



NATO toward 2030: a resilient Alliance and its main priorities

by

Ottavia Credi, Alessandro Marrone and Roberto Menotti

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Abstract²

The new US administration represents a political opportunity to better address the Alliance's needs, also through the elaboration of a new Strategic Concept. NATO needs to adapt to an international security environment marked by "aggressive multipolarity", which may lean over time towards a bipolar confrontation between the US and China. The latter is indeed a peer competitor to deal with, while deterrence and dialogue should be maintained towards Russia in light of its importance to Eurasia but also its relative weakness. Transatlantic burden sharing has to adapt accordingly, and NATO-EU partnership should make a breakthrough also through an appropriate level of European strategic autonomy. As a result, NATO priorities with a view to 2030 can be grouped into three baskets: the cornerstone of collective defence and deterrence with greater political consultation; a new focus on Allies' resilience; a renewed outlook towards both Europe's unstable neighbourhood as well as the Asia-Pacific that is increasingly becoming the focus of US strategic commitments. NATO remains the most powerful alliance in the world and a fundamental pillar of stability and prosperity for the Euro-American community. One of its major strengths has always been its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. In light of the various global transformations currently underway, the Alliance needs to prove, once again, its resilience.

The Biden administration: a political opportunity to better address the Alliance's needs

An incoming US administration always offers a political opening, at least in terms of a mutual willingness across the Atlantic to address existing issues in a frank and cooperative manner, and potentially even to explore new ideas. It is clear to all NATO members that, as of early 2021, most of the open questions about the Alliance will be of a structural nature, which in turn will require the adoption of a medium- to long-term view. Yet, there may be short-term policy measures and decisions capable of producing nearly immediate positive effects on the political atmosphere – thus facilitating harder and more complex steps down the road.

One such decision would be to openly recognize that, while NATO is not "brain dead", it certainly suffers from an insufficient level of genuine political consultation, i.e. substantive and frequent exchanges on national priorities that have a major impact on diplomatic activities, security policies and military deployments. In particular, the fundamental shift that has been underway for several years in the military center of gravity of the largest member of the Alliance – the US – should be an essential component of NATO's overall adaptation to changing circumstances. As US naval deployments and security priorities shift from the European continent and the Mediterranean basin toward the Indian Ocean and East Asia, the

¹ Ottavia Credi is Junior Researcher in the Security and Defence Programmes at IAI; Alessandro Marrone is Head of Defence Programme at IAI; Roberto Menotti is Editor-in-Chief of *Aspenia* online and Deputy Editor of *Aspenia*, Senior Advisor – International Activities for Aspen Institute Italia.

² This paper stems from the first digital event "The future of NATO" held on October 8, 2020, jointly organized by Aspen Institute Italia and Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), in partnership with Real Istituto Elcano and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The paper reports some of the most insightful observations presented by the event's participants and deepens the analysis with further reflections on some of the main challenges the Alliance will likely face over the next decade. It has been jointly prepared by Aspen Institute Italia and IAI for second webinar held on November 25, 2020, once again in partnership with Real Istituto Elcano and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, with the support of Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

Alliance's options in the face of risks and threats do change significantly. This large-scale development is underrepresented in NATO's official statements – which may be deliberate – but needs to be fully appreciated by political leaders and taken into account when formulating policies and making public commitments.

Such a recognition would bring the Allies to more directly address the issue of burden sharing in a changed – in fact, in a profoundly transformed – strategic landscape, focusing not just on the question of resources and relative contributions, but on the more fundamental question of shared goals and the tools to pursue them.

A decision with broader implications – but moving exactly in the same direction – would of course be the elaboration of a new NATO Strategic Concept, the policy document designed to evaluate the global security framework and publicly identify the Allies' shared goals and instruments. The current guidelines were adopted in 2010, and a full decade is a long time in the context of the rapidly evolving global security landscape of the 21st century.

