deterrence and defence posture, including the establishment of an enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the three Baltic states. They have further recognised that credible deterrence requires these small multinational forces to be underpinned by a robust reinforcement strategy.

Valerie Insinna and Aaron Mehta, [Moving US F-16s from Germany will ripple far outside the Black Sea region](#), Defense News, 13 August 2020

[The US and NATO are boosting their presence in a hotspot for military activity near Russia](#), Business Insider, 11 August 2020

Glen E. Howard, [Stryker deployment to Black Sea will bolster NATO's eastern flank](#), Military Times, 10 August 2020

Christelle Calmels, [NATO's 360-degree approach to security: alliance cohesion and adaptation after the Crimean crisis](#), *European Security*, 22 July 2020

Sven Biscop, [In the desert or at sea? Securing Europe's southern flank](#), Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 96/2020, 16 July 2020

[NATO Crafting All-Domain, Euro-Atlantic Strategy as Threats to Alliance Shift](#), USNI News, 16 July 2020

Josh Campbell, [Why NATO should adopt a tactical readiness initiative](#), War on the Rocks 13 July 2020

[NATO Puts Defence Plan for Poland, Baltics Into Action, Officials Say](#), New York Times, 2 July 2020

[NATO endorses new Baltic defense plans after Turkey withdraws veto](#), The Baltic Times, 30 June 2020

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski, Ray Wojcik and Carsten Schmiedl, [NATO needs a Coherent Approach to Defending its Eastern Flank](#), War on the Rocks, 12 June 2020

Neringa Bladaitė & Margarita Šešelgytė, [Building a Multiple 'Security Shelter' in the Baltic States after EU and NATO Accession](#), *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 72 No.6, 2020, pp. 1010-1032

Counterterrorism

In June NATO launched its first ever Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum (CTRC) to enhance “capacities to develop national skills and improve counter-terrorism strategies”. Drawing on historical examples, the CTRC provides an overview of terrorist ideologies, motivations and methods, as well as contemporary counter-terrorism practices and potential future projections. It is the result of close cooperation between the Defence Education Enhancement Programme

and NATO's Counter-Terrorism Section, as well as the Partnership for Peace Consortium. Over 100 experts from nations across five continents, including from Tunisia, Jordan and Mauritania, as well as multiple international organizations contributed to the writing, drafting, and editing of the final product.

[NATO Launches Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum](#), Homeland Security Today, 21 June 2020

[NATO launches Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum](#), NATO News Release, 12 June 2020

[NATO Secretary General addresses Foreign Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS](#), NATO News Release, 4 June 2020

COVID-19: NATO's response

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented challenge. “NATO and allied military personnel have been key in supporting civilian efforts – setting up field hospitals, providing military airlift, sharing medical expertise, and helping to develop innovative responses”, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) about the alliance's role in the relief effort. This has included facilitating the delivery of medical supplies and mobilising NATO's scientific network. This effort has included some 350 flights airlifting hundreds of tons of critical supplies around the world; setting up almost 100 field hospitals; and the deployment of more than half a million troops to support the civilian response. These military personnel have been involved in logistics, controlling borders, disinfecting public spaces and providing medical capabilities.

When did NATO first learn about the outbreak?

An emerging issue concerns the timing of when NATO first became aware of coronavirus. According to reports, the US intelligence community became aware of the emerging disease in Wuhan in the second week of

November 2019 and drew up a classified document. US intelligence informed the Trump administration, which ignored it, but also apparently updated NATO allies and Israel with the classified document. As Professor Paul Rogers [asks](#), “If NATO was informed of the outbreak in November, as US and Israeli sources have indicated, did NATO act on it and, if so, how?”. For appropriate lessons to be learned it is crucial that NATO answers these questions.

Preparing for the future

NATO is now preparing for any future health crisis, and to this end, the NATO Defence Ministers in June (see below) agreed (a) a new operational plan, to be ready for any second wave of COVID-19; (b) to create a stockpile of medical equipment to provide immediate assistance to allies and partner countries; and (c) to set up a fund to acquire critical medical supplies. However, details remain sketchy and there was no indication as to whether the operational plan will be made public.

The NATO Secretary General stated that “many allies have offered to donate medical equipment to the stockpile and to contribute to the financing”, but provided no concrete examples of this “sign of allied unity and solidarity”. Asked by a journalist to clarify when the stockpile would be ready, what would be included in it, and to give an indication of how much money is planned for the fund he said: “This is a flexible fund and a flexible stockpile, meaning that we have now agreed to establish the framework, the mechanisms, both for the fund and for the stockpile and allies already at this meeting today made specific announcements about funding and about in-kind contributions. But the size, it’s too early to say, because that depends fully on the total amount of commitments from different NATO allies”

The COVID-19 crisis clearly requires a health care driven response and thus falls largely in the province of the individual NATO member states, and (for some European states) within the shared sovereignty which is delegated to the European Union.

The NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence in Bydgoszcz, Poland, has started an initiative to collect lessons learned regarding the pandemic. “This initiative will help us to review and enhance the NATO Military Police capabilities in order to provide a safe and secure environment for NATO Command Structures and NATO Force Structures (global and individual protection)”, said Colonel Miroslaw Labecki, Director of NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence.

During the meeting of the Political Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on 15 July allied parliamentarians also discussed NATO’s response to the pandemic. PC Chair Lord Campbell introduced a special draft report [COVID-19 and Transatlantic Security](#) where he argued that the alliance acted in the spirit of solidarity and mobilised its assets to help hardest-hit members and partners, while maintaining adequate levels of military preparedness.

Patrick Cockburn, [War and Pandemic Journalism: The Truth Can Disappear Fast](#), TomDispatch, 6 August 2020

[Allied Armed Forces’ Response to COVID-19, NATO Security Partnerships in Focus at Defence and Security Committee’s Online Meeting](#), NATO PA News Release, 16 July 2020

Karen Donfried, [The Importance of Transatlantic Cooperation During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), GMF Blog, 14 July 2020

[COVID-19 Sharpened Focus on Trans-Atlantic Security Gaps, Defense Official Says](#), US Department of Defense, 13 July 2020

[Coronavirus: Alliance scientists respond to the challenge](#), NATO News Release, 10 July 2020

[NATO Policy Directors discuss strengthening resilience and preparations for second wave in the COVID-19 pandemic](#), NATO News Release, 9 July 2020

[NATO scientists help Connecticut forecast the spread of COVID-19](#), NATO News Release, 3 July 2020

[Deputy Secretary General at Brussels Forum: NATO is responding in unity to the pandemic](#), NATO News Release, 30 June 2020

[Deputy Secretary General Geoană at Jagello Conference](#): Health and economic downturn should not become a security crisis, NATO News Release, 26 June 2020

[NATO Defence Ministers plan for possible second wave of COVID-19](#), NATO News Release, 22 June 2020

[The Role of NATO's Armed Forces in The Covid-19 Pandemic](#), Draft Special Report by Attila Mesterhazy (Hungary), NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Defence and Security Committee (DSC), 091 DSC 20 E, 18 June 2020

Political Committee (PC), [Covid-19 and Transatlantic Security](#), Draft Special Report, Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (UK), Chairperson, 105 PC 20 E, 17 June 2020

If NATO was informed of the outbreak in November, as US and Israeli sources have indicated, did NATO act on it and, if so, how?

Must Read: Paul Rogers, [Writing on the Wall? The UK and the Early Warning Signs of COVID-19](#), Oxford Research Group, 15 June 2020

[COVID-19 – NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence Started Initiative to Collect Lessons Learned](#), NATO Act News Release, 5 June 2020

Thierry Tardy (ed.), [COVID-19: NATO in the Age of Pandemics](#), NATO Defense College, NDC Research Paper, May 2020

Cyber Security, Information Warfare & Hybrid Threats

While NATO does not have its own cyber weapons, the alliance established an operations centre in August 2018 at Mons, Belgium. Several member states have since offered their cyber capabilities. The new NATO cyber operations centre (CYOC) is expected to be fully staffed by 2023 and able to mount its own cyberattacks.

A Russian hacking group that calls itself Evil Corp. has conducted sophisticated ransomware attacks on US companies, according to [media reports](#) in June. Experts say that these attacks are a major threat to the US election infrastructure.

James Jones, Ian Brzezinski, Douglas Lute and Robert Wheeler, [NATO Must Move Out Smartly on 5G](#), Defense One, 13 August 2020

[Russia-aligned hackers running anti-Nato fake news campaign – report](#), The Guardian, 30 July 2020

[Anti-NATO disinformation effort uses coronavirus to poke political tensions](#), CyberScoop, 29 July 2020

[NATO's approach to countering disinformation: a focus on COVID-19](#), Stop Fake, 24 July 2020

[Meet Dan Black, a cyber analyst protecting NATO networks against cyber threats](#), NATO News Release, 20 July 2020

[Siemens and NATO CCDCOE cooperation: cybersecurity for critical infrastructure](#), Smart Energy, 6 July 2020

Alan Borland, [Why a Common Data Classification Standard is an imperative for NATO](#), Enterprise Times, 23 June 2020

[New Disinformation Detection Technology wins NATO's Innovation Challenge Spring 2020](#), NATO News Release, 18 June 2020

[Statement by the North Atlantic Council concerning malicious cyber activities](#), NATO News Release, 3 June 2020

Defence Budgets, Procurement and Burden Sharing

The burden-sharing debate has dominated successive NATO Summit (see, for, example the discussion in Observatory No. 48).

German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer is pushing for a new yardstick to measure Berlin's contributions to NATO, suggesting the country could shoulder 10% percent of alliance requirements. The figure is meant to reflect the share of NATO's total "planning targets," a German defence ministry spokesman said.

NATO's future fleet of multi-role aircraft marked an important milestone at the end of June as the first of the eight aircraft in the fleet landed at the main operating base in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. The aircraft, an Airbus A-330, arrived from the production facility in Getafe (Spain). In addition, NATO received the third and fourth of five Northrop Grumman RQ-4D Phoenix unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that will form the air component of its Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) capability.

[Airbus delivers second A330 MRTT aircraft to Nato](#), Airforce Technology, 12 August 2020

Harvey Sapolsky, [Beware of Latvians Bearing Gifts](#), National Interest, 9 August 2020

[Germany floats a new NATO spending yardstick: 10 percent](#), Defense News, 7 August 2020

[The cost of Europe's defense](#), Editorial, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 7 August 2020

[The race is on to replace NATO's early-warning aircraft fleet](#), Defense News, 6 August 2020

[Eastern European NATO allies ramp up drone buys to protect their borders](#), Defense News, 6 August 2020

[NATO receives fourth RQ-4D Phoenix remotely piloted aircraft](#), Defence Blog, 28 July 2020

Jakub Odehnal & Jiří Neubauer, [Economic, Security, and Political Determinants of Military Spending in NATO Countries](#), *Defence and Peace Economics*, vol. 31 no.5, 2020, pp. 517-531

[NATO Airlift Management Program expands C-17 training capability](#), Skies Magazine, 24 July 2020

[NATO spending rules need revising due to coronavirus, German defense chief says](#), Deutsche Welle, 17 July 2020

[NATO receives third Phoenix UAV as AGS tracks towards IOC](#), Jane's, 16 July 2020

[NATO participates in Albanian OSCE Chairmanship High-Level Conference on combating corruption](#), NATO News Release, 7 July 2020

[First aircraft of NATO's future multi-role tanker transport fleet lands at Eindhoven airbase](#), NATO News Release, 30 June 2020

[Airbus delivers first A330 aircraft to Nato fleet](#), Air Force Technology, 30 June 2020

[Northrop Grumman supports Nato RQ-4D Phoenix training](#), Airforce Technology, 25 June 2020

[Unified Vision 2020 to guide further development of NATO Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities](#), NATO News Release, 22 June 2020

[NATO's new surveillance drone begins test flights over the Mediterranean](#), Defense News, 22 June 2020

Kristýna Pavlíčková & Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz, [To free or not to free \(ride\): a comparative analysis of the NATO burden-sharing in the Czech Republic and Lithuania](#), *Defense & Security Analysis*, vol. 36 no.3, 2020, pp. 335-351

[Emerging and Disruptive Technology: workshop on Technology, Security and Finance](#), NATO News Release, 2020

Wukki Kim and Todd Sandler, [NATO at 70: Pledges, Free Riding, and Benefit-Burden Concordance](#), *Defence and Peace Economics*, vol. 31, no.4, 2020, pp. 400-413

Rebecca R. Robison, [NATO burden-sharing: A comprehensive framework for member evaluation](#), *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 39 no.3, 2020, pp.299-315

Energy Security

According to the 2018 [Brussels Summit Declaration](#), energy security plays an important role in NATO's common security. A stable and reliable energy supply increases the alliance's resilience against political and economic pressure (para 76). While recognising these issues are primarily a national responsibility, NATO "will continue regular allied consultations on issues related to energy security" and "refine NATO's role in energy security in accordance with established principles and guidelines, and continue to develop NATO's capacity to support national authorities in protecting critical infrastructure".

