NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

2022 NATO STRATEGIC CONCEPT & ASSEMBLY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Policy Brief

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This Policy Brief is presented for information only and does not necessarily represent the official view of the Assembly.

1.   At the NATO Summit in Madrid (29-30 June 2022), Heads of State and Government adopted NATO's new Strategic Concept, setting the overall direction of the Alliance. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) had actively contributed its views throughout the consultation phase of development of the new Concept, sharing the perspectives of Allied legislators on the priorities for NATO's adaptation.

2.   On 22 February 2022, the Standing Committee unanimously approved the Assembly's contribution to the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept. Two days later, Russia started an unjustified, unprovoked and brutal war of choice against Ukraine. While the Assembly's recommendations were not invalidated, and the war actually amplified the importance of many of them, the NATO PA adopted two declarations passed during the 2022 Spring Session in Vilnius – *Confronting Russia's Threat* and *Standing with Ukraine* – which complemented the Assembly's contribution.

3.   This policy brief lays out how the Strategic Concept aligns with the Assembly's priorities and concrete recommendations, as expressed in its February contribution and in the Vilnius declarations.

The Assembly's Two Priorities: Reaffirming Shared Values and Principles & NATO Adaptation

4.   The Assembly had identified two priorities for the new Strategic Concept. NATO had to "both recommit to its founding democratic values and adapt and modernise the ways in which it provides a foundation for our collective defence" (NATO PA Contribution). The 2022 Strategic Concept aligns well with both.

5.   Importantly, the new Strategic Concept places the Alliance's shared democratic values at the heart of NATO's response to today's threats and challenges. Rather than dedicating one section to reaffirming these values, the new Strategic Concept references them prominently throughout the text (see more below).

6.   The Strategic Concept's framing of threats and challenges as well as the adaptation efforts outlined in it also align well with the Assembly's views. The concept specifically highlights the growing threat of authoritarianism, stating: "Authoritarian actors challenge our interests, values and democratic way of life." Notably, Russia is identified as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area."[1] Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, figures as the other, "most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity." The Strategic Concept also, for the first time, addresses China and the challenges that Beijing poses to the security, interests and values of the Alliance. Beyond that, the Strategic Concept also covers the evolving approach to a number of other threats and challenges.

Recommendation 1: Place Shared Democratic Values at the Very Heart of the New Strategic Concept

7.   As the Assembly has recommended, the new Strategic Concept places the Alliance's shared democratic values at the heart of NATO's response to today's threats and challenges. The Concept opens by reaffirming that "We are bound together by common values: individual liberty, human rights, democracy and the rule of law." The text of the new Concept includes references to these values throughout. Notably, it ends with a firm commitment: "As Allies, we will continue to stand together to defend our security, values, and democratic way of life."
Recommendation 2: Establish a NATO Democratic Resilience Centre

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[1]   If not otherwise noted, all quotes are taken from the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept.

8.   Shared democratic values are at the heart of the Strategic Concept (see above) and national and collective resilience is seen as critical to NATO core tasks (see below). While the 2022 Strategic Concept did not go as far as directing the establishment of an institutional architecture within NATO Headquarters as recommended by the Assembly. This proposal enjoys near-unanimous support among Allied governments.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the Unique Transatlantic Bond

9.   The Strategic Concept closely follows Assembly language in framing the transatlantic bond, based on common values, as indispensable to Allied security. It makes clear "NATO is the unique, essential and indispensable transatlantic forum […] on all matters related to our individual and collective security." It commits to strengthening the Alliance "based on our indivisible security, solidarity, and an ironclad commitment to defend each other, enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty", stressing that "Our ability to deter and defend is the backbone of that commitment."

10.   In line with the Assembly's emphasis on the importance of contributing fairly and actively to transatlantic security, the Strategic Concept stresses that Allies "will share equitably responsibilities and risks for our defence and security." Moreover, it also underlines that "investing in NATO is the best way to ensure the enduring bond between European and North American Allies, while contributing to global peace and stability."