NATO's adaptation to “aggressive multipolarity”– and beyond

At present, the international security environment could well be depicted as an aggressive multipolar system, caught between multiple forms of low intensity warfare and the absence of major conflicts – a sort of “peacetime war”.³In this scenario, global and regional powers are engaged in various forms of proxy wars, cyber-attacks and information warfare. They use a variety of tools to put their competitors' societies under pressure by targeting public opinion through media outlets, sometimes political parties and even policy operatives, or by putting at risk energy security and critical infrastructure, without escalating into a fully-fledged military conflict.⁴Such a global context obviously influences NATO, which is going through a delicate phase that is likely to shape the Alliance's role in the future.

The challenges NATO is facing today are both geographic and thematic. The former consists of the assertive and sometimes more openly aggressive postures of the non-Western great powers, Russia and China – however different their goals and tactics may be. The latter can be found in transnational global challenges such as emerging technologies, cyber-security, the space domain, and climate change. The two sets of challenges are obviously intertwined, i.e. with Moscow and Beijing exploiting and investing in both the cyber and space fields.

Moreover, the Covid-19 challenge is not over, and the Alliance cannot behave as if it is. During a speech delivered in the midst of the first wave of the pandemic, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the Alliance “must continue to work hard to ensure that this health crisis does not become a security crisis”.⁵Such a scenario is not as far into the future as most people would hope. For one, the pandemic has intensified pre-existing structural trends in international relations, such as the rivalry between the US and China. In addition, as a consequence of their domestic health emergencies, Western countries have started or may begin to gradually reduce their commitment to international crises and areas of endemic instability,

³See in this regard: A. Marrone and K. Muti, *NATO's Future: Euro-Atlantic Alliance in a Peacetime War*, IAI Papers 20|28, IAI, October 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/natos-future-euro-atlantic-alliance-peacetime-war>.

⁴See in this regard: S. Silvestri, *Guerre nella globalizzazione: il futuro della sicurezza europea*, IAI Papers 20|22, IAI, May 2020, <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/guerre-nella-globalizzazione-il-futuro-della-sicurezza-europea>.

⁵NATO, *Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg*, 14 April 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_175085.htm.

thus worsening the security environment worldwide. Operationally, the military is employed in several European countries to support civil protection agencies in dealing with the pandemic.

Well beyond the pandemic's challenge, the sheer complexity of quasi-global pressures on NATO's interests has been on full display in the ongoing Syrian and Libyan crises. The web of alignments and tactical partnerships in action on the ground in either Syria or Libya is a microcosm of what could be coming on a wider scale.

But this multipolar interplay could actually hide a deeper trend toward bipolarity. If we look at several key criteria of global power and influence, China is indeed in a class of its own as it firmly occupies position number two. In fact, despite internal imbalances and obstacles to be addressed, in economic terms Beijing is already a peer competitor of Washington and demonstrates the ability to keep growing at an unrivalled pace. It is thus hard to imagine this large-scale phenomenon not translating into major international realignments and pressures on traditional American allies and partners, in Europe and elsewhere. In other words, the active presence of multiple players in important regional settings is not proof that the global security framework is truly multipolar in a stable manner. By most counts, and given China's trajectory, the global balance of power is becoming more bipolar than anything else. A unique challenge for NATO stems exactly from the fact that both trends coexist, with mid-ranking powers competing fiercely to exploit opportunities just as the overall global framework pushes countries to often choose between close cooperation with Beijing or with Washington. In short, we are facing a multipolar scenario while seeing on the horizon the contours of a mostly bipolar setting.

Russia: new partnerships, old resentments

It seems unlikely that Russia's fundamentals will change much in the near future. In a nutshell, its economy is structurally very weak whilst its military power remains threatening, and the authoritarian leadership appears relatively stable – except, of course, when the time will come for the post-Putin transition, for which there is hardly any roadmap. One thing that is likely to change and intensify in the coming years is Moscow's cooperation with Beijing. Such a pragmatic, unbalanced partnership will encompass a vast array of fields, from technology exchanges and military coordination, to the exploitation of natural resources.