Arnold C. Dupuy, [Energy security in the era of hybrid warfare](#), Atlantic Council, 12 August 2020

Petr Iskenderov, [Nord Stream 2 undermines NATO unity](#), Modern Diplomacy, 13 July 2020

Enlargement & Partnerships

Bosnia Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina became a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme in 2006 and was invited to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 2010. However, it was only in 2018 that NATO Foreign Ministers agreed to accept the country's first Annual National Programme—a precondition for activation of the MAP.

[Bosnian Minister of Defense met with Commander of the NATO Headquarters in Sarajevo](#), Sarajevo Times, 24 August 2020

[Bosnia and Herzegovina benefits from further Allied assistance against global pandemic](#), NATO News Release, 29 June 2020

Georgia

A 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration promised eventual NATO membership for Georgia—a position reiterated at

several NATO summits since, and most recently in July 2018.

Timothy Ogden, [The siren song of promised NATO membership for some post-Soviet states](#), New Europe, 20 August 2020

[Former NATO general Breedlove: Nobody has contributed to NATO more than Georgia](#), Agend.ge, 18 August 2020

Kakhaber Kemoklidze and Natia Seskuria, [Twelve Years Since the August War, Georgia Still Faces Russian Aggression](#), RUSI Commentary, 12 August 2020

[28 Georgian soldiers infected with coronavirus in Afghanistan](#), Khaama News, 11 July 2020

Irakli Beraia, [Georgia strengthens democracy, moves closer to NATO with US support](#), The Hill, 11 July 2020

[Georgian peacekeepers arrive for Afghan NATO mission](#), Agenda, 8 July 2020

[Defence ministry to buy NATO-standard hardware in update effort](#), Agenda.ge, 3 June 2020

Japan

Japan is the longest-standing of NATO's 'partners across the globe'. Building on initial contacts in the early 1990s, dialogue on common security interests has become more regular and structured. NATO and Japan committed to strengthen cooperation in a joint political declaration in April 2013.

[Secretary General commends strong cooperation between NATO and Japan](#), NATO News Release, 23 July 2020

Mauritania

NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme has launched "PROMEDEUS", a new project which will further enhance Mauritania's crisis management system. It builds on the achievements of two previous projects that established a crisis management centre in Nouakchott and four regional operational coordination centres. The new project aims to support the development of Mauritania's

operational capabilities and emergencies management in the fields of public health and civil protection.

[New project to boost Mauritania's crisis management capabilities launched](#), NATO News Release, 10 July 2020

Policy

Andres Kasekamp, [An uncertain journey to the promised land: The Baltic states' road to NATO membership](#), *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2020

[NATO Deputy Secretary General stresses the importance of security partnership for democracy](#), NATO News Release, 19 June 2020

Serbia

Unlike other Western Balkan partners, Serbia does not aspire to join NATO. However, the country is deepening its political dialogue and cooperation with the alliance on issues of common interest, such as defence reforms. In early July, Serbia officially inducted six Chinese CH-92A attack/reconnaissance drones into the country's armed forces. The country will also be purchasing Chinese-made FK-3 air defence missile system, the export version of the HQ-22 system, in the near future. This makes Serbia the first European country to deploy Chinese unmanned aerial vehicles. These deals have led some NATO members to worry about closer ties between Beijing and Belgrade.

[NATO over-sensitive to Serbia's pragmatic arms purchase from China](#), Global Times, 10 August 2020

UN-NATO Relations

Practical cooperation between NATO and the UN includes operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, cooperation on tackling terrorist misuse of technology, countering improvised explosive devices, border security, providing assistance to NATO allies in the identification and prosecution of

foreign terrorist fighters, and strengthening capabilities to deal with threats posed by terrorist attacks with the use of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons.

[NATO, UN and Civil Society discuss fight against conflict-related sexual violence](#), NATO News Release, 2 July 2020

[NATO and the UN hold consultations on COVID-19 response](#), NATO News Release, 29 June 2020

[NATO, UN and Civil Society discuss fight against conflict-related sexual violence](#), NATO News Release, 19 June 2020

Ukraine

Ukraine signed a partnership agreement with NATO in 1997 and launched talks on full membership in 2005. But those talks never progressed far, and the situation became even more complicated when Russia invaded Ukrainian territory in 2014, annexing Crimea and launching irregular warfare in other parts of the country. Since 2014, in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, cooperation has intensified.

On 12 June NATO recognised Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. This status is part of NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative, which aims to maintain and deepen cooperation between allies and partners that have made significant contributions to NATO-led operations and missions. Ukraine is now one of six Enhanced Opportunities Partners, alongside Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan and Sweden. Each of the partners has a tailor-made relationship with NATO, based on areas of mutual interest.

A meeting of NATO-Ukraine Commission in Brussels on 8 July focused on reforms and developments in Donbas, eastern Ukraine.

The disposal of unserviceable ammunition in Ukraine has been resumed under the NATO Trust Fund Demilitarization Project framework,

managed by the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA). These activities were interrupted earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Special procedures have been put in place to ensure compliance with the sanitary and epidemiological regulations and to provide a safe working environment.

The Trust Fund was established in 2005 at the request of the Ukrainian Government, and the second phase of the project was initiated in 2011. Since then, NSPA has contributed to the disposal of more than 29,600 tons of ammunition, 2.4 million PFM-1(S) antipersonnel landmines and employed up to 110 people in the region. With the restarting of activities, another 1,500 tons of unserviceable munitions are expected to be destroyed and safely disposed by the end of 2020.

[Disposal of Unserviceable Ammunition Resumes in Ukraine Under NATO Trust Fund Project](#), NATO News, 18 August 2020

[Three membership components: What will Ukraine's path towards NATO be?](#), Ukrinform, 17 August 2020

[Poll: nearly 60% of Ukrainians support EU accession, almost 50% - joining NATO](#), UNIAN, 13 August 2020

[NATO boosts scientific cooperation with Ukraine](#), NATO News Release, 7 August 2020

[NATO could deploy middle-range missiles in Ukraine, - Lukashenko](#), 112 International, 7 August 2020

[Statement by the NATO PA President on ceasefire implementation in Eastern Ukraine](#), NATO PA News Release, 27 July 2020

[NATO EOP: Defense Ministry outlines benefits for Ukraine](#), Ukrinform, 24 July 2020

[Ukraine's defense minister invites NATO Allies to join national drills this fall](#), UNIAN, 10 July 2020

[Meeting of NATO-Ukraine Commission focuses on reforms, developments in Donbas](#), UNIAN, 9 July 2020

Florian Encke, [An independent and sovereign Ukraine is key to Euro-Atlantic security](#), NATO Review, 8 July 2020

[Maronkova: Ukraine should carry out appropriate reforms on path towards NATO](#), Ukrinform, 3 July 2020

["Ice has broken": Zelensky could meet with Hungarian PM](#), UNIAN, 24 June 2020

Yuri Lapaiev, [Ukraine-NATO: Politicians Struggle, While Military Acts](#), Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 90, 23 June 2020

[Ukraine gets NATO's EOP status by "automatic consensus" - Deputy PM](#), UNIAN, 23 June 2020

[NATO recognises Ukraine as Enhanced Opportunities Partner](#), NATO News Release, 12 June 2020

[Top Ukrainian And German Diplomats Talk NATO And Conflict In Eastern Ukraine](#), RFE/RL 2 June 2020

History

In 1976, the Soviet Union began deploying a new missile, the SS-20, that was one of the pivotal events of the Cold War, igniting a confrontation between NATO and the USSR over medium-range "Euromissiles".

John T. Correll, [The Euromissile Showdown](#), Air Force Magazine, 1 February 2020

Libya and intra-NATO conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean

Libya has been in conflict since 2011, when a NATO-backed uprising deposed and killed Moammar Gadhafi. The country has since been split between rival administrations in the east and the west, each backed by armed groups and different foreign governments.

The UN backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli led by Fayez Sarraj is supported by Turkey, which sent troops and mercenaries to protect the capital in January, as well as Italy and Qatar. The NATO Secretary General has also indicated his support for the GNA. In the eastern city of Tobruk, Libya's House of Representatives, with

military forces under the command of Khalifa Hifter (who launched an offensive on Tripoli last year), is backed by a number of Arab countries, including Egypt and the UAE and overtly at least by Russia and France.

In July the GNA, backed by Turkey reversed a year-old attack on the capital by Haftar's army, but fears continued to grow of a new escalation in the chaotic proxy war, as rival sides mobilised for a battle over Sirte, the gateway to the country's major oil export terminals, which are under General Haftar's control. However, towards the end of August the GNA announced a ceasefire and in a separate statement, Aguila Saleh, speaker of the rival east-based House of Representatives, also called for a ceasefire.

Intra NATO divisions

At the beginning of July France suspended its role in Operation Sea Guardian, a NATO operation aiming to counter maritime terrorism and ensure freedom of navigation, after accusing Turkey of violating the UN arms embargo against Libya. France's withdrawal from the NATO operation came after its frigate Courbet tried to inspect the cargo ship Cirkin on 10 June, suspecting it was smuggling arms.

[According to France](#), its frigate Courbet was unable to inspect the cargo after being targeted three times by weapon and defence systems from Turkish warships escorting the Cirkin. However, [according to Turkey's ambassador to France Ismail Hakki Musa](#), the Courbet was the aggressor while the Cirkin was only carrying humanitarian aid. [Musa also said](#), that the NATO report investigating the 10 June incident was "inconclusive", to which the [French defence ministry responded](#) that France will not recommit to Operation Sea Guardian until the UN arms embargo is respected by all NATO allies. [France also demanded](#), amongst other things, better NATO and EU coordination to enforce the embargo and the

introduction of mechanisms that would avoid similar incidents in the future.

French-Turkish tensions continued to build with the Turkish Foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu [saying on 2 July that](#) "Our expectation from France at the moment is for it to apologize in a clear fashion, without ifs or buts, for not providing the correct information". French President [Emmanuel Macron responded](#) by saying that "We have the right to expect more from Turkey than from Russia given that it is a member of NATO".

In June [NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#) said that the Libyan arms embargo "needs to be respected by all sides", however, the embargo does not equate Libya's UN-recognized government with the forces led by Khalifa Haftar. Therefore, "NATO is ready to give its support to the government of Tripoli", [said Stoltenberg](#) having discussed the situation separately with the Libyan Prime Minister and Turkish President Erdogan. Although NATO is prepared to follow through on its promise in helping Libya's UN-recognized government with developing defence and security institutions, political negotiations, led by the UN and involving all parties, is the only solution to the crisis, [said Stoltenberg](#).

Turkey and Greece are also at odds in a race to develop energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. The two countries have laid claim to overlapping areas, arguing they belong to their respective continental shelves. In July, Turkey put out a naval alert that it was sending its Oruc Reis research ship to carry out a drilling survey in waters close to the Greek island of Kastellorizo, a short distance from the coast of south-west Turkey. The alert prompted alarm in the Greek military, and relations between Greece and Turkey deteriorated until German intervention, brought a commitment to dialogue. However, in August Greece signed a deal with Egypt to set up a

maritime zone that infuriated Turkey. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas urged Greece and Turkey to de-escalate their territorial dispute, while the NATO Secretary General also called for dialogue between the two parties.