11.   Regrettably, the NATO Strategic Concept does not address increased outreach efforts to Allied populations, in particular young people, about NATO and the unique transatlantic bond – which remains a long-standing recommendation of the Assembly.

Recommendation 4: Make Consensus a Strength

12.   The Assembly's recommendation to reaffirm consensus as the key principle of NATO decision-making – making the principle a strength rather than a weakness – is not specifically addressed in the Strategic Concept. However, it remains the key operating principle of the Alliance.

13.   However, in line with the Assembly's plea, the Strategic Concept's section on "Deterrence and Defence" pledges to adapt and streamline decision-making processes.

Recommendation 5: Commit to Enhanced Consultations

14.   Echoing the recommendations of the Assembly, the Strategic Concept commits "to broaden and deepen our consultations to address all matters that affect our security." The NATO PA had also called for new informal and formal consultation mechanisms. NATO has indeed increased the frequency of high-level Allied meetings and experimented with new formats for the North Atlantic Council particularly since the start of Russia's war against Ukraine.

15.   Lastly, the Concept pledges to "reinforce consultations when the security and stability of an Ally is threatened or when our fundamental values and principles are at risk." The latter is another example of the Alliance putting shared democratic values at the heart of its approach to defence and security.

Recommendation 6: Bolster the Rules-Based International Order

16.   In the "Preface", the Strategic Concept makes clear that "the Alliance continue to work towards just, inclusive and lasting peace and remain a bulwark of the rules-based international order."

17.   Very much in line with the Assembly's understanding of the international security environment, the text underlines authoritarian actors' "efforts to undermine multilateral norms and institutions and promote authoritarian models of governance." Like the NATO PA, it highlights, in particular, those actions by Russia and China – individually and in their deepening strategic partnership – which undermine the rules-based international order.

18.   Like the Assembly, the Strategic Concept sees partnerships as key in upholding this order.

19.   The Concept also commits, as urged by the Assembly, "to principles of responsible use that reflect our democratic values and human rights" when it comes to new technologies and innovation.

Recommendation 7: Leverage NATO's Partnerships to Support the Alliance's Values, Goals and Policies

20.   The Strategic Concept picks up language similar to the Assembly's recommendation to leverage partnerships as an essential basis for the maintenance of the rules-based order (see below).

21.   As regards cooperation with the European Union, highlighted by the Assembly, the Strategic Concept calls on enhancing the modalities of the NATO-EU strategic partnership and increased cooperation on issues of common interest. Similarly, it pledges to "strengthen dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners in the Indo-Pacific to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests."

Recommendation 8: Stay True to the Open Door Policy

22.   Echoing the Assembly's call, the Strategic Concept reaffirms the Open Door policy "as an expression of our fundamental values and our strategic interest in Euro-Atlantic peace and stability." It stresses that the Alliance's "door remains open to all European democracies that share the values of our Alliance, which are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose membership contributes to our common security."

23.   Moreover, it commits to "continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of interested countries" in the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region, which "are of strategic importance for the Alliance."

24.   The text also states that "Decisions on membership are taken by NATO Allies and no third party has a say in this process", hewing close to the Assembly's language on this issue.

25.   The Strategic Concept also stresses that "each country can choose its own path, free from aggression, coercion or subversion", in line with the Assembly's position.

Recommendation 9: Enshrine NATO's Commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

26.   Mirroring the Assembly, the Strategic Concept addresses, in its "Purpose and Principles" section, the cross-cutting importance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda across all

core tasks of the Alliance and pledges to continue advancing gender equality as a reflection of Allied values.

Recommendation 10: Deter and Defend Against All Threats to Allied Citizens from all Directions in all Domains

27.   Following the Assembly's recommendation, the Concept, on its first page, establishes "the need to significantly strengthen our deterrence and defence as the backbone of our Article 5 commitment to defend each other." The additional decisions taken during the Madrid Summit have meant that the Alliance has established "a new baseline for our deterrence and defence posture" ([Madrid Summit Declaration](#)).