The advantages Russia will obtain from its collaboration with China are expected to turn it into an even more opportunistic global player, with a renewed interest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Moscow seems committed to implementing a two-fold strategy that will help to reaffirm it as a macro-regional, if not a world power: on the one hand, presenting itself as a mediator of the crises unfolding in the region;⁶ on the other hand, planning to undermine the role of the US in the area.⁷ In addition to a geopolitical rationale, Moscow's interest in the MENA is also of an economic nature, with the Kremlin establishing strong trade relations with countries in the region.⁸

⁶V. Talbot and C. Lovotti, *The Role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Strategy or Opportunism?*, ISPI-EuroMeSCo Policy Study, ISPI, 3 April 2019, p.8, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/role-russia-middle-east-and-north-africa-region-strategy-or-opportunism-22736>.

⁷M. Milosevich, "The 2010s: "Grand Strategy" or Tactical Opportunism?", in *Ivi*, p. 39.

⁸*Ivi*, p. 40.

The strengthening of the Russia-China partnership may also possibly lead to an undermining of the perception of NATO's power (both inside and outside the Alliance).⁹ Indeed, the two countries aim to create divisions both between the two sides of the Atlantic and within Europe, in order to create weaker, less resilient competitors unable to successfully respond to a potential intervention on behalf of either party.¹⁰ Stoltenberg stressed this risk in a speech delivered back in April, warning member states about Russia and China's attempt to aim at the unity of the Alliance.¹¹

For a variety of reasons, Russia will likely continue to see NATO as a source of threat, particularly with regard to the geopolitical situation of Ukraine, Belarus and the Caucasus countries, and thus actively work against the Alliance. Nevertheless, NATO should maintain its dual-track approach with Moscow, based on deterrence and dialogue. Concerning the former, the Alliance should maintain and update the plans already implemented with regard to the Eastern flank, which have ensured a rather stable balance over the last five years.

At the same time, establishing a constructive dialogue amongst adversaries prevents the risk of mutual misunderstandings which, as history teaches, might turn into a serious security crisis. NATO represents a forum where member states can and should address their security concerns towards Moscow, bridge their differences about Russia's foreign policy, and forge a common position to be discussed with the Russian Federation through subsequent bilateral and multilateral channels including the NATO-Russia Council. In this context, the renewal of arms control treaties and the launch of new initiatives in this field should be discussed among Allies. These diplomatic efforts should, indeed, be the flip side of the coin of NATO's nuclear and conventional deterrence, as well as of its activities across all five operational domains including space and cyber.

China: a peer competitor that continues to grow in size and influence

China is the West's main, global competitor in technological terms, and thanks to its economic and industrial strengths it may well become NATO's main military concern in the midterm. Indeed, Beijing has achieved a considerable advantage in terms of 5G communication, artificial intelligence and quantum computing, and is making progress on hypersonic weapons. In this sense, China differs from Russia: whilst it might not be a military superpower right now across the conventional-nuclear continuum, it does have an economic and technological advantage over many NATO members. More importantly, Beijing has demonstrated its willingness to employ its technological edge against Western interests,¹² and uses trade and industrial policies as tools for statecraft according to a long-term, comprehensive strategy – as a peer competitor.

The competition between the US and China, which some have defined a “new Cold War”, does not seem to be slowing down. The Covid-19 crisis functioned as a multiplier, highlighting the ideological strife between the two countries. It is now evident the US-China confrontation is about much more than East Asian

⁹ P. Paszak, *The strategic partnership between China and Russia at the time of the pandemic*, Warsaw Institute, 14 July 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/strategic-partnership-china-russia-time-pandemic/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ R. Jozwiak, *NATO's Stoltenberg Blasts Chinese, Russian Disinformation About Coronavirus*, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 27 April 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-s-stoltenberg-blasts-chinese-russian-disinformation-about-coronavirus/30579874.html>.

