



## ODUMUNC 2026 Issue Brief North Atlantic Treaty Organization



# Strengthening NATO Article Five Mutual Security Assurances

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## Introduction

In an era marked by renewed geopolitical competition, the concept of mutual security assurances has reemerged as a defining issue for NATO. At the heart of this challenge lies Article Five of the Washington Treaty, which states that

an armed attack against one member shall be considered an attack against all (NATO 2024). While originally conceived during the Cold War, Article Five is now being tested by new and complex threats, including cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, hybrid warfare, and the resurgence of state-based military aggression. Most urgently, the credibility of NATO's mutual defense commitments is being challenged by Russian behavior on NATO's eastern flank and the unreliability of the United States under President Trump.



A meeting of the NATO North Atlantic Council in the NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium. This is the principal political decision-making body of the alliance, for Permanent Representatives (ambassadors) of the 32 NATO member countries.

Although Article 51 of the UN Charter offers legal grounding for collective self-defense, NATO's Article Five is not a guarantee of military response but a promise to consult and determine what each member deems necessary (Giegerich 2023). In a NATO simulation setting, the central question is not multilateralism in a global sense, but whether the Alliance can act quickly and credibly when a member is attacked. As new threats and internal divisions mount, the

Alliance must confront hard questions about deterrence, solidarity, and decision-making under pressure.

Article Five also represents a central pillar of NATO's deterrence architecture. If adversaries begin to believe that NATO will not respond, even in the face of clear aggression, the deterrent effect evaporates. NATO's capacity to deter, then, depends not only on military capability but also on perceived political will. As such, credibility becomes the currency of collective defense, and that credibility is now in question.



NATO Summit, with the 32 Heads of Government, in The Hague, Netherlands, 24-25 June 2025.

## Background

The concept of mutual defense and collective security rose to prominence in the wake of World War II, particularly with the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. While the UN Charter (Article 51) laid the legal foundation for collective self-defense, NATO's Article Five became the premier political expression of this principle. The Cold War threat from the Soviet Union shaped NATO's early posture, with a strong emphasis on nuclear deterrence and conventional military parity.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO's role was repeatedly redefined. The 1990s and 2000s saw NATO interventions in the Balkans, training missions in Iraq, and the post-

9/11 invocation of Article Five in support of the United States. These missions broadened NATO's identity beyond territorial defense. However, this expansion also created uncertainty over priorities. Critics argue that by expanding its strategic horizon, NATO diluted its core mission: defending its members from state aggression (Major & Mölling 2021).

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a turning point. NATO responded with the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative, deploying multinational battalions to Poland and the Baltic States. While symbolically important, these forces are limited in size and rely heavily on reinforcement plans. In the years since, NATO has made cybersecurity a "core task" and has attempted to keep pace with threats in space and digital domains. Nonetheless, the application of Article Five to these new domains remains vague (UNODA 2023).

## Current Situation

The current international security environment is marked by instability, multipolar rivalry, and the erosion of long-standing norms. Russian Federation activities continue to destabilize Eastern Europe, including hybrid operations, cyber intrusions, and overt military pressure.

A key example is the 2025 Polish drone incident, where swarms of drones crossed into Polish airspace, allegedly launched from Russian-aligned territory. This triggered Article Four consultations but stopped short of Article Five invocation (Wintour 2023). Similar events in Estonia and Lithuania have raised alarm bells. NATO's Enhanced Vigilance Activities have increased, but questions persist about readiness and consensus.

Cybersecurity presents a particularly complex dilemma. Major ransomware attacks on hospitals, banks, and government institutions in NATO member states have originated from actors tied to or protected by Russia. However, attribution remains difficult, and consensus on whether cyberattacks constitute "armed attacks"

under Article Five is lacking. The Tallinn Manual provides some legal clarity, but NATO has yet to adopt a public doctrine stating which cyber actions cross the Article Five threshold (UNODA 2023).