[NATO chief Stoltenberg calls for Turkish-Greek dialogue on East Med tensions](#), Daily Sabah, 26 August 2020

[NATO allies are facing off in the Eastern Mediterranean. The conflict could entangle the entire region](#), CNN, 26 August 2020

[Germany's Maas calls on Greece and Turkey to avoid 'catastrophe'](#), Deutsche Welle, 25 August 2020

[Gadhafi's cousin: NATO, UN Security Council responsible for Libya's crisis](#), Middle East Monitor, 8 August 2020

Philip Kowalski, [Why U.S. Engagement in Libya Is Critical for Strengthening NATO](#), National Interest, 24 July 2020

Heather Conley and Rachel Ellehus, [How NATO Can Avoid a Strategic Decoupling in the Eastern Mediterranean](#), CSIS Commentary, 17 July 2020

Candace Rondeaux, [Libya's Expanding Proxy War May Be the Ultimate Test of NATO's Resilience](#), World Politics Review, 17 July 2020

Andrei Isaev, [Libyan conflict puts NATO to the test](#), Modern Diplomacy, 13 July 2020

Talha Köse, [NATO and EU share tragedy in Libya crisis](#), Daily Sabah, 13 July 2020

Emile Hokayem, [Libya: a cauldron for Mediterranean power politics](#), IISS Analysis, 6 July 2020

[France-Turkey spat over Libya arms exposes NATO's limits](#), AP, 5 July 2020

[Libya crisis: France suspends Nato mission role amid Turkey row](#), BBC News, 2 July 2020

Serife Cetin, [NATO shows signs of change in its Libya policy](#), Anadolu Agency, 23 June 2020

[NATO concerned by growing Russian presence in Libya](#), Anadolu Agency, 23 June 2020

M.K.Bhadrakumar, [NATO returns to Libya to challenge Russia](#), New Europe, 19 June 2020

[NATO to probe France-Turkey Med naval incident](#), Associated Press, 18 June 2020

M. K. Bhadrakumar, [NATO Returns to Libya to Challenge Russia](#), Counter Punch, 4 June 2020

M K Bhadrakumar, [NATO vs Russia: Who will win Libya?](#), Global Village Space, 1 June 2020

Maritime Security

NATO's 2011 Maritime Strategy sets out a series of activities that includes collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security and maritime security. In July, the outgoing chief of US Naval Forces Europe-Africa Adm. James G. Foggo said NATO needed a new naval strategy to counter Russia and China. Foggo [noted](#) in an interview the changes in global naval security in the nine years since NATO formalized a sea strategy, which he said currently takes no account of "the return, or the resurgence, of the Russian submarine force". "It misses the rise of China as a great power, it misses completely the illegal annexation of Ukraine [in 2014]," Foggo said. "That's not a criticism of NATO. That's just something that, you know, I'm making my colleagues aware of. I think we need to do a refresh".

[Royal Navy and Nato allies escort nine Russian vessels](#), Naval Technology, 20 August 2020

[NATO Looks to Replace Pair of R&D Vessels](#), National Defense, 19 August 2020

[In the North Atlantic, NATO navies are practicing to take on a wave of Russian submarines](#), Business Insider, 31 July 2020

Matthew Thomas, [Maritime Security Issues in the Baltic Sea Region](#), Foreign Policy Research Institute, 22 July 2020

[Outgoing U.S. Naval Forces-Europe chief calls for new NATO maritime strategy](#), UPI News, 17 July 2020

[NATO exercises with Tunisian Navy in the Mediterranean](#), Defence Blog, 4 June 2020

[NATO Allied ships patrol in the Black Sea](#), NATO News Release, 20 June 2020

Military Exercises

NATO scaled down military exercises in Europe to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Exercise Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) led by Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO finished its 49th iteration in the Baltic Sea in mid-June. Held in the Baltic region since 1972, BALTOPS provides maritime-focused training exercise for NATO allies and partners. Training events include air defence, anti-submarine warfare, maritime interdiction and mine countermeasure operations. Also in June, the US and five other NATO allies took part in the anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare exercise Dynamic Mongoose off the coast of Iceland.

[US bombers arrive in Europe for training with NATO Allies and partners](#), NATO News Release, 22 August 2020

[Ramstein airmen join Bulgarian forces in paratroop exercises near NATO's eastern borders](#), Stars and Stripes, 20 August 2020

[NATO Anti-Submarine Exercise Dynamic Mongoose Kicks Off With U.S. Destroyer, SSN](#), USNI News, 30 June 2020

[US, NATO allies start anti-submarine warfare exercise Dynamic Mongoose](#), Navy Times, 29 June 2020

[NATO's Dynamic Mongoose submarine exercises underway in North Atlantic](#), UPI, 29 June 2020

[NATO exercise helps improve interoperability for 22 nations across 10 time zones](#), NATO News Release, 26 June 2020

G. Thomas, P. Williams, and Y. Dyakova, [Exercise Defender-Europe 20: enablement and resilience in action](#), NATO Review, 16 June 2020

[Russia, NATO conduct parallel wargames over Baltic Sea](#), Military Times, 12 June 2020

[Russia Military Conducts Combat Training as U.S., Allies Drill in Baltic, Setting Stage for Further Rivalry](#), Newsweek, 11 June 2020

[Explainer: Why The U.S.-NATO Exercises In Eastern Europe Are Important](#), RFE/RL, 10 June 2020

[NATO navies test readiness in Baltic war games](#), Emerging Europe, 9 June 2020

[NATO navies and air forces exercise in the Baltic Sea](#), NATO News Release, 8 June 2020

Dylan Malyasov, [NATO launches massive maritime-focused exercise close to Russia](#), Defence Blog, 7 June 2020

[Warships mass in the Baltic Sea for a coronavirus-conscious battle drill](#), Defense News, 4 June 2020

[Air and maritime assets from NATO allies to kick off Baltic Operations exercise](#), Navy Recognition, 2 June 2020

[NATO's BALTOPS 2020 exercise to involve 19 countries](#), UPI, 1 June 2020

Illimar Ploom, Zdzislaw Sliwa and Viljar Veebel, [The NATO "Defender 2020" exercise in the Baltic States: Will measured escalation lead to credible deterrence or provoke an escalation?](#), *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 39 no4, 2020, pp. 368-384

NATO 2030 Reflection Group

NATO leaders agreed at their December 2019 summit in London that Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg should head up a "reflection process" aimed at strengthening the alliance's political dimension. Stoltenberg named a panel of 10 experts on 31 March 2020—five men and five women—to be co-chaired by Thomas de Maizière, a member of the Bundestag and former German defence minister and A. Wess Mitchell, a former assistant secretary of state for European affairs in Trump's administration.

On the 8 June, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [launched](#) his outline for [NATO 2030](#) in an online conversation with two US think-tanks, the Atlantic Council and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. "This is an opportunity to reflect on where we see our alliance ten years from now, and how it will continue to keep us safe in a more uncertain world" the Secretary General said. However, the NATO Secretary General's launch event and the make-up of the Reflection Group suggest that this reflection

process will not be challenging the position of the United States as the key determinant of strategic processes within the alliance.

For further details read: NATO's reflection process (NATO 2030): will it address the twin elephants in the room (American exceptionalism and militarism)? [NATO Watch Briefing Paper No.77](#), 16 June 2020

[Will NATO Still Be Relevant in the Future?](#) Washington Diplomat, 7 August 2020

[Will NATO still be relevant in the future?](#) Atlantic Council debate, 24 July 2020

Hans Binnendijk and Timo S. Koste, [NATO needs a new core task](#), Defense News, 22 July 2020

George Robertson, [NATO needs its full strength to resist Chinese and Russian threats](#), The Times, 20 July 2020 (paywall)

Ana Palacio, [NATO Is Dying](#), Project Syndicate, 15 July 2020

Ian Bond, [Europe must take on its own defense responsibilities](#), Defense News, 3 July 2020

[NATO Secretary General underlines the need for NATO to take a more global approach](#), NATO News Release, 30 June 2020

[NATO Chief Talks Nuclear Arms, Burden-sharing, NATO 2030](#), US Department of Defense, News Release, 26 June 2020

[Remarks](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Brussels Forum, 23 Jun. 2020

Katarína Klingová, [#NATO2030 – Preparation for Future Challenges](#), Globsec Commentary, 22 June 2020

Peter Roberts, [NATO 2030: Difficult Times Ahead](#), RUSI Commentary, 15 June 2020

Frederick Kempe, [U.S. and European tensions jeopardize 75 years of democracy, open markets and individual rights](#), CNBC, 14 June 2020

Gorana Grgic, [NATO: Rebranding exercise or new product launch?](#) The Interpreter, 12 June 2020

[NATO eyes deeper ties in China's neighbourhood](#), Defence Connect, 11 June 2020

[Stoltenberg urges NATO unity amid challenges from China](#), Russia, RFE/RL, 8 June 2020

[Stoltenberg Launches 'NATO 2030' Effort to Strengthen Alliance](#), US Department of Defense, 8 June 2020

[NATO chief seeks to forge deeper ties in China's neighbourhood](#), Defense News, 8 June 2020

[NATO chief urges allies not to go it alone](#), Military Times, 8 June 2020

[NATO must become more political and global, says alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg](#), EuroNews, 8 June 2020

[Remarks](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on launching #NATO2030 - Strengthening the Alliance in an increasingly competitive world, 8 June 2020

[Secretary General launches NATO 2030 to make our strong Alliance even stronger](#), NATO News Release, 8 June 2020

NATO Defence Ministers Meeting – June 2020

The NATO Defence Ministers held a virtual two-day meeting in June to discuss: preparations for a possible second wave of COVID-19; updating national resilience guidelines; deterrence and defence, including the response to Russia's new nuclear-capable missiles and the rise of China; and NATO missions and operations, particularly in Afghanistan and Iraq. Key activities and decisions taken:

- A new operational plan was agreed, to be ready for any second wave of COVID-19. No details of the plan were provided and it is unclear if it will be published. It was also agreed to create a stockpile of medical equipment and supplies, and a new fund to acquire those supplies (see COVID-19 section above).

- Ministers agreed to update baseline requirements for national resilience to take account of cyber threats; the security of supply chains, and consequences of foreign ownership and control. Again, it is unclear whether or not these ‘baseline requirements’ will be publicly available.
- A “balanced package of political and military elements” was agreed in response to Russia’s “destabilizing and dangerous” behaviour. Some parts of the package were outlined, including strengthened air and missile defence, advanced conventional capabilities, intelligence, exercises, and “steps to keep NATO’s nuclear deterrent safe, secure and effective”. The exact nature of the nuclear-related steps was not disclosed; deployment of new land-based nuclear missiles in Europe continue to be ruled out.
- The US Defense Secretary said that Washington would consult NATO allies on the next steps in plans to withdraw some US troops from Germany (see Germany section below).
- Ministers expressed concern about the consequences of the rise of China (see China section above).
- Ministers reiterated their strong commitment to Afghanistan’s long-term security; to support the peace process NATO is “adjusting” its presence in Afghanistan (i.e. attempting an organized and managed exit). In Iraq, NATO remains committed to enhancing its training mission and to increasing its presence when conditions allow (see Operations section below).
- Eleven NATO Defence Ministers (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey) launched a multilateral initiative on pilot training.

- Various intra-NATO divisions persisted: Turkey continued to block a NATO defence plan for Poland and the Baltic states; while NATO agreed to investigate a recent incident between Turkish warships and a French naval vessel in the Mediterranean (see above).

For further details read: Papering over the cracks in NATO’s uncertain world A review of the NATO Defence Ministers meeting, Brussels, 17-18 June 2020, [NATO Watch Briefing Paper No.78](#), 24 June 2020

[Eleven Allies launch Multinational Initiative on Pilot Training](#), NATO News Release, 19 June 2020

[NATO chief sees no ‘imminent threat’ against allies in face of China, Russia tensions](#), CNBC, 18 June 2020

[NATO Defense Ministers Look to Counter Russia, 2nd COVID-19 Wave](#), US Department of Defense, 18 June 2020

[Readout of Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper's Remarks at the NATO Defense Ministerial](#), US Department of Defense, 18 June 2020

[NATO Defence Ministers plan for possible second wave of COVID-19](#), NATO News Release, 18 June 2020

[NATO Looks to Counter Russia’s Growing Nuclear Capabilities](#), Air Force Magazine, 17 June 2020

[NATO Defence Ministers agree response to Russian missile challenge, address missions in Afghanistan and Iraq](#), NATO News Release, 17 June 2020

[NATO concerned by Russia’s growing presence in E.Med](#), Anadolu Agency, 16 June 2020

[NATO Ministers of Defence meet to discuss global challenges](#), NATO News Release, 16 June 2020

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Since being formed in 1965, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has provided a forum for parliamentarians from the NATO member states to promote

debate on key security challenges, facilitate mutual understanding and support national parliamentary oversight of defence matters. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly consists of 269 delegates from the 30 NATO member states. Each delegation is based on the country's size. In addition to delegations from NATO member states, delegates from associate countries and parliamentary observer delegations take part in Assembly activities and bring the total number of delegates to approximately 360.