¹² I. Brzezinski, *NATO's role in a transatlantic strategy on China*, Atlantic Council, 1 June 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/natos-role-in-a-transatlantic-strategy-on-china/>.

security or trade, and concerns energy, the economy and information, just to name a few areas. One of the implications of a more frontal clash between the two countries has been Washington's increasing focus on Beijing, which took its attention away from other areas – such as the MENA – thus leaving room for maneuver to other actors that might have very different agendas.

NATO should not approach China in the same way it approaches Russia. They have different goals and aspirations, as well as different tools (both military and non-military) which can be employed in a confrontation. Instead, the Alliance should develop and take forward a tailored, balanced approach towards China, which began to emerge at the 2019 London summit.¹³ This approach may well include strengthening the Allies' security of supplies, technological edge – particularly but not only in the space and cyber domains – and overall resilience, but should not be limited to these factors. A reflection on the proper balance between containment and engagement should be conducted and should include Western relations with like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific area such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Such a NATO outlook towards the Pacific region would not imply an enlarged membership nor a change in the Washington Treaty. Rather, it would be a matter of intelligence sharing, politico-military consultation, and definition of common military and technological standards with important implications for critical infrastructures and the civilian sector aimed to contain Chinese penetration.¹⁴

Moreover, the year 2019 represented a turning point for EU-China relations, with the former labelling the latter a “systemic rival”.¹⁵ The Europeans seem more aware and worried than before about China's increased capabilities, and what its authoritarian government intends to do with them.¹⁶ Given its broad portfolio of competencies, the Union could and should play an important role in increasing Europe's resilience in cooperation with NATO.

NATO and the EU: no space for misunderstandings

Due to their shared values and interests, their multilateral nature and the partial overlap in their member states, NATO and the EU have made progress in partnering on a number of issues since the 2000s.¹⁷ Yet the collaboration between the two groupings largely depends on the state of transatlantic relations, and they require more efforts on both sides of the Atlantic – as well as of the Channel and the Aegean Sea. A clear incentive for Europe to work more closely with the US comes from China's perception of the Old Continent. Indeed, Beijing does not seem to view Europe as a potential counterweight to the US, nor as a potential partner – rather, as a place to influence and exploit. In other words, to put it bluntly Europe has become a potential object of predation, and the pandemic has done nothing but accentuate such a perception. For the Europeans to hold a sensible and balanced discussion on the Chinese challenge with their American ally, within NATO as well as through NATO-EU cooperation, they must first investigate and clarify the true nature of the European interests at stake – as well as their capabilities and aspirations vis-à-vis emerging technologies and foreign direct investments.

¹³ NATO, *London Declaration*, 4 December 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm.

¹⁴ A. Marrone and K. Muti, *NATO's Future: Euro-Atlantic Alliance in a Peacetime War*, IAI Papers 20|28, IAI, October 2020, p. 8, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/natos-future-euro-atlantic-alliance-peacetime-war>.

¹⁵ European Commission, *EU-China - A strategic outlook*, 12 March 2019, p.1, <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

¹⁶ N. Casarini, *How Europe Should Approach China*, IAI Commentaries 19|68, IAI, December 2019, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/how-europe-should-approach-china>.

¹⁷ See in this regard, G. Lindstrom and T. Tardt (eds), *NATO and the EU - The essential partners*, NATO Defence College Research Paper, September 2019, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1352>.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned need for increased transatlantic collaboration, the Covid-19 crisis will likely cause Europe to concentrate more on its internal security, economy and social issues for the near future. While this is understandable, the defense and international security dimension should not be sidelined in terms of political energy and military investments.