Meanwhile, internal cohesion is under strain. Türkiye has blocked accession bids and arms agreements due to bilateral concerns. Hungary has shown openness to Russian influence. Some member states have failed to meet the 2% defense spending threshold. These political fissures reduce trust and slow collective decision-making, especially under crisis conditions (Fiott 2022).



NATO Heads of Government summit meeting in The Hague, Netherlands, 24-25 June 2025.

## Role of the United Nations

Though NATO operates independently, the UN Charter remains the legal framework for the use of force in international relations. Article 51 affirms the right to collective self-defense, and Security Council authorization under Chapter VII can legitimize enforcement action.

In practice, however, the UN has played a limited role in reinforcing NATO's Article Five commitments. The Security Council is deeply divided, with Russia wielding a veto that blocks efforts to hold it accountable for aggression. The UN General Assembly has taken symbolic action, such as passing resolutions condemning

the invasion of Ukraine, but these do not carry binding legal force (UNGA 2022).

Nonetheless, the UN's contributions to disarmament, peacebuilding, and norm development remain important. UNODA's work on cyber norms and the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) have helped define responsible state behavior in cyberspace. These initiatives support NATO's broader goal of establishing a rules-based international order, even if they do not directly reinforce mutual defense (UNODA 2023).

Additionally, the UN has emphasized the importance of regional arrangements under Article 52 of the Charter. NATO is one such arrangement. Greater synergy between NATO and UN bodies could improve legitimacy and enhance interoperability, especially in post-conflict stabilization scenarios.

## Landmark UN Resolutions

Several UN resolutions establish foundational principles relevant to mutual security, even if they do not directly address Article Five. These include:

- **A/RES/25/2734 (1970)** – Declaration on the Strengthening of International Security. Reaffirmed state sovereignty and non-use of force.
- **A/RES/60/1 (2005)** – 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. Affirmed the “responsibility to protect” and the need for collective action in response to mass atrocities.
- **A/RES/76/262 (2022)** – The Veto Initiative. Requires explanation and General Assembly debate after Security Council vetoes.

While these resolutions do not mandate mutual defense, they help establish the legitimacy of collective responses to aggression. They also signal global expectations around proportionality, sovereignty, and the rule of law (UNGA 2005; UNGA 2022).

Moreover, the UN's support for the development of legal norms in cyberspace, including reports by the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG), lays groundwork for broader international agreement on what constitutes aggression in the digital domain. Such definitions could eventually be used to clarify the scope of Article Five responses to cyber incidents (UNODA 2023).



NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium.

## Country Positions

**China:** China is not in NATO, not part of alliance deliberations, but it could be extremely relevant to alliance choices.

China continues to view NATO's expansion and evolving role with deep suspicion, arguing that a militarized North Atlantic presence encroaches on global strategic balance. In 2025, Beijing has stepped up its critique of NATO's presence in the Indo-Pacific region and increasingly frames the Alliance as part of a U.S.-led bloc aimed at containing China's rise (Xinhua 2025; CSIS 2025).

That same year, China expanded military cooperation with Russia, enhancing joint exercises in the Siberian and Arctic theaters as a signal of strategic alignment (Jane's Defence Weekly 2025). This collaboration includes coordinated cyber operations targeting infrastructure in NATO states, high-intensity "dual-use" drills near European maritime choke points, and intelligence-sharing in contested regions (IISS 2025).

Beijing has also intensified its opposition to NATO-EU cooperation. At the 2025 UN General Assembly, China introduced resolutions condemning "military blocs" and claiming NATO's shift into Asia-Pacific security was destabilizing (UNGA 2025). Chinese media and state-affiliated think tanks argued that NATO's engagement across the globe threatened sovereignty principles and mirrored Cold War-era bloc politics (Global Times 2025).

Growing Chinese investment in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans has raised concerns within NATO. Through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure deals, particularly in ports, rail lines, and energy, China now holds strategic economic leverage in several NATO member states. In 2025, controversies erupted when Hungarian, Serbian, and Bulgarian infrastructure projects tied to Chinese firms drew scrutiny from NATO capitals over potential security risks and espionage (MERICS 2025; Financial Times 2025).