The Assembly has five Committees – the Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security; Defence and Security Committee; Economics and Security Committee; Political Committee; and the Science and Technology Committee – and eight sub-committees. Much of the Assembly's work is carried out by these committees.

In July the Assembly concluded three weeks of online committee meetings. During these meetings, allied legislators reviewed the many dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis, examined the opportunities and challenges related to China's rise, and discussed a range of other challenges affecting Euro-Atlantic security. All [Assembly's draft reports](#) and [recordings of Committee meetings](#) are available on the NATO PA website.

A second round of online committee meetings will be held from 31 August to 16 September. One of the Assembly's key priorities this autumn will be to develop its contribution to the NATO 2030 reflection process led by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (see above).

[Four months into COVID-19 pandemic, NATO PA Bureau takes stock of Assembly's priorities and activities](#), NATO PA News Release, 17 July 2020

[Allied and Ukrainian lawmakers condemn Russian destabilisation, discuss COVID-19 crisis, reform efforts, and NATO-Ukraine cooperation](#), NATO PA News Release, 7 July 2020

Nigel Walker, [The NATO Parliamentary Assembly and UK delegations](#), UK House of Commons Briefing Paper, No. CBP 8951, 30 June 2020

NATO Secretary General on Desert Island Discs

Desert Island Discs is a UK radio programme broadcast on BBC Radio 4. It was first broadcast in 1942. Each week a guest, called a 'castaway' during the programme, is asked to choose eight recordings (usually, but not always, music), a book and a luxury item that they would take if they were to be cast away on a desert island, whilst discussing their lives and the reasons for their choices. The NATO Secretary General was the castaway in an episode broadcast in July.

[BBC Desert Island Discs](#)

Podcast Released On: 12 Jul 2020 (Available for over a year): Jens Stoltenberg is the Secretary General of NATO and a former Prime Minister of Norway. Although he was born into a political family in Norway, he grew up thinking he would become a statistician, before turning to a career in politics. He served as the Prime Minister of Norway twice. During his second term, Norway experienced one of the darkest days in its recent history, when 77 people were murdered in a bomb attack in Oslo and a mass shooting on a nearby island. Before becoming the Secretary General of NATO, a post he has held since 2014, he spent time as a UN Special Envoy on climate change. His term in office as Secretary-General has been extended until September 2022. Presenter: Lauren Laverne Producer: Sarah Taylor

Music choices:

- Madrugada and Ane Brun: Lift Me
- Smerz: No Harm
- Leonard Cohen: So Long, Marianne
- Bruce Springsteen: Hungry Heart
- Ane Brun: Make You Feel My Love
- Ingebjorg Bratland: Til Ungdommen

- The Special A.K.A.: Free Nelson Mandela
- Ingrid Olava: From Up Here

Book choice: Textbook on statistics

Luxury item: A pair of skis

[Springsteen and Stoltenberg: NATO Secretary-General Picks Top Tracks](#), New York Times, 17 July 2020

Ryan C. Hendrickson, [Servant of the institution: Secretary General Lord Peter Carrington](#), NATO Review, 14 July 2020

Nuclear Weapons

NATO's collective defence strategy is based on a mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities. The alliance continues to argue that its nuclear arrangements are fully consistent with the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while rejecting the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as being "inconsistent with the alliance's nuclear deterrence policy". Both are questionable claims.

A new Russian nuclear policy document

President Vladimir Putin approved a strategic document on the basic principles of Russia's nuclear deterrence policy on 2 June, naming the creation and deployment of anti-missile and strike weapons in space as one of the main military threats to Russia. In this six-page document, "[Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence](#)" (in Russian)—published for the first time; all prior iterations were classified—includes four main sections: general principles; substance of deterrence (that is, what deterrence means to Russia); the conditions under which Russia would use nuclear weapons; and the roles of Russian government institutions and agencies. Much of what the document contains is not new. Russia argues that its nuclear weapons policy is defensive and designed to

safeguard the country's sovereignty against potential adversaries.

It outlines four scenarios in which Moscow could order the use of nuclear weapons, and some of them involve potential first-use of nuclear weapons. In line with Russian military doctrine, the new document reaffirms that the country could use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack or an aggression involving conventional weapons that "threatens the very existence of the state".

The two other provisions confirm what has often been suspected: that Moscow can launch nuclear weapons in cases in which the government receives reliable information that a ballistic missile attack is imminent or when actions (i.e. a cyberattack) on critically important government or military infrastructure could undermine Russia's nuclear retaliatory capacity. The new expanded wording reflects Russian concerns about the development of prospective conventional and cyber weapons that could give the United States the capability to knock out key Russian military assets and government facilities without resorting to nuclear weapons.

Further reading:

Olga Oliker, [New Document Consolidates Russia's Nuclear Policy in One Place](#), 4 June 2020

Pavel Felgenhauer, [Moscow Clarifies Its Nuclear Deterrence Policy](#), Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 17 Issue: 80, 4 June 2020

Marek Menkiszak, [Russia's New Rhetorical Deterrence](#), RUSI Commentary, 10 June 2020

Gustav Gressel, [Russia's nuclear deterrence principles: what they imply, and what they do not](#), ECFR Commentary, 12 June 2020

Maxim Starchak, [Russia's New Nuclear Strategy: Unanswered Questions](#), RUSI Commentary, 26 June 2020

US administration discusses resumption of nuclear testing

[Reports](#) suggest that the US administration is considering a resumption of nuclear weapons testing. Such an outcome would reverse a decades-long moratorium on such actions. (The last US nuclear test explosion was in 1992.) The matter arose following accusations from US administration officials that Russia and China are conducting low-yield nuclear tests—an assertion that both countries have denied and that has not been substantiated by publicly available evidence.

US control of nuclear weapons on European soil

A formerly 'top secret' [document](#) from 1961, made public by the American National Security Archive, shows that the United States could unilaterally decide to use its nuclear weapons based in European countries. When the agreement to store US nuclear weapons on European soil was negotiated, countries such as Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal failed to enforce their right of approval in using these weapons.

Must Read: [The U.S. Nuclear Presence in Western Europe, 1954-1962](#), National Security Archive, 21 July 2020

UK supports controversial new US nuclear warhead

The UK has been lobbying the US Congress in support of a controversial new warhead for Trident missiles, claiming it is critical for "the future of NATO as a nuclear alliance". A letter from Britain's defence secretary, Ben Wallace, seen by *The Guardian* newspaper, urged Congress to support initial spending on the warhead, [the W93](#). The letter, sent in April but not previously reported, draws the UK into a US political debate, pitting the Trump administration against many Democrats and arms control groups over whether the \$14bn W93 programme is necessary. The US navy already has two warheads to choose

from for its submarine-launched Trident missiles.

[UK lobbies US to support controversial new nuclear warheads](#), *The Guardian*, 1 August 2020

Nuclear war simulation

A team of researchers at Princeton University developed a simulation for a plausible escalating war between the United States and Russia using realistic nuclear force postures, targets and fatality estimates. It is estimated that there would be more than 90 million people dead and injured within the first few hours of the conflict.

For more, see:

<https://sgs.princeton.edu/the-lab/plan-a>

Watch the four minute video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jy3JU-ORpo&feature=youtu.be>

[Plan A: How a Nuclear War Could Progress](#), *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2020

In the context of the pandemic, this updated study explores the ongoing and planned nuclear weapon modernisation programmes in China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Non-governmental researchers and analysts provide information on each country's modernisation programmes, plans, and budgets. The nuclear-armed states are spending billions of dollars to "upgrade" their nuclear weapons and delivery systems—in direct contradiction to their legal obligations for nuclear disarmament.

Must Read: [Assuring destruction Forever: 2020 Edition](#), *Reaching Critical Will*, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, June 2020

Asima Ashraf, [Relevancy of Russian Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in current NATO-Russian threat environment](#), *Modern Diplomacy*, 29 July 2020

Marion Messmer, [Strategic Risk Reduction in the European Context](#), *BASIC*, June 2020

Jon B. Wolfsthal, [America should welcome a discussion about NATO's nuclear strategy](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 29 June 2020

Oliver Meier, [Liability or Asset? The EU and Nuclear Weapons](#), Clingendael Spectator, 16 June 2020

Wilfred Wan, [Nuclear risks are laid bare by COVID-19](#), European Leadership Network Commentary, 11 June 2020

Vincent Boulanin, Lora Saalman, Petr Topychkanov, Fei Su and Moa Peldán Carlsson, [Artificial Intelligence, Strategic Stability and Nuclear Risk](#), SIPRI Report, June 2020

Jessica Cox, [Nuclear deterrence today](#), NATO Review, 8 June 2020

David Mackenzie, [Scots and Germans Make Common Cause on Nuclear Weapons](#), Bella Caledonia, 5 June 2020

Michèle Flournoy and Jim Townsend [Striking at the Heart of the Trans-Atlantic Bargain](#), Spiegel International, 3 June 2020

Becky Alexis-Martin, [Trump is looking to restart nuclear tests for the first time in 28 years, and we should all be worried](#), Independent, 2 June 2020

Katarzyna Kubiak, [Playing Warsaw against Berlin on nuclear weapons](#), European Leadership Network Commentary, 1 June 2020

Matthew Kroenig, [Shadows on the wall: Deterrence and disarmament](#), *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 39 no. 4, 2020, pp. 401-403

Operations and Missions

Afghanistan

At the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in June the NATO Secretary General stated that there had been “some progress” in Afghanistan, including the February agreement between the United States and the Taliban, some important steps on prisoners’ release, and some reduction in violence and “no attacks against NATO and US forces”. He also added that “we are also seeing a clear commitment from the Taliban to break all ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups” (but in response to question qualified this by saying, “We

need a stronger and more firm demonstration of that”). At the same time, he stressed that “the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, difficult and there are many obstacles that we have to overcome before we have a lasting political solution”. There is now “an ongoing conversation” in NATO on how best to support the peace efforts by “adjusting our presence”, the Secretary General said.

The NATO mission, which is in the process of reducing troop numbers from about 16,000 troops to roughly 12,000 troops, is preparing to make further reductions “in a coordinated, planned and orderly way”. But that “depends on the peace process, because this is a direct result of the US-Taliban agreement and the efforts to have a real peace process in Afghanistan”, he added. Asked about a potential unilateral US pull-out from Afghanistan (the US troop level is already down to 8,600 from around 12,000), the Secretary General again stressed that it would be a coordinated approach: “we made a decision earlier this year to move to what we call Phase A-Light which is a reduced NATO presence in Afghanistan. But we maintained the bases, the regional presence of the NATO forces in Afghanistan, including with a German-led presence in Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, with many other allies. And also the Italian-led presence in Herat, in the west of Afghanistan. And we will now have a process in NATO where we will sit together, the US and all other allies and discuss different options, different possibilities for further reductions. But of course, that will be done in a coordinated way, in an orderly way, and it will depend on the developments in Afghanistan”.

However, increased attacks from the Taliban on Afghanistan’s security forces, which in June suffered their [worst weekly casualties](#) so far in the 19-year-old Afghan war—with 291 members of Afghan National and Defence Security Forces killed and 550

others wounded in multiple Taliban attacks—as well as an initial reluctance on the part of President Ashraf Ghani’s government to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners, as stipulated in the peace deal, has hindered the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations.

In a [statement](#) issued on 14 July, NATO urged the Taliban to cease its violent campaign and allow a peaceful solution to the decades-long war after the alliance adhered to its commitment to reduce troop numbers. In early August, President Ghani agreed to release [the last 400 Taliban prisoners](#), but in the two weeks since, only 80 prisoners have been released. Thus, by late August the next steps of the peace process—a cease-fire and direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government—continued to be delayed.

Allegations of Russian kill-bounties

According to a *New York Times* [report](#) in late June, a Russian military intelligence unit secretly offered Afghan militants bounties to kill coalition forces. US intelligence briefed President Trump on the alleged Russian bounty programme in late March (a claim Trump denies). Twenty US soldiers were killed in Afghanistan in 2019, but it is unclear whether any of these deaths may be connected to this alleged covert operation.

After reviewing classified intelligence, Republican Senator Pat Toomey [called](#) for a Senate briefing on the reports. “If it is concluded that Russia offered bounties to murder American soldiers, a firm American response is required in short order,” Toomey said in a statement. Anatoly Antonov, the Russian Ambassador to the United States, claimed that the allegations are completely false and were “poisoning the atmosphere of cooperation” between the United States and Russia on establishing peace in Afghanistan.