Because of the pressure of an aggressive multipolar system, whereby China's influence is on the rise and the US increasingly focuses on the Pacific, NATO is bound to demand a higher level of burdensharing from its European members. In the worse-case scenario, the Alliance needs to be able to potentially fight a conflict in which American and European forces are to a certain degree interchangeable, and Europeans are able to hold NATO's eastern flank with limited American support while a simultaneous crisis is attracting most US forces in the Pacific. At the same time, by reaching an appropriate degree of strategic autonomy in the midterm, the EU will be able to operate with NATO on the high level of the conflict spectrum and contribute to Europe's defense and deterrence. Still, European strategic autonomy should also cover non-military issues such as emerging technologies, just like the EU-NATO collaboration should concern the whole security spectrum.

At the same time, European strategic autonomy should not be seen as a potential cause for a de-linking between Europe and the US, the EU and NATO. Rather, it should complement NATO's collective defense, which remains a cornerstone of the conventional nuclear continuum (to which the cyber domain should be added). As a matter of fact, by investing in its own defense and security, also through the EU, the Europeans will also demonstrate their willingness to take up greater responsibilities in NATO.

The MENA should be on top of the cooperation agenda between NATO and the EU. Africa and the Middle East are – even more than in the past – a priority for the Union for a variety of reasons encompassing economic, demographic, environmental and security aspects. An overall EU lead with a strong military-diplomatic support by NATO to stabilize the shared Southern flank of both organizations would probably be the most feasible, effective and efficient division of labor in this region. However, such a collective, Euro-Atlantic effort needs to address, or at least mitigate, internal divisions among NATO members, including Turkey.

The role of Turkey

The ongoing clash between Turkey and Cyprus, alongside Greek-Turkish tensions in the whole Eastern Mediterranean, represents one of the main reasons NATO and the EU still cannot reach an updated political and security agreement, 17 years later the Berlin Plus agreements. It is clear that the 2016 Strategic Partnership declaration and its subsequent implementation represent an important step forward. Yet until a new, fully-fledged accord will be agreed upon, the two organizations are bound to continue making *ad hoc* adjustments and deals depending on the specific challenges they face.

Reaching a common understanding with Turkey represents a *conditio sine qua non* for Europe to find a solution to the stability and security of its neighborhood. Some experts suggest the best way for Europeans to face the Turkish government would be to put aside any sign of arrogance and approach each other's differences in a conciliatory manner. In this sense, the speech delivered by Stuart Peach, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, during his Istanbul visit last September, represented a step in the right direction,

with the Chairman stressing the importance of Turkey's contribution to the Alliance.¹⁸ On the contrary, some NATO ambassadors have expressed their concern about Turkey's inconsistency with the Alliance's democratic values, and the risk it poses to its collective defense.¹⁹ Paradoxically, the NATO-EU partnership could help in this regard. Indeed, while NATO could and should remain the framework for engaging Turkey and striving for a common stance, the EU can take those initiatives that within the Alliance would be blocked by Ankara's veto.

Towards 2030: NATO priorities

The defense and deterrence cornerstone

The cornerstone of NATO's strength consists of its deterrent and defense capacity, which is founded on both concrete capabilities and the political will to use them. Together, these two elements constitute the basis of an effective Alliance able to defend its members, and such a shield in turn enables the Allies to exercise a proactive influence on the world stage. This is particularly true in times of aggressive multipolarity and "peacetime war". Yet, in comparison with the Cold War when NATO had one, clear political opponent, today's scenario presents a variety of threat perceptions as well as tensions and crises even within its own members. The political dimension is especially fluid, and NATO should work to bring the Alliance's political functionality in line with the requirements dictated by the current era of great power competition.

The Alliance needs to remain an effective and efficient politico-military instrument granting Western societies an advantage in terms of military power, cementing the political bond among countries which, together, represent a technological, industrial and economic bloc able to successfully face peer competitors and international security crises.