Moreover, China's use of hybrid tools, such as state-linked disinformation campaigns, influence operations targeting international organizations, and economic coercion of Taiwan's partners, draws from the same strategic playbook Russia applies against NATO. While China is not a direct participant in NATO's security paradigm, its actions increasingly echo across Alliance considerations, forcing NATO to address Indo-Pacific dynamics within its European security architecture.

In a simulation where a NATO member is attacked and U.S. involvement is uncertain; China may exploit fissures within NATO by amplifying narratives of foreign encirclement or by shifting investment and influence to countries doubting American reliability. For NATO to remain credible, its strategic planning must now incorporate the possibility that conflict in Europe may entangle hybrid competition from Beijing as well.

**European Union Member States:** While NATO remains the primary security alliance, the

European Union has been steadily expanding its strategic role. The EU now pursues defense integration and crisis response capabilities through mechanisms such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the European Defence Fund, the European Peace Facility, and EU Battlegroups. In 2025, this investment acquires renewed urgency amid doubts about the reliability of U.S. leadership in NATO.

Recent political developments have pushed the EU toward greater military ambition. In March 2025, the European Commission unveiled a new “Defence Pathway” initiative to accelerate joint procurement, strengthen European defense industrial capacity, and broaden rapid deployable forces, especially in the Baltics, the Black Sea region, and the Arctic (European Commission 2025). This move responds to pressure from France and Germany, who argue that Europe must be able to act autonomously if transatlantic backing wavers.

However, this does not necessarily signal replacement of NATO; rather, most EU leaders reaffirm that strategic autonomy should complement, not supplant, transatlantic defense. In her 2025 State of the Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen underscored that NATO remains central to Europe’s security, but Europe must “own more of its defense and not outsource its sovereignty.” (European Commission 2025)

Cooperation between the EU and NATO has deepened further in 2025. Joint initiatives include:

- A cyber threat intelligence-sharing cell, launched in June 2025, that links EU cybersecurity agencies and NATO’s Hybrid Analysis Center (NATO 2025).
- Expanded military mobility corridors, reducing transit times for armored and mechanized units across borders (EU-NATO Mobility Roadmap, 2025).
- Shared hybrid threat workshops and war-gaming exercises in the Baltic and Adriatic theaters, jointly organized by

the European External Action Service (EEAS) and NATO Defense College (EEAS 2025).



All 32 NATO Member States

Yet political constraints remain. Some Eastern European EU states worry that a more militarized EU might pull resources away from NATO. Others fear that greater EU capacity could enable defense actions without U.S. oversight, raising distrust in Washington. Moreover, the EU’s consensus-driven decision-making model can slow crisis responsiveness compared to NATO’s streamlined command mechanisms.

If a NATO member is attacked and U.S. participation is uncertain or delayed, the EU could play a surge-support role, deploying battlegroups or logistics assets under joint NATO-EU mandates. In simulation scenarios, the EU might be asked to fill gaps, especially in humanitarian relief, stabilization, and hybrid response tasks while NATO’s primary deterrent forces mobilize.

The EU’s evolving defense posture in 2025 reflects a strategic recalibration: the goal is not to compete with NATO, but to strengthen Europe’s resilience, plug capability gaps, and ensure that western Europe is not left defenseless in case of American retrenchment. The key question remains balancing autonomy with alliance cohesion, ensuring Europe invests robustly without undermining the transatlantic security architecture.

**Hungary:** Under Viktor Orbán, Hungary has long been viewed as a disruptor within both the EU and NATO. While previously blocking Sweden’s NATO membership as leverage, in

February 2024 Hungary's parliament finally ratified Sweden's accession, ending a long stalemate (Al Jazeera 2024). However, the political undercurrents remain turbulent. Orbán continues to promote a foreign policy that balances overtures to the West with deep ties to Russia and China, positioning Hungary as a geopolitical swing actor (CEPA 2024; Blue Europe 2024).