During its own nine-year intervention in Afghanistan (Soviet–Afghan War, 25

Dec 1979 – 15 Feb 1989), the Soviet Union lost 15,000 troops in battle against the mujahideen, forerunners of today’s Taliban, who had [received](#) \$20 billion in US assistance through [Operation Cyclone](#).

Continuing violence

A UN’ mid-year [report](#) (1 Jan-30 June 2020) on the protection of civilians in Afghanistan detailed the continuing violence against the Afghan civilian population. According to the UN report, nearly 1,300 civilians have been killed and about 2,200 others wounded in the Afghan conflict so far this year. It attributed 43% of the civilian casualties to the Taliban, 23% to Afghan forces, 9% to the Islamic State and 3% to international military forces. The remainder were either undetermined or the result of crossfire.

New US Defense Department data shows that the United States has distributed approximately \$2 million in condolence payments to civilians in Afghanistan over the last five years (as reported by *The Washington Post*). The data also includes outlays for “battle damage” and “hero” payments, which the military provides to families of Afghan soldiers. After facing criticism in 2018 for allegedly underestimating civilian casualties, the US military developed new policies seeking to better prevent and address civilian deaths (but see box below).

US retaliation against the ICC

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating alleged war crimes and other abuses committed by US forces in Afghanistan. In retaliation, the United States has threatened economic and legal actions against the ICC, leading to [criticism](#) by two NATO allies. The Netherlands said it was “very disturbed” by the US measures, while France described them as “a grave attack on the court and a further undermining of multilateralism”.

New research on civilian casualties from airstrikes in Afghanistan

As the United States has increased its use of airstrikes in the war in Afghanistan civilian casualties have reached record numbers. New research by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, published in partnership with Al Jazeera, The Intercept and Bellingcat, reveals how the US military conducts its investigations when there are allegations of civilian casualties, and what justice looks like for civilians who lost loved ones to airstrikes.

The US dropped more munitions on Afghanistan in 2019 than any other year in the past decade. The first half of 2019 marked the first time in 10 years that deaths caused by US and Afghan forces surpassed those by the Taliban, a development the UN attributed to increased air attacks.

The research focuses on just 10 airstrikes that took place between 2018 and 2019. One hundred and fifteen civilians died in the 10 airstrikes; more than 70 of them were children. The Bureau crowdsourced information on particular strikes, then worked with an Al Jazeera film crew who travelled to Afghanistan to meet some of the survivors, confirming civilian casualties in some instances when the US government had not admitted them.

Both the US and Afghan militaries have poor records of investigating civilian casualties from air attacks. The US often disputes allegations of civilian harm and does not routinely interview survivors or witnesses of these attacks.

Sometimes, when the US or Afghan militaries acknowledge civilian casualties, they will give a condolence payment for their loss. But families told the researchers what they really want are answers and justice. This important research sheds light on how civilian loss is investigated and remembered.

Murtaza Hussain, [More than 70 children killed in just 10 airstrikes in Afghanistan, report finds](#), 3 June 2020

Also see:

[Afghanistan: Civilian Loss in the US Air War](#), Civilian casualties investigated amid a surging air campaign as US prepares for possible withdrawal from Afghanistan., Al Jazeera, 3 June 2020

Bashar Deeb and Jess Purkiss, [An airstrike, a family destroyed and the months-long quest for answers](#), Wired, 3 June 2020

Jessica Purkiss, [The families paying the price for the war in Afghanistan](#), Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 3 June 2020

Jessica Purkiss and Bashar Deeb, [Finding the faces of Afghanistan's slaughtered civilians](#), Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 3 June 2020

[With Delay in Afghan Peace Talks, a Creeping Sense of 'Siege' Around Kabul](#), New York Times, 23 August 2020

[Afghanistan to Release Last Taliban Prisoners, Removing Final Hurdle to Talks](#), New York Times, 5 August 2020

[As violence surges in Afghanistan, NATO warns Taliban attacks undermine faltering peace process](#), Washington Examiner, 15 July 2020

[Nato calls for Taliban to end violence in Afghanistan](#), The National, 15 July 2020

[North Atlantic Council statement on Afghanistan](#), NATO Press Release, 14 July 2020

Must Read: Andrew Quilty, [Afghanistan Between Negotiations: How the Doha Agreement Will Affect Intra-Afghan Peace](#), Lawfare, 5 July 2020

[NATO Steps In Amid Reports Of COVID-19 Hitting Afghan Forces](#), VoA, 4 July 2020

[Taliban's Violence 'Unacceptable': NATO SCR](#), Tolo News, 4 July 2020

[Republican lawmakers confirm intelligence reports on Russian operation to target U.S. troops but say material needs further review](#), Washington Post, 30 June 2020

[NATO officials say they were briefed on Russian bounties on US soldiers in Afghanistan — even though Trump claims he wasn't](#), Business Insider, 29 June 2020

[Afghanistan war: Russia denies paying militants to kill US troops](#), BBC News, 28 June 2020

[Russia denies report spy unit paid Taliban to attack NATO forces](#), Al Jazeera, 27 June 2020

[Head of international criminal court accuses US of acting unlawfully](#), The Guardian, 24 June 2020

[Afghan Security Forces Suffer Bloodiest Week in 19 Years](#), VoA, 22 June 2020

Jonathan Schroden, [Will the United States Really Go to Zero Troops in Afghanistan?](#) Lawfare, 15 June 2020

[NATO has enabled Afghan forces to fight terrorism themselves: NATO Chief](#), Khaama Press, 9 June 2020

[NATO's new SCR takes up role in Afghanistan at a critical juncture](#), Khaama Press, 1 June 2020

[Ambassador Stefano Pontecorvo assumes the role of the new NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan](#), NATO News Release, 1 June 2020

Iraq

At the NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018, the NATO Mission Iraq was launched following a request from the Iraqi government. The new, non-combat training and advisory mission was established in Baghdad in October 2018. At their meeting in February 2020, NATO Defence Ministers reaffirmed their support to Iraq and agreed to enhance NATO's role. Due to the security situation and the COVID-19 health crisis in spring 2020, NATO Mission Iraq had to temporarily suspend some activities and relocate personnel outside Iraq. However, the mission is now rebuilding its capacity in Baghdad and planning for NATO's future engagement. The planning is conducted in close coordination and consultation with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS/Daesh and the Iraqi government.

At the NATO Defence Ministers meeting in June, the NATO Secretary General acknowledged an increase in Islamic

State attacks in recent months, but stressed that the alliance remains committed to working with Iraq in the fight against international terrorism. Detailed consultations about the NATO Mission are ongoing with the Iraqi government. These are likely to have been made more complicated by an escalation in Turkey's border conflict with Kurdish groups in northern Iraq. While the Defence Ministers were meeting Turkey [deployed](#) special forces in northern Iraq backed by air and artillery support.

Given the unpredictable duration of the COVID-19 outbreak and the continuing insecurity in Iraq, it is unclear when NATO will resume the mission, and if its promised expansion would still follow. Meanwhile, the [US troop withdrawal](#) from Iraq continues with only about 2,500 left.

[U.S.-led troops withdraw from Iraq's Taji base](#), Reuters, 23 August 2020

[Spain completes delivery of medical assistance to Iraq](#), NATO News Release, 13 August 2020

[Spain delivers critical medical aid to Iraq](#), NATO News Release, 27 July 2020

[Turkey delivers critical aid to Iraq](#), NATO News Release, 1 July 2020

[Coronavirus response: Poland delivers medical aid to Iraq](#), NATO News Release, 17 June 2020

Elliot Stewart, [Admitting the Hard Reality of US Influence in Iraq](#), Geopolitical Monitor, 15 June 2020

Kosovo

Two decades after the withdrawal of Serbian forces, Kosovo's security is still guaranteed by 4,000 NATO troops, known as KFOR. Following a Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office indictment in June against Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi for alleged war crimes, a US-led peace summit between Kosovo and Serbia was postponed. The prosecutor, who works as a part of Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague, has accused Thaçi of war crimes

and crimes against humanity for his alleged involvement in persecution, torture and over 100 murders of political opponents and ethnic minorities between 1998 and 2000.

[Trump's Kosovo peace summit postponed amid war crime allegations](#), The Hill, 25 June 2020

[21 years of KFOR: continued contribution to peace and regional stability](#), NATO News Release, 13 June 2020

Russia-NATO relations

Relations between Russia and NATO have deteriorated to record post-Cold War lows. Both sides have competing explanations for this. Within the alliance, there remain disagreements about the nature of the Russian threat and how to respond to it.

On 1 June, the Russian military [accused](#) the US and its NATO allies of conducting “provocative” military drills near the nation’s borders, while also saying that it would not conduct major military exercises near the borders with NATO member countries this year. Sergei Rudskoy, chief of the main operational department for Russia’s General Staff, also said that NATO has stonewalled Russia’s written proposal to scale down each other’s military activities. He said Russia has moved large-scale drills scheduled for September, Kavkaz-2020, deeper inside the country and is “ready to adjust the locations of exercises on a parity basis” with NATO. He pointed to [recent NATO exercises](#) in the Arctic—three US destroyers entered the Barents Sea for the first time in three decades and held missile defence exercises alongside UK warships—as well as increasing nuclear-capable strategic bomber flights near Russian borders and US intelligence flights near Russian bases in Syria.

On 5 June, however, Russia [announced](#) the deployment of more troops to its western region, signalling a new

challenge to the US and NATO presence near the Russian border.

US Sixth Fleet commander Navy Vice Admiral Lisa Franchetti said in a press statement regarding the Arctic exercise: “In these challenging times, it is more important than ever that we maintain our steady drumbeat of operations across the European theatre while taking prudent measures to protect the health of our force”. “We remain committed to promoting regional security and stability, while building trust and reinforcing a foundation of Arctic readiness”.

As for Russia’s written proposal for a mutual de-escalation of military activities, an unnamed NATO official [told](#) Newsweek that the alliance remains active in attempting to engage with Moscow diplomatically. “NATO remains open to dialogue with Russia on military risk reduction and transparency, which is why in February we proposed to the Russian side to hold another meeting of the NATO-Russia Council”, the official said. “Unfortunately, Russia has so far not shown any interest in a meeting. NATO Allies also continue to call on Russia to follow existing transparency rules and to engage constructively in modernizing the Vienna Document on military activities”, the official added.

Russian military officials have recently increased the frequency and range of their submarine exercises in the Atlantic Ocean (as reported by the *Wall Street Journal*). NATO officials and analysts say this resurgence of Russian naval operations demonstrates Moscow’s resolve to project power into the Atlantic and could pose a strategic threat to the US and its allies.

David Axe, [If Russia Invades Europe, NATO Could Sweep The Seas Of Russian Merchant Ships](#), Forbes, 26 August 2020

[Fighting Russia has become an existential necessity for NATO, if tensions are reduced alliance has no purpose – Russia FM Lavrov](#), RT, 21 August 2020

[Russia develops NATO-standard assault rifle](#), Defence Blog, 18 August 2020

[Britain's NATO-driven 'deterrence & dialogue' policy towards Russia is 95% deterrence & 5% dialogue' - Russian ambassador to UK](#), RT, 9 August 2020

[Major investments in infrastructure needed to deter Russia's incursion into Baltics - NATO general](#), Baltic Times, 2 August 2020

[Powerful Russian 'Ekranoplan' Ground Effect Plane Makes Final Voyage](#), Forbes, 1 August 2020

Dmitri Trenin, Eugene Rumer and Andrew S. Weiss (eds), *Steady State: Russian Foreign Policy After Coronavirus*, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 8 July 2020

Summary: The coronavirus pandemic has hastened the arrival of a new era of bipolarity. These essays examine the various implications of the pandemic for Russia's foreign relations.