Resilience: the flip side of the defense coin

As NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană recently stressed, preparing for peace in the future cannot be done with the instruments of the past. If, on the one hand, the Alliance must continue to provide collective defense to its member states, on the other hand it must also be more involved in societies' resilience. This concerns not only recovering after shocks or emergencies, but also learning to adapt and respond to transnational global challenges such as emerging technologies, cyber-security and climate change. Indeed, these challenges do have a direct or indirect impact on the Allies' military might and political will. In other words, resilience is the flip side of the defense coin. Pragmatically, NATO should not become a global organization in geographic terms, but rather adopt a more comprehensive approach in thematic terms.

Emerging technologies, including defense and security-related applications, are often still not subject to common regulations. The Alliance is currently drafting an Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT)

¹⁸ NATO, "Turkey is a valuable NATO ally," says NATO Chairman, 7-8 September 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177838.htm.

¹⁹ S. Erlanger, "Turkish Aggression Is NATO's 'Elephant in the Room'", *The New York Times*, 3 August 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/03/world/europe/turkey-nato.html>.

Roadmap, a task approved in October 2019 by the member states' defense ministries.²⁰ The aim of the Roadmap is twofold: help NATO understand the main technological areas on which it has to work, and draw Allies' attention to the main implications of emerging technologies on deterrence and defense. Here different paths are possible, also in light of the degree of confrontation and conflict within an aggressive multipolarity scenario. Either a technological segregation will take place along the lines of different poles, for instance with NATO members and other like-minded democratic countries not using Chinese technologies negatively affecting Allies' security such as 5G. Or some form of global regulation will be agreed, i.e. for government and private activities in space, so to integrate technological and operational developments in a global framework. The reality may see a mix of both paths, with certain technology areas where segregation will be pursued as a security guarantee, and other areas where commonalities, interdependence or even cooperation will be managed.

Last but not least, already during the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO members committed to enhance their resilience through the achievement of a set of baseline requirements for civil preparedness.²¹ Such requirements included, for instance, resilient civil communication systems, food and water resources, and energy supplies. The Covid-19 crisis shed new light on the necessary requirements for civil preparedness, concerning first and foremost medical equipment, but also the security of supplies of goods and technologies at times when global trade and mobility are interrupted by measures aimed to contain pandemics. NATO is committed to updating its resilience requirements soon, as it works on its third report on the state of civil preparedness, and by doing so in cooperation with the EU would benefit the resilience of the whole of Europe.

Transatlantic relations with a global outlook

To envision a future for the transatlantic relationship, NATO members need to think beyond transatlantic relations. The reason is twofold. On the one hand, Allies' security interests are affected in different ways by developments in various world regions, and these should be at least discussed within the Alliance. On the other hand, instability in Europe's neighborhood has a negative, direct effect on Euro-Atlantic security: as often stated by Stoltenberg, if neighbors are more stable, Allies are more secure. This is why cooperative security is currently one of the three NATO core tasks, and the Alliance has committed to projecting stability and strengthening security outside its perimeter through a variety of partnerships.²² If NATO partners become more resilient, so will NATO itself. This obviously applies to both eastern and southern flanks.

In the MENA region, the Alliance has been implementing a partnership policy based on dialogue and cooperation at military and political levels,²³ mostly focusing on less sensitive issues. To this end, NATO has been carrying out bilateral partnerships, as well as initiatives based on multilateral formats. For instance, through the Mediterranean Dialogue, it offers support to countries in the region that might need assistance

²⁰ D.F. Reding and J. Eaton, *Science & Technology Trends 2020-2040 Exploring the S&T Edge*, NATO Science & Technology Organization, March 2020, p.2, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/190422-ST_Tech_Trends_Report_2020-2040.pdf.

²¹ NATO, *Commitment to enhance resilience*, 8 July 2016, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133180.htm?selectedLocale=en.

²² NATO, *Partnerships: projecting stability through cooperation*, 12 June 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm.