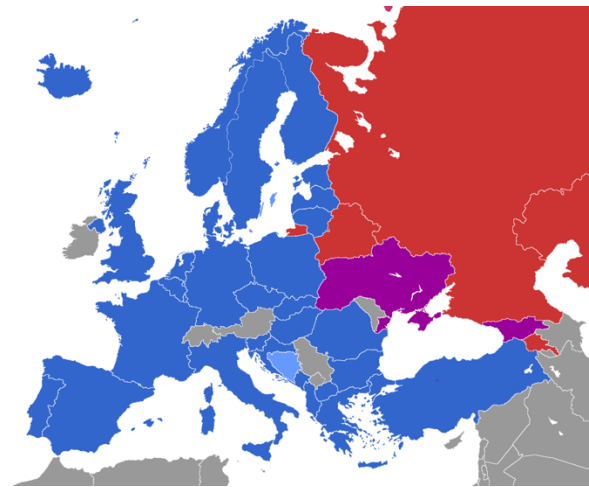
In 2025, tensions with Ukraine have flared. Hungary recently blocked access to twelve Ukrainian news websites in retaliation for Kyiv's restrictions on Hungarian-language media, citing concerns over national security and media bias (Reuters 2025). Moreover, Orbán publicly questioned Ukraine's sovereignty amid a drone dispute, drawing sharp criticism from Ukrainian and NATO officials (Reuters 2025). These moves underscore that Budapest remains willing to challenge NATO and EU consensus when it suits domestic or strategic interests.

Energy policy is another arena where Hungary's alignment with Russia complicates alliance cohesion. In 2025, Hungary signed its largest-ever liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal with France's Engie, ostensibly to diversify away from Russian energy (Reuters 2025). Yet this diversification coexists with continued reliance on Russian gas, such as via the TurkStream pipeline, signaling that Orbán has not abandoned his traditional strategy of maintaining flexible ties with Moscow (Reuters 2025).

Defaulting to domestic political logic, Orbán's Fidesz government also appears motivated by upcoming 2026 parliamentary elections, which may drive further nationalistic or confrontational stances to energize its base (CIRSD 2025). In foreign policy, Hungary has refused to join efforts to frame NATO as an "anti-China" bloc, reflecting its strategic positioning between East and West (Reuters 2024).

If a NATO member were attacked in a simulation context and Budapest chose to obstruct or delay decisions based on its bilateral interests, the Alliance would face a significant

credibility risk. Hungary's record, in implementing vetoes or delaying votes over Ukraine or NATO accessions, signals that internal national priorities can override collective security logic. In response, NATO must consider bypass mechanisms, abstention procedures, or automatic protocols for handling recalcitrant members in crisis contexts.



NATO's 30 European Member States

**Turkey:** Turkey remains a complex but crucial NATO ally. It continues to host key NATO assets, including the Incirlik Air Base, and plays a pivotal role in Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean security. However, tensions within the Alliance have deepened. In 2024 and early 2025, Ankara lifted its veto on Sweden's NATO accession only after extracting new security concessions and arms agreements from Washington and Stockholm, underscoring its transactional approach to Alliance commitments (Kirişçi & Toygür 2025).

Despite these steps, Ankara maintains close economic and energy ties with Russia, including ongoing cooperation in nuclear energy and trade, even as it supplies drones and defense technology to Ukraine (European Council on Foreign Relations 2025). Turkey's possession of the Russian S-400 missile system remains unresolved; NATO officials continue to exclude Turkey from certain joint projects and

intelligence sharing due to security concerns (NATO 2025).

President Erdoğan has also used NATO leverage to pursue his regional agenda, threatening to delay NATO missions or military planning over disputes in Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean, and with Greece. In 2025, Turkey conditioned its support for new NATO air defense deployments on recognition of its proposed “security corridor” in northern Syria, a demand criticized by other Allies as undermining Alliance cohesion (Alarabiya 2025; ECFR 2025).