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[Russia revamps its nuclear policy amid simmering tensions with NATO](#), Euractiv, 3 June 2020

[Russia Scales Down Military Drills Near NATO Borders in 2020 – Official](#), Moscow Times, 2 June 2020

[Russian General Chafes at 'Provocative' NATO Drills](#), New York Times, 1 June 2020

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Tomáš Karásek, [Between Pastiche and Sampling: NATO's Strategic Adaptation to Russian Revisionism](#), *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 72 No.6, 2020

Special Forces

Special forces in Germany and the UK have been embroiled in controversy in recent months. At the beginning of August, Germany's defence ministry officially disbanded a company of its Special Forces Command (KSK), following reports that it had been exposed to far-right and neo-Nazi ideology. The move showed how deeply rooted right-wing extremism could be within the German army, some experts said. German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer made the initial announcement of disbanding the KSK's 2nd Company on 1 July after an

investigation into allegations of right-wing activity. Kramp-Karrenbauer said then that the investigation had revealed the KSK was building a "wall of secrecy" around itself with a "toxic leadership culture".

Meanwhile in the UK, it emerged that the government withheld evidence from a court which suggested that SAS soldiers had executed 33 civilians in Afghanistan in early 2011. [The Guardian reports](#) that Defence Minister Ben Wallace has until autumn to explain why key emails and documents revealing official concern about the string of killings were not previously disclosed in a case relating to the deaths of four Afghan men from one family in a night raid.

[Germany Dissolves Elite Army Unit Over Far-right Activity](#), VoA, 1 August 2020

[Did UK Special Forces execute unarmed civilians?](#) BBC News, 1 August 2020

Thang Q. Tran, [Increase NATO's operational reach: Expanding the NATO SOF network](#), Atlantic Council, 5 June 2020

Space Policy

In June 2019 a new policy or "a common NATO framework" was agreed to "guide" the alliance's approach to space. While the substance of the policy remains secret, the NATO Secretary General argued that it was "not about militarizing space", but rather NATO playing an important role "as a forum to share information, increase interoperability, and ensure that our missions and operations can call on the support they need". No further details emerged at the NATO Leaders' Meeting in London in December 2019, although space was declared as an operational domain alongside land, air and sea. This allows space to be used for military operations during times of war.

Benjamin Silverstein, [NATO'S return to space](#), War on the Rocks, 3 August 2020

[Space Launch - NATO specialists in UK launch initiative for future space capabilities](#), DVIDS, 15 July 2020

Security News from NATO Member States:

Albania

NATO and Albania are assessing the Albanian government's proposal to modernize the Pasha Liman naval base in the Mediterranean Sea. Minister of Defense Olta Xhaçka and US Ambassador Yuri Kim [visited](#) the base in the Bay of Vlore (southern Albania) in July, of which NATO and Albania are assessing the potential to modernize and transform it into a NATO representative project.

[NATO Examining Plan to Revamp Albanian Naval Base](#), Exit News, 11 July 2020

Belgium

After a complaint from a human rights group, the Belgian Council of State has suspended arms export licences for shipments to Saudi Arabia's national guard, as the contracts did not meet the standard for "human rights in the end-user country and its respect for international law". But the Council decided to not block shipments to the Saudi royal guard, a separate unit, arguing that they were more focused on "legitimate" internal security and bodyguard goals.

[Belgium suspends arms exports to Saudi national guard](#), Al Jazeera, 7 August 2020

Canada

Canada is deploying military trainers back to Ukraine as it looks to restart some of the many missions and exercises temporarily suspended or scaled back because of COVID-19. Canada first deployed around 200 troops to Ukraine to train local forces in the basics of soldiering in 2015, but that mission and several others were suspended in early April as COVID-19 forced countries around the world into lockdown. A skeleton force of about 60 service members was left to hold the

fort, but in June it was announced that another 90 soldiers would soon join them with an eye to resuming the mission.

In June, a broad coalition of civil society organisations and concerned individuals called on the Canadian government to stop its multibillion-dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada lifted its [moratorium](#) on issuing arms exports for weapons destined for Saudi Arabia, days after endorsing the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. Critics argue that Canadian arms exports to Saudi Arabia are not in line with legal commitments under the Arms Trade Treaty, Canada's national arms export policy and moves toward adopting a feminist foreign policy.

Canada is looking to establish its own fleet of armed drones that can conduct long-range surveillance and precision air strikes. The programme is expected to cost around CAD \$1-5 billion and would enable Canada to join several NATO allies that already have their own fleet of armed drones.

[Canada Wants Armed Drones in the Air by 2025](#), Vice News, 12 August 2020

[Top NATO job coming open but Liberals are silent on whether Gen. Vance's name will be submitted](#), The ChronicleHerald, 20 June 2020

[90 Canadian troops to leave for Ukraine as military looks to resume mission](#), CBC, 14 June 2020

[Canada doubles weapons sales to Saudi Arabia despite moratorium](#), The Guardian, 9 June 2020

Czech Republic

In June, following false allegations of a Russian poisoning plot against the mayor of Prague, two Russian were invented by Russian diplomats were expelled by the Czech prime minister.

[Czechs expel two Russian diplomats over fake poisoning plot](#), The Guardian, 5 June 2020

Michaela Dodge, [U.S.-Czech ballistic missile defense cooperation: Lessons learned and way forward for others](#), Comparative Strategy, vol. 39 no3, 2020, pp.288-298

Denmark

Denmark will send up to 285 military personnel to NATO's non-combat training operation in Iraq as it takes over leadership of the mission training Iraqi security forces from Canada by the end of 2020, it said in mid-June. "By strengthening our contribution to the stabilization of Iraq we reduce the risk of new refugee crises while we at the same time increase our guard against the threat from terror groups like ISIL," foreign minister Jeppe Kofod said in a statement. The Danish Parliament has also agreed to send a ship and a helicopter including up to 195 staff to a European-led naval mission in the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes, for a four-month period from August 2020.

[Denmark agrees to send more troops to Iraq's NATO training mission](#), WHTC.com, 11 June 2020

Estonia

In June, the Estonian Navy participated in BALTOPS, a large-scale military training exercise in the Baltic Sea in which altogether 19 NATO member states took part (see 'Military Exercises' above). Estonia contributed 80 sailors and divers to the training, and the Estonian Navy minehunter, EML *Sakala*, and the auxiliary ship, *Wambola*, joined the exercise.

In the fifth edition of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service's annual report, [International Security and Estonia](#), the main external threats to Estonia's security remain the same, namely Russia. However, the likelihood of a Russian military attack on Estonia is rated as "low", as Russia does not want a military conflict with NATO, but the escalation of Russia's confrontation

with the West anywhere in the world could trigger a rapid change in Estonia's threat situation, the report argues. The potential use of China's foreign investment for political purposes and the possible development of technological dependency are increasingly threats to Estonia's security, the report adds,

In July the United States delivered 92 Raytheon Javelin anti-tank missiles to the Estonian Defence Forces. The missiles are funded through the US European Command's Building Partner Capacity programme.

[Press Release: Javelin Missile Delivery Augments Estonian Defensive Capabilities, Enhances NATO Interoperability](#), US Embassy in Estonia, 24 July 2020

[NATO's head of intelligence and security visits Estonia](#), ERR News, 6 July 2020

[NATO-funded facility ready to receive and support Allied troops in Estonia](#), NATO News Release, 1 July 2020

[Estonia provides critical aid to Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Ukraine](#), NATO News Release, 26 June 2020

[The Estonian Navy to participate in a large-scale NATO exercise](#), Estonian World, 6 June 2020

[International Security and Estonia 2020](#), Estonia Foreign Intelligence Service, 2020

France

France continued to decry Turkey's "aggressive" intervention in the Libya conflict as unacceptable, accusing its fellow NATO member of violating a UN arms embargo and sending half a dozen ships to the war-torn country's coast (see Libya section above).

In June, the French government repatriated 10 children of French Jihadists, who were held in Kurdish led detention camps in Syria, [according](#) to the New York Times. When the Islamic State collapsed in Syria in March 2019, Kurdish forces established camps to hold surviving relatives of Islamic State combatants. Approximately 900

children from Western countries remain in the camps, as many Western nations refuse to bring home their citizens who have ties to the Islamic State.

[France-Turkey tensions mount after NATO naval incident](#), Reuters, 7 July 2020

[France Withdraws from NATO Naval Mission: Turkish Alleged Actions as Cause](#), SLDinfo, 3 July 2020

[France freezes role in NATO naval force amid Turkey tensions](#), The Spokesman-Review, 1 July 2020

[France suspends role in NATO naval mission after Turkey tensions](#), Al Jazeera, 1 July 2020

[Public in France and Germany support a European military, security and defence policy, survey shows](#), University of Exeter, 30 June 2020

[France presses allies for Nato censure of Turkey over Mediterranean naval incident](#), The National, 25 June 2020

Emmanuel Macron: ['Turkey is playing a dangerous game in Libya'](#), Euro News, 23 June 2020

Jean-Marie Collin, [The flawed logic of the French "nuclear warning"](#), European Leadership Network Commentary, 15 June 2020

[NATO to investigate France-Turkey standoff in the Mediterranean](#), Al Monitor, 18 June 2020

[France's call for NATO to stop ignoring the "Turkey problem" further divides the alliance](#), InfoBRICS, 18 June 2020

[NATO must deal with, not ignore Turkish problem: French official](#), WKZO, 17 June 2020

[France says Turkey conduct in Libya 'unacceptable'](#), Arab News, 14 June 2020

[Meet Flight Lieutenant Quentin, a French fighter pilot protecting the Baltic skies](#), NATO News Release, 8 June 2020

Germany and the US troop withdrawal

In late July, the Trump administration [announced](#) plans to move 11,900 troops out of Germany, 5,600 of which would relocate to other European

countries, including Belgium and Italy (and according to US Secretary of Defence Mark Esper [possibly in rotation](#) to Romania, the Baltic states and Poland), with 6,400 returning to the United States.

Germany is a longstanding hub for US operations in the Middle East and Africa. Currently, the US has five garrisons in Germany and a handful of US military communities have developed around a few German towns, in which many jobs are tied to the bases.

The changes include an F-16 fighter squadron moving to Italy and an armoured unit that will return to the United States and start a rotational deployment in the Black Sea region. The US military's European Command headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, will [move to Mons](#), Belgium. The Africa Command headquarters, also in Germany, will also probably move, although US officials did not name a location. For further details see [here](#).

Mark Esper said the changes were part of an ongoing review of US troop presence around the world that was "accelerated" by Mr. Trump's announcement to cut forces in Germany. He also [confirmed](#) that removing the troops from Germany will take "some time" to complete and cost "billions". "Coordination, approval, funding and execution will take time," European Command head Gen. Todd Wolters [said](#) in a memo to the force on 31 July. AFRICOM commander Gen. Stephen Townsend also issued a statement the same day affirming the process is in its infancy, and decisions are months away. "It will likely take several months to develop options, consider locations, and come to a decision," on where the Stuttgart-based command will move, though "the command has started the process".

Criticism of the withdrawal

The partial withdrawal has been criticized by officials and parliamentarians in both the US and

Europe, since the US presence in Germany has long been regarded as the bedrock of the US commitment to NATO. Senator Mitt Romney, Republican of Utah and a former presidential candidate, [called the plan](#) a “grave error”, while the move lacked “[a strategic underpinning](#)” according to Atlantic Council distinguished fellow, Hans Binnendijk, and “could undercut a half decade long effort to prevent war by enhancing NATO’s deterrent posture in the Baltic area”. Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, a retired US army officer and the former US commander in Europe, said that [the withdrawal was “a gift to the Kremlin”](#).

The governors from the four German states that host US troops [sent a letter](#) to more than a dozen US lawmakers, pushing them to urge the President not to scale back the troop presence in Germany. “For decades, Americans and Germans have worked together to build and develop these unique and highly capable structures,” the letter said. “They provide the necessary foundation for a partnership-based contribution to peace in Europe and the world, to which we all share a common commitment”.

The net result: a rearranging of the furniture, with Poland the ‘winner’

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the US move and said Washington has been consulting allies on the matter recently, although the initial June announcement on the withdrawal did come without any prior discussion. Similarly, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Attila Mesterhazy, in a [statement](#) applauded the reaffirmation that the proposed redeployment “seeks to enhance deterrence of Russia, strengthen NATO and reassure allies and that no moves will take place without continued engagement with Congress, and consultation with Allies”.

After the withdrawal there will still be 24,000 US forces in Germany—more than in any other country except Japan and South Korea—and over 51,000 on

the European continent. (At the height of the Cold War, the US military had nearly 300,000 troops stationed in Europe.)

A strategic decision or punishment for Germany?

President Trump [revealed plans](#) for the partial withdrawal from Germany in June and he has frequently criticized Germany and other NATO allies for not spending 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence. On the 5 August Donald Trump renewed his criticism of Germany [accusing](#) the NATO ally of “making a fortune” off US soldiers, of being “very delinquent” and being among NATO countries who “took advantage” of the US by not paying their share for defence.