²³ See in this regard, A. Aversano Stabile, G. Lasconjarias and P. Sartori, *NATO-EU Cooperation to Project Stability*, Documenti IAI 18 | 18, IAI, July 2018, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1818.pdf>.

in the areas of modernization and capacity development, civil-military relations and security institution-building.²⁴ A similar path has been undertaken through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. All these activities are likely to suffer a scarcity of resources and commitment in light of the prioritization of deterrence, defense and resilience in a scenario of aggressive multipolarity.²⁵ At the same time, they are likely to be seen through the lenses of confrontation with Russia and China, also in the MENA, where the influence of both Moscow and Beijing is increasing.

In contrast, Europe's presence in the Middle East is relatively weak, traditionally relying on US military preponderance in the region.²⁶ However, Washington's gradual retrenchment from the region might imply a greater role for the EU which, by doing so, might also show its determination to achieve a greater level of strategic autonomy. While some experts claim a progressive US military withdrawal will lead to Europe investing more military capabilities in the MENA,²⁷ others believe the Europeans will choose not to take this path, fearing their own capacities would be insufficient without American support.²⁸ As a matter of fact, European members of the Alliance will remain much more affected by what happens in their southern and southeastern neighborhood, and therefore the responsibility of dealing with these challenges will mainly remain on their shoulders.

NATO deeply values its relationship with like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific, as was for instance reiterated by Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller in a speech she delivered during the seventh NATO Asia-Pacific Dialogue in late 2017.²⁹ The same view is shared by the US President-elect Joe Biden, who recently re-affirmed his own belief about the importance of establishing strong ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific.³⁰ When it comes to NATO's priorities and creating fora for discussion and dialogue, numerous experts argue that the Alliance should enhance its relationship with the Asia-Pacific countries and namely with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India. Clearly, these relations will have to be managed within the broader Western approach to China, since Beijing is actively seeking to sideline US influence from East Asia according to a long-term strategy based on military, diplomatic, economic, and infrastructural initiatives. In order to face this reality, NATO's contribution should also be framed within a broader Western approach.

Conclusions

In conclusion, NATO has proven to be a resilient Alliance for more than 70 years – including the last four years that have been marked by strong transatlantic tensions across the board. The Biden administration provides an opportunity for both short-term steps and the elaboration of a new Strategic Concept,

²⁴ NATO, *NATO Mediterranean Dialogue*, 13 February 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_60021.htm.

²⁵ A. Marrone and K. Muti, *NATO's Future: Euro-Atlantic Alliance in a Peacetime War*, IAI Papers 20|28, IAI, October 2020, p.7, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/natos-future-euro-atlantic-alliance-peacetime-war>.

²⁶ N. Tocci and S. Ekim, "As the US retreats from Middle East, Europe can no longer hide in its shadow", *Politico*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/as-the-us-retreats-from-middle-east-europe-can-no-longer-hide-in-its-shadow-turkey-syria-donald-trump-recep-tayyip-erdogan/>.

²⁷ E. Brattberg in J. Dempsey, *Judy Asks: Should NATO Stay Away From the Middle East?*, Carnegie Europe, 16 January 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80815>.

²⁸ J. Shea in Dempsey, *Judy Asks: Should NATO Stay Away From the Middle East?*

²⁹ NATO, NATO Deputy Secretary General underscores importance of Asia-Pacific partnerships, 16 October 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_147844.htm?selectedLocale=en.

³⁰ P. Bacon, "Competition, cooperation, and connectivity How the Indo-Pacific can shape transatlantic relations", in *Turning the tide - How to rescue transatlantic relations*, S. Soare (Ed.), EUISS, October 2020, p.97, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Transatlantic%20relations%20book.pdf>.

providing agreed guidelines with a 2030 horizon. Allies should exploit these opportunities through a wide ranging political conversation on the great power competition with Russia and China, as well as the NATO-EU strategic partnership – *in primis* towards the MENA. In this context, the Alliance’s priorities should include the cornerstone of deterrence and defense, but also a new focus on Allies’ resilience, and a renewed approach towards both Europe’s unstable neighbourhood as well as the Asia-Pacific that is increasingly becoming the focus of US strategic commitments.