At the same time, Turkey has expanded its defense industry partnerships with NATO states, supplying Bayraktar drones and armored vehicles to Poland and the Baltic states, a move seen as both a bid to restore trust and as an effort to position itself as an indispensable security partner (ECFR 2025). This dual-track strategy, leveraging NATO membership while cultivating ties with Russia and asserting regional autonomy, illustrates Ankara’s pivotal but unpredictable role in shaping Alliance decision-making.

**Russia:** Russia continues to treat NATO not merely as a rival but as the central counterweight to its regional ambitions. Moscow frames NATO’s steady expansion, particularly into the Baltics and Finland, as a direct strategic threat and responds with a calibrated blend of coercion, hybrid tactics, and subversion (McCarthy et al. 2025; CSIS 2025). Russia’s gray-zone doctrine deliberately blurs the distinction between peace and war, enabling aggressive acts below conventional thresholds while denying culpability (McCarthy et al. 2025; IISS 2025).

In 2025, this strategy has become both bolder and more systematic. One of the most significant provocations occurred between 9–10 September 2025, when approximately 19–23 unmanned aerial vehicles entered Polish airspace, prompting a joint NATO response; four were intercepted, and Poland formally invoked Article Four of the North Atlantic Treaty (IISS 2025).

This incident marked a turning point, with NATO launching Operation Eastern Sentry just two days later to strengthen air defenses across the eastern flank. These developments underscore Moscow’s intent to test NATO’s thresholds for collective response while remaining beneath the level that might trigger full-scale retaliation (McCarthy et al. 2025).

At the same time, Russia has expanded its aerial provocations across the Baltic region. Fighter jets, often flying without active transponders, have conducted aggressive maneuvers near or within Estonian and Lithuanian airspace (IPS Journal 2025; Modern Diplomacy 2025). These actions are frequently timed to coincide with domestic political unrest or election cycles in NATO countries, suggesting a strategic calculus to maximize psychological impact and probe for weak links within the Alliance.

Russia’s disruptive campaign also extends to infrastructure sabotage and cyber intrusions. According to a 2025 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), incidents of sabotage, particularly targeting undersea pipelines, data cables, and regional energy facilities, have nearly tripled since 2023 (IISS 2025). These covert actions are often coordinated with cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, creating multi-pronged threats that challenge traditional definitions of armed aggression.

Information warfare remains central to Moscow’s gray-zone strategy. Kremlin-backed propaganda networks and cyber-enabled influence operations now routinely target Western audiences, amplifying narratives about NATO’s internal dysfunction, the unreliability of the United States, and the economic burdens of collective defense (Modern Diplomacy 2025; IISS 2025). These operations aim not only to sway public opinion but also to foment political divisions that weaken decision-making cohesion within NATO capitals.

Moreover, Russia appears to be institutionalizing unmanned systems and drone warfare as part of its strategic arsenal. The

September 2025 drone incursion into Poland exemplifies this shift, with analysts noting the use of drone swarms both as tactical assets and as instruments of strategic signaling (Modern Diplomacy 2025; IISS 2025). This normalization of drone provocations indicates a future battlefield where conflict remains deliberately ambiguous, slow to escalate, yet persistently destabilizing.

Russia's objective is clear: fracture NATO unity, erode the credibility of deterrence, and normalize persistent, low-intensity aggression. Without clearly defined thresholds for collective response and a consistent demonstration of resolve, the Alliance risks appearing indecisive, an outcome the Kremlin is actively pursuing.



**United States:** The United States remains NATO's principal military and political pillar, supplying the majority of funding, advanced equipment, strategic leadership, and global reach. However, under the current presidency of Donald Trump, questions have grown sharper about whether that commitment is durable in the face of domestic polarization and transactional foreign policy rhetoric.

Public remarks by President Trump suggest a conditional view of U.S. NATO obligations. In February 2024, Trump stated that he might "encourage" Russia to attack NATO allies who fail to meet the 2% defense spending threshold, remarking, *"No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want."* (CBS News 2024). This echoed earlier statements from his first term and raises profound concerns that a