However, both Belgium and Italy spend a smaller percentage of their GDP on defence than Germany. Further, the German government has paid more than \$1 billion over the past decade to cover costs related to the stationing of US troops in Germany, according to the finance ministry in Berlin. Of that, 648.5 million euros went into construction work.

Trump also (again) condemned Germany's decision to cooperate with Russia over the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. “We’re supposed to protect Germany from Russia. That’s fine. But Germany is paying Russia billions of dollars for energy,” Trump told Fox News. “What’s that all about?” The United States announced plans in June to expand sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany. Germany's Foreign Ministry said the sanctions would “constitute a serious interference in European energy security and EU sovereignty”.

Germany wants a rethink on the 2% of GDP defence spending commitment

There is still a conversation to be had on the relevance and efficacy of the 2% of GDP guideline. In Germany, defence spending rose by 10% in 2019 to \$49.3

billion—the largest defence budget increase among the world's top 15 states when it comes to military expenditures. Moreover, owing to its high GDP, Germany contributes more to defence spending with less than 1.5 percent than most of the other allies. And if the two percent target were met, Germany's defence budget would be higher than Russia's (\$65.1 bn in 2019).

German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer is [arguing](#) for a new method of measuring Berlin's contributions to NATO, suggesting the country could shoulder 10% of alliance total "planning targets". According to German officials this would more accurately capture Germany's efforts across the categories "cash, capabilities and commitments" than the current defence-spending objective of 2% of GDP.

Finally, there is also a larger conversation to be had about why, 75 years after V-E Day, the United States still has tens of thousands of soldiers on European soil.

[Secretary General discusses security challenges with Chancellor Merkel in Berlin](#), NATO News Release, 27 August 2020

Victor Davis Hanson, [Goodbye — Sort of — to Germany?](#), National Review, 20 August 2020

[Germany Pushes to End 2 Percent GDP Commitment to NATO](#), Washington Free Beacon, 7 August 2020

Ashley Burrell, [Donald Trump Is Turning His Back On America's European Allies By Taking Troops Out of Germany](#), National Interest, 5 August 2020

[Donald Trump accuses Germany of 'making a fortune' off US soldiers](#), Deutsche Welle, 5 August 2020

Christopher Layne, [Trump's plan to pull troops from Germany doesn't address a risk NATO has faced since the start of the Cold War](#), Business Insider, 1 August 2020

Mark Esper, [US military force structure changes strengthens NATO, improves deterrence against Russia](#), The Hill, 31 July 2020

Ralf Roloff, [Germany's EU Presidency 2020: The Security Dimension and EU-NATO Cooperation](#), George C. Marshall Center, July 2020, Number 015

[Who are the real winners and losers of the US troop withdrawal from Germany?](#) Euro News, 31 July 2020

[NATO PA President's statement on the U.S. European Command Force Posture review](#), NATO PA News Release, 30 July 2020

[What Will It Take to Move 12,000 Troops from Germany? Closures, Time and Lots of Money](#), Military.com, 30 July 2020

[US to Bring 6,400 Troops Home From Germany, Move 5,600 More](#), New York Times, 29 July 2020

[U.S. Will Cut 12,000 Forces in Germany](#), New York Times, 29 July 2020

Zdeněk Kříž, Jana Urbanovská & Stanislava Brajerčíková, [Refugees, Energiewende and NATO deterrence: limits of German leadership in Central Europe](#), European Security, July 2020

The United States has 34,500 troops in Germany today. President Trump says he has given the order to reduce that to 25,000 soon. If the original purpose of NATO was to keep the Americans in western Europe, keep the Russians out of western Europe, and keep the Germans down in western Europe, 25,000 would still accomplish the first two. (The Germans are off the floor, and have been since, oh, about 1950.)

[Same old story. Perhaps a different ending?](#) Arkansas Democrat Gazette, 23 July 2020

[US troop withdrawal a cause for NATO concern, German defense minister says](#), Deutsche Welle, 22 July 2020

[German states appeal to US Congress not to withdraw troops](#), Al Jazeera, 19 July 2020

Maximilian Terhalle, [Keeping the Americans In, the Russians Out and the Chinese in Check: Germany's Future Strategy](#), RUSI Commentary, 21 July 2020

[Germany takes over the Chairmanship of the National Reserve Forces Committee](#), NATO News Release, 15 July 2020

[Defense Minister Says U.S. Troop Moves From Germany Tied to Future NATO Commitments](#), USNI News, 9 July 2020

[Germany spent over \\$1B to cover costs linked to US troops](#), KOB, 6 July 2020

[Germany Disbands Special Forces Group Tainted by Far-Right Extremists](#), New York Times, 1 July 2020

[Germany to dissolve special forces unit over far-right links](#), Reuters, 30 June 2020

[America's relationship with Germany may never be the same again, Berlin warns](#), CNBC, 29 June 2020

[Pentagon to give Trump options to reduce US troops in Germany](#), The Local.de, 28 June 2020

[German defense minister: Any U.S. troop reductions in Europe should be coordinated with NATO](#), Washington Times, 24 June 2020

[NATO chief Stoltenberg: World needs more German leadership](#), Deutsche Welle, 23 June 2020

[Stoltenberg: US presence in Europe is important for NATO](#), Deutsche Welle, 23 June 2020

John Cookson, [Troop reduction in Germany should spark a conversation about NATO's future](#), The Hill, 22 June 2020

[US 'will consult NATO' on Germany troop plan: Stoltenberg](#), AFP, 18 June 2020

[No details yet on Trump's Germany pullout, NATO chief says](#), Reuters, 18 June 2020

[Nato chief: no firm plan agreed for pulling US troops from Germany](#), The Guardian, 16 June 2020

[US troop pull-out from Germany rattles transatlantic relationship](#), Army Technology, 10 June 2020

Hans Binnendijk, [The folly of a NATO troop withdrawal decision](#), Defense News, 9 June 2020

[Trump Troop Pullout Would Still Leave Hefty U.S. Footprint in Europe](#), New York Times, 8 June 2020

[German foreign minister says Berlin and Washington remain NATO partners but allows that the U.S. relationship is now 'complicated'](#), Associated Press, 8 June 2020

[German lawmakers criticize reported US troop withdrawal plan](#), CTpost, 7 June 2020

[Trump Plans to Withdraw Some U.S. Troops From Germany, a Key NATO Ally](#), New York Times, 5 June 2020

[Donald Trump orders 9,500 US troops to leave Germany](#), The Guardian, 6 June 2020

Greece

Greece is at loggerheads with Turkey after Athens signed a deal with Egypt designating an exclusive economic zone between the two countries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The agreement was [denounced](#) by Turkey, which signed a competing deal with Libya last year. It is likely that there are large oil and gas reserves under the seabed. For further details see the Libya section above.

Greece is proceeding with plans to extend a cement and barbed-wire fence that it set up in 2012 along its northern border with Turkey to prevent migrants from entering the country, the government said in August.

At the Informal Meeting of the EU Defence Ministers in August, developments in the Eastern Mediterranean were discussed, with the Greek Defence Minister informing his colleagues of the “the provocative actions by Turkey”. Panagiotopoulos also told the NATO Secretary General that the alliance’s equal treatment of Greece and Turkey: “NATO’s policy of equal distances is detrimental to our country, but also to the cohesion of the alliance, and therefore is not acceptable”.

[Greek DM tells NATO that Greece's equal standing with Turkey is "not acceptable"](#), Greek City Times, 26 August 2020

[Greek defense minister stresses dangers of equal distances policy to NATO chief](#), Ekathimerini, 26 August 2020

[Greece to extend fence on land border with Turkey to deter migrants](#), Reuters, 24 August 2020

[Greece accuses Turkey of 'threatening peace' in the Mediterranean](#), Deutsche Welle, 10 August 2020

[Greece looks to NATO to play its role with regard to Turkey](#), Ekathimerini, 7 August 2020

[Europe warns Turkey against natural gas mission near Greece](#), Deutsche Welle, 24 July 2020

[Three Thousand US Army Soldiers Arrive in Greece for NATO Exercise](#), Greek Reporter, 22 July 2020

[Greece says 'illegal' actions of Turkey threaten NATO cohesion](#), Ekathimerini, 22 July 2020

George Tzogopoulos, [Striving for a more active role in NATO](#), Ekathimerini, 9 July 2020

Hungary

Hungary signed a declaration of intent in August to purchase air defence missiles from the United States for around \$1 billion. The US Embassy described the deal as Hungary's "largest-ever defence procurement from the United States. According to the Hungarian Defence Ministry, it includes both air-to-air and land-to-air missiles. In revealing his government's plans to secure US-made weapons, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said last year that "the construction of the modern Hungarian army is happening now". The Orban government has increased annual defence spending since around 2015 following deep cuts in the years following the 2008 financial crisis.

[Hungary to buy air defense missiles from US for \\$1 billion](#), KOB, 12 August 2020

[Hungary is a major contributor to NATO's collective security, says the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee](#), NATO News Release, 13 July 2020

[Szijjártó: Hungary wants to resolve language issues soon to unblock Ukraine-NATO Commission](#), UNIAN, 25 June 2020

Today, the alliance faces a growing and pernicious threat: the rise of illiberal nationalism within its ranks. This internal threat is one that an alliance built on cooperation of individual nation-states and premised on states working together is ill-suited to address. For instance, NATO has been encouraging member states to [devote more resources](#) to national defense. However, this begs the question of whether the alliance should encourage an autocratic Hungary to massively increase its defense spending when it could use its military capabilities to threaten its neighbors. With Turkey [stoking tension](#) with Greece in the eastern Mediterranean, leading to fears of conflict between two NATO members, the internal threat of nationalism to NATO's cohesion is clear. It is time for the NATO alliance to get serious about the threat posed by rising nationalism and democratic backsliding among its member states.

Max Bergmann and Siena Cicarelli, [Why Hungary's Democratic Backsliding Should Prompt NATO To Act](#), Center for American Progress, 17 August 2020

Iceland

Unauthorised Russian aircraft entered NATO airspace near Iceland, according to the Icelandic Coast Guard. Italian aircraft stationed in Iceland flew from Keflavík Airport on 3 July to meet the Russian planes.

[Russian Long-Range Bombers Spotted Within NATO Airspace Near Iceland](#), The Reykjavik Grapevine, 6 July 2020

[Submarines Arrive in Iceland for NATO Exercises](#), Iceland Review, 25 June 2020

[Italy's F-35s are back in Iceland for another NATO air-policing mission](#), Business Insider, 7 June 2020

[NATO Airmen to go into 4-Week Quarantine Before Patrols Begin](#), Reykjavik Grapevine, 3 June 2020

Italy

Speaking to reporters during a 'virtual' media event hosted by NATO, Colonel Michele Cesario of the Italian Air Force said that the six F-35A aircraft that have been flying the Icelandic Air Policing mission since early to mid-June have proved to be "extremely reliable" in the quick reaction alert role.

[Italy demonstrates F-35 air defender credentials on NATO ops](#), Jane's 9 July 2020

Teresa Coratella, [Crisis communication: Italy, the coronavirus, and European solidarity](#), ECFR Commentary, 16 June 2020

Latvia

The complex dynamics of today's security environment call for a deep-rooted comprehension of existing threats and robust preparation to ensure an effective response when a crisis occurs. Hence, the concept of comprehensive defence is seen by many NATO states as the appropriate response to the evolving number of security threats and challenges. Latvia made its approach on comprehensive defence a policy priority in 2019. As a part of these efforts, the Ministry of Defence of Latvia, in a close cooperation with civil services and NGOs, published guidelines in June entitled '[72 hours: What to do in case of crisis](#)'. This handbook covers a broad range of crises, from natural or man-made disasters to military threats and war.

Artis Pabriks, [How Latvia Accomplishes Comprehensive Defence](#), RUSI Commentary, 25 June 2020

Lithuania

The United States plans to sell six UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to Lithuania to boost allied quick response capabilities in a region regarded by some security analysts as one of NATO's most vulnerable. The deal, which will also include a full stock of related Black Hawk gear and weaponry

such as M240H machine guns and missile warning systems, is worth \$380 million.

[Lithuania to buy US helicopters to bolster NATO capabilities in Baltics](#), Stars and Stripes, 7 July 2020

Montenegro

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed President of Montenegro Milo Đukanović at NATO Headquarters on 9 June and congratulated him on the anniversary of his country's accession to the alliance three years ago.