28.   In its Vilnius declarations, the NATO PA urged the Alliance to "swiftly move to a 'forward defence' posture including the permanent deployment of a significant number of troops and equipment along NATO's Eastern flank." The Assembly also urged to "[adjust] adequately NATO's posture, NATO's defence plans, especially on the front line of NATO's Eastern Flank, command and control structure and military preparedness." The NATO Strategic Concept comes close to this recommendation: "We will deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces, enhanced command and control arrangements, prepositioned ammunition and equipment and improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice."

29.   Echoing the Assembly, the text also codifies adaptations to hybrid and other novel challenges and threats, including that hybrid operations, as well as a single or cumulative set of malicious cyber activities, or hostile operations to, from, or within space, could reach the level of armed attack and could trigger Article 5.

Recommendation 11: Make Clear Nuclear Deterrence Remains the Ultimate Guarantee of Allies' Security

30.   In line with the recommendations of the Assembly, the Strategic Concept makes clear that "As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance." The Strategic Concept also identifies the new threats posed by Russia and China's expanding nuclear arsenal and coercive signalling. Notably, it asserts that "The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote", while stressing that "The Alliance has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that any adversary could hope to achieve."

31.   Echoing the Assembly, the text also emphasises continued Allied efforts on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Recommendation 12: Enshrine NATO's Dual Track Approach to Russia

32.   While the Assembly's 22 February recommendations still referred to NATO's dual-track approach to Russia – combining deterrence and dialogue – the full extent of Russia's intentions and barbaric actions soon became clear as it rolled out its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Assembly's Vilnius declarations thus recognised that Russia's war against Ukraine marks a fundamental shift in Euro-Atlantic and global security and in NATO-Russia relations and updated the Assembly's recommendations accordingly.

33.   Like the Assembly's Vilnius declarations, the 2022 Strategic Concept describes Russia as the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and peace in the Euro-Atlantic area, adding "the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace" and "We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity."

34. In light of Russia's hostile policies and actions, the new Strategic Concept affirms that NATO can no longer consider the Russian Federation to be a partner. In a similar vein, the Assembly's Vilnius declarations note that "Russia has turned its back on the core principles of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act" – the basis for the NATO-Russia partnership and that "Russia's own actions currently make [meaningful] dialogue impossible."

35. Both the Assembly's Vilnius declarations and the Strategic Concept call for a strengthened deterrence and defence posture (see above). At the same time, they express a willingness to keep open channels of communication mostly as a means to manage and mitigate risks and prevent escalation and miscalculation.

Recommendation 13: Continue to Defend Against Terrorism

36. Mirroring the language of the Assembly, the Strategic Concept identifies "Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, as the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity." The text goes a step further than the Assembly in establishing the objective of countering terrorism as essential to collective defence and notes that it contributes to NATO's three core tasks. It pledges to enhance cooperation with the international community and to boost support for partners, including through capacity building.

Recommendation 14: Agree to a Transatlantic China Policy Based on Engagement, Competition, and the Defence of Allies' Security Interests

37. In its recommendations, the Assembly stressed that the Strategic Concept should, building upon the principles laid out in the 2021 Brussels Summit communiqué, set a policy to engage with China wherever possible and when in the Alliance's interest; compete with China to maintain the Allied scientific and technological edge as well as supply chain resilience; and deter it when China's actions challenges Euro-Atlantic security.

38. As mentioned above, the language on describing China's ambitions and actions generally align with the NATO PA's positions. In particular, the Strategic Concept makes clear the challenge that China poses to Allied values and commits Allies to "stand up for our shared values and the rules-based international order."

39. The Strategic Concept also includes similar language to the Assembly's on the three pillars of engagement, competition and defending Allies' security interests. It noted that Allies "remain open to constructive engagement with the PRC [...] with a view to safeguarding the Alliance's security interests." It commits them to "boost[ing] our shared awareness, enhance[ing] our resilience and preparedness, and protect[ing] against the PRC's coercive tactics and efforts to divide the Alliance." At the same it highlights the importance of "ensur[ing] NATO's enduring ability to guarantee the defence and security of Allies."

Recommendation 15: Elevate the Need for Whole-Of-Society Resilience

40. The Strategic Concept emphasises the importance of resilience – "a national responsibility and a collective commitment." Resilience is critical to all NATO core tasks and underpins efforts to safeguard nations, societies and shared values, it notes. While falling short of calling for the comprehensive whole-of-society approach advocated by the Assembly, the Strategic Concept nonetheless commits Allies, as recommended by the Assembly, to "pursue a more robust, integrated and coherent approach to building national and Alliance-wide resilience against military and non-military threats and challenges to our security", rooted in article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Like the Assembly as well, it calls for closer cooperation with the EU on strengthening resilience.

Recommendation 16: Incorporate the Security Impact of Climate Change

41.   Generally in line with the Assembly's recommendations, the Strategic Concept approaches climate change as a crisis and threat multiplier and recognises its multifaceted impact on NATO policy and activities as well as its possible impact on the operations of armed Allied forces. Describing it as "a defining challenge of our time, with a profound impact on Allied security", NATO sets its ambition to become the leading international organisation when it comes to understanding and adapting to the impact of climate change on security."

Recommendation 17: Further Reform and Resource NATO's Partnerships

42.   The Concept seconds the Assembly's recommendations in recognising that cooperation with partners "contribute[s] to stability beyond our borders, enhance[s] security at home and support[s] NATO's core tasks." It also incorporates the importance of working with partners to defend shared democratic and uphold the rules-based international order.

43.   Allies commit to "increase outreach to countries in our broader neighbourhood and across the globe" through an approach that "remains interest-driven, flexible, focused on addressing shared threats and challenges, and able to adapt to the changing geopolitical realities." To successfully prevent and manage crises, supporting partners through capacity building is part of a sustainable crisis prevention strategy.

Recommendation 18: Enshrine NATO-EU Complementarity

44.   The Concept seconds the Assembly in affirming the EU as a "unique and essential partner for NATO" and "recognises the value of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO." In line with the Assembly, the Concept highlights initiatives to "increase defence spending and develop coherent, mutually reinforcing capabilities, while avoiding unnecessary duplications." Like the Assembly, it also calls "non-EU Allies' fullest involvement in EU defence efforts" to develop strategic partnership.

Recommendation 19: Define the Future Parameters of NATO's Role in Crisis Management

45.   Echoing the Assembly, the Strategic Concept pledges to incorporate "the lessons learned over the past three decades, including through our operations in Afghanistan", and to "further develop the Alliance's ability to support civilian crisis management and relief operations." The lessons learned process which NATO conducted following the withdrawal of Allied troops from Afghanistan broadly mirror the Assembly's recommendation to better define the parameters of NATO's engagement and to set clear, achievable, realistic goals, benchmarks and timelines.

Recommendation 20: Meet and Sustain Allied Defence Spending Goals

46.   As called for by the Assembly, the Concept commits to "ensur[ing] our nations meet the commitments under the Defence Investment Pledge, in its entirety, to provide the full range of required capabilities."

47.   The Strategic Concept does not specifically enshrine the Pledge guidelines as a minimum long-term commitment, as urged by the Assembly. However, it stresses Allies will "ensure that increased national defence expenditures and NATO common funding will be commensurate with the challenges of a more contested security order." The Madrid Summit Declaration also states that Allies "will build on that pledge and decide next year on subsequent commitments beyond 2024."

Recommendation 21: Invest in Innovation to Keep the Alliance's Technological Edge

48.   The Assembly's recommendation to promote innovation and increase investments in emerging and disruptive technology, with the objective of retaining NATO's technological edge as well as interoperability, has been incorporated, not least because "Technological primacy increasingly influences success on the battlefield," as the Strategic Concept notes. The Strategic Concept also commits Allies to "expedite our digital transformation, adapt the NATO Command Structure for the information age and enhance our cyber defences, networks and infrastructure." This Allied commitment was buttressed by several important decisions at the Madrid Summit, including the establishment of the Defence Innovation Accelerator and innovation fund.

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