[Secretary General congratulates the President of Montenegro on third anniversary of accession to NATO](#), NATO News Release, 9 June 2020

Netherlands

Admiral Rob Bauer is in the race for the position of Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. The Netherlands government has formally nominated Bauer for the NATO position. Should he be elected, he will hand over his current position of Chief of Defence to his successor in the summer of 2021.

[Netherlands Chief of Defence standing for Chairman of the NATO Military Committee](#), Netherlands MoD News, 21 August 2020

[The Netherlands likely to scrap NATO spending target](#), Euractiv, 3 June 2020

Maaik Beenes, [US could unilaterally decide to use nukes from Volkel airbase](#), nonukes.nl, 30 May 2020

Norway

NATO has concluded a historical ordnance disposal operation along the north coast of Norway, making them safer for fishermen, merchant shipping, underwater operations and civilian installations. The operation, conducted between 4 and 12 August identified and disposed of several mines from World War II.

[NATO ships clear historic ordnance in the waters of northern Norway](#), NATO News Release, 20 August 2020

[NATO's Defence Plans Against Russia Outdated, Norwegian Researcher Warns](#), Sputnik, 22 July 2020

['NATO Roulette': Norwegian Town 'Forced' to Receive Allied Nuclear Submarines Against Its Will](#), Sputnik, 28 May 2020

[Forced to receive nuclear submarines at municipal port in Tromsø](#), NRK, 27 May 2020 (in Norwegian)

Poland

On 3 August the United States signed an ["enhanced defence cooperation agreement"](#) with Poland to gradually increase US troop levels by 1,000 rotational personnel (as part of reorganisation of US troop deployments that will see reductions in Germany, as discussed above). This was [agreed in principle in June 2019](#) and is in addition to the [4,500 US troops already in Poland](#) on a rotational basis.

The increase in troops levels comes with other military infrastructure investments Poland has agreed to fund. Poland's defence minister [said](#) that "we will have an American command in Poland. This command will manage the troops deployed along NATO's eastern flank". Under the agreement, a division command will be housed at Poznań, while a training centre will be located at Drawsko Pomorskie, a frequent host of multinational NATO exercises. There will also be an Air Force logistics hub, a headquarters for a rotational Combat Aviation Brigade, two separate special ops facilities, and another base near the German border that will house an Armoured Brigade Combat Team.

It is unclear whether these additional US forces will be permanently stationed in Poland. If they are it would likely violate the terms of the [1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act](#), which states: "NATO reiterates that in the current and foreseeable security environment, the

Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces".

Accordingly, the enhanced NATO presence in Eastern Europe has been referred to as "continuous" but rotational. Proponents of extended permanent basing assert that the "current security environment" has changed considerably since 1997, largely due to Russian activities, and that NATO should therefore no longer be constrained by the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

[NATO deploys AWACS aircraft to Poland](#), Defence Blog, 22 August 2020

[NATO E-3A Sentry AWACS Platform Operating out Of Krakow, Supporting Aviation Detachment 20-4](#), The Aviationist, 22 August 2020

[Pompeo signs deal to redeploy troops from Germany to Poland](#), BBC News, 15 August 2020

[U.S. commitment to Poland's and NATO's security is ironclad - US ambassador](#), First News, 14 August 2020

[5,500 US Troops to be Stationed in Poland](#), SOFREP, 8 August 2020

[U.S. Military Presence in Poland](#), Congressional Research Service, 4 August 2020

[Poland Agrees To Pay Almost All Costs of US Troop Presence](#), Breaking Defense, 3 August 2020

[The US is sending 1,000 troops to Poland to establish a permanent military base](#), Task and Purpose, 31 July 2020

[Poland Wraps Deal For Permanent US Troops, Drones, Special Ops](#), Breaking Defense, 31 July 2020

[US corps command in Poland to play vital role on NATO's eastern flank](#), The First News, 31 July 2020

[MoD recommends chief of general staff to lead NATO Military Committee](#), The First News, 1 July 2020

[Poland provides medical aid to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to tackle Global Pandemic](#), NATO News Release, 29 June 2020

GMF Experts, [Transatlantic Take 360: Poland's Turbulent and Consequential Presidential Election](#), GMF, 26 June 2020

[1,000 more U.S. troops to Poland as Trump and Duda discuss NATO's eastern flank](#), Military Times, 24 June 2020

Lukasz Janulewicz, [Poland's New National Security Strategy: The Potential for Regional Leadership, Cooperation and Cohesion on NATO's Eastern Flank](#), RUSI Commentary, 23 June 2020

[Poland and allies conduct military exercises near bottleneck with Lithuania](#), Poland In, 22 June 2020

[Polish, NATO generals discuss defence capabilities](#), The First News, 22 June 2020

Dan Goure, [The F-35 Will Give Poland A More Advanced Air Force Than Some Major NATO Allies](#), National Interest, 20 June 2020

[Poland seeks support of allies for more US troops in Poland - PM](#), The First News, 14 June 2020

[NATO functioning efficiently despite pandemic - president](#), The First News, 8 June 2020

[Polish PM would welcome US troops pulled out from Germany](#), The First News, 6 June 2020

[Coronavirus response: essential supplies airlifted to Poland](#), NATO News Release, 3 June 2020

Romania

An airfield in central Romania could become a hub for US Air Force operations in southeastern Europe, where the Pentagon is seeking added fighter plane rotations as part of a mission to deter Russia. The US National Defense Authorization Act for 2021, which is working its way through Congress, includes \$130.5 million to renovate Campia Turzii Air Base in what would be the biggest overseas military construction project under the Pentagon's European Deterrence

Initiative, which was initiated in June 2014, shortly after Russia annexed Crimea. The US Air Force has requested major upgrades at the base, including dangerous cargo landing pads, more parking aprons to supporting additional tactical fighter aircraft squadron rotations, fuel storage and a depot to support a deployable air base system. "Campia Turzii Air Base is one of the primary sources for United States European Command and its Service Components' ability to respond to an evolving European security environment," the Air Force said in its 2021 budget request.

[Esper says some U.S. troops withdrawn from Germany could go to Romania](#), Inside Defense, 5 August 2020

[Air Force wants to turn Soviet-era base in Romania into NATO Black Sea hub](#), Stars and Stripes, 9 July 2020

[Former commander of U.S. Army in Europe warns Russia may invade Romania to test NATO](#), Romania-Insider, 15 June 2020

Turkey

A more aggressive, nationalist and religious Turkey is increasingly at odds with its Western allies over Libya, Syria, Iraq, Russia and the energy resources of the eastern Mediterranean (see above). Turkey's tilt towards authoritarianism and coercive diplomacy after 17 years with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the helm has also unsettled other NATO members.

Tony Lawrence, [NATO Will Suffer as Allies Quarrel in the Eastern Mediterranean](#), International Centre for Defence and Security, 20 August 2020

[NATO Secretary General discusses eastern Mediterranean, Libya with Foreign Minister of Turkey](#), NATO News Release, 19 August 2020

şaban Kardaş, [Understanding Turkey's Coercive Diplomacy](#), On Turkey, GMF, 13 August 2020

[Congress is quietly blocking arms sales to Turkey](#), WRAL, 12 August 2020

Barçin Yinanç, [Challenging Turkey's NATO loyalty through Libya](#), Hurriyet Daily News, 6 August 2020

Mark Leonard, [The other Putin on Europe's doorstep](#), ECFR Commentary, 4 August 2020

Can Kasapoglu, [Can the Turkish Military's Fight Against the Pandemic Set an Example for NATO?](#) *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Volume: 17 Issue: 114, 4 August 2020

Turkey—increasingly assertive, ambitious and authoritarian—has become “the elephant in the room” for NATO, European diplomats say. But it is a matter, they say, that few want to discuss. A NATO member since 1952, Turkey is too big, powerful and strategically important—it is the crossroads of Europe and Asia—to allow an open confrontation, alliance officials suggest.

Turkey has dismissed any criticism of its behavior as unjustified. But some NATO ambassadors believe that Turkey now represents an open challenge to the group's democratic values and its collective defense.

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United Kingdom

Britain is running secret missions involving armed drones previously used to target and kill terrorist suspects in Iraq and Syria, according to a [report](#) in the Guardian in June. The UK Ministry of Defence is refusing to reveal the nature or location of the operation involving RAF Reapers, leading to calls for greater parliamentary oversight of Britain's armed drone programme. It is thought that the secret missions could be taking place in Syria or Iraq but outside the remit of Operation Shader, which targets Isis in Iraq and Syria. A second theory is that the drones are supporting Royal Navy operations monitoring shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. A third possibility is that they are operating in the Sahel region of Africa.

Also in June, the Scottish Parliament agreed to suspend exports of riot gear, tear gas and rubber bullets to the United States in light of police brutality towards Black Lives Matter protests. In late July, however, the UK government approved more tear gas sales to US policing despite a UN warning over continuing violence. Due to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the UK government had made a review—which is not publicly available—of new sales of those items to the United States. The review concluded that the violence did not amount to “internal repression”.

In July, the British government imposed new sanctions on people from Russia, Saudi Arabia and Myanmar for human rights abuses. Dominic Raab, the UK foreign secretary, said that the move was part of a “dynamic new vision for a truly global Britain”, in which the post-Brexit UK will stand as “an even stronger force for good in the world”. However, on 7 July, the UK government

[announced](#) that it will resume the granting of new licences for arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the rest of the coalition that is involved in the armed conflict in Yemen. In June 2019, the UK Court of Appeal [ruled](#) that the government acted unlawfully when it licensed the sale of UK-made arms to Saudi forces for use in Yemen without making an assessment as to whether or not past incidents amounted to breaches of international law. Just a few days later, on 13 July, the UK Ministry of Defence [revealed](#) that it registered more than 500 Saudi air raids in Yemen, in possible breach of international law.

Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister has reiterated her government's opposition to nuclear weapons and its support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This was affirmed in the First Minister's response to a letter from Setsuko Thurlow, who at the age of 13 survived the US nuclear attack on Hiroshima. In her reply, Sturgeon said, “I was greatly encouraged that 122 countries voted for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and like you I have called on the UK Government to sign and ratify the Treaty”.

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United States

The Trump administration's response to the Black Lives Matter protests and the coronavirus pandemic have been the dominant security narratives in the United States in the past three months. In June, for example, retired senior military leaders condemned their successors in the Trump administration for ordering military units to attack

peaceful protesters near the White House.

In June, President Trump signed an executive order authorizing expanded visa sanctions and introduced new economic sanctions against International Criminal Court (ICC) officials in response to ongoing ICC investigations into alleged US war crimes in Afghanistan.

Former US officials say that in 2018, President Trump authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to execute several clandestine cyber operations targeting Iran and other countries, [according](#) to Yahoo News. One official said the authorization, called a "presidential finding", was "very aggressive" and "gave the agency very specific authorities to really take the fight offensively to a handful of adversarial countries" such as Russia, China and North Korea. The CIA has reportedly conducted at least 12 operations under this finding

The July [report](#) from the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions calls the January 2020 US drone strike, that killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and nine other people, a violation of international law. The report calls for accountability for targeted killings by armed drones and for greater regulation of the weapons. It says the drone strike violated the UN Charter. The US rejected the report, calling the UN expert's conclusions "[spurious](#)," and continues to defend the operation.

A survey conducted by the [Programme for Public Consultation](#) at the University of Maryland found that there is considerable bipartisan agreement on nuclear weapons policy. The Programme, which [surveyed](#) nearly 86,000 Americans over the past five years, found that 56% of Republicans and 73% of Democrats would support cutting a modest US \$2 billion from the annual nuclear weapons budget. Overwhelming majorities in both parties also supported continuing to

have nuclear arms control treaties with Russia, renewing the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty before it expires in February, and continuing to abide by a moratorium on explosive nuclear tests.

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“Some 43 percent of the 1.3 million men and women on active duty in the United States military are people of color. But the people making crucial decisions, such as how to respond to the coronavirus crisis and how many troops to send to Afghanistan or Syria, are almost entirely white and male.

Of the 41 most senior commanders in the military — those with four-star rank in the Army, Navy, [Air Force](#), Marines and Coast Guard — only two are black: Gen. Michael X. Garrett, who leads the Army's Forces Command, and Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr, the commander of Pacific Air Forces.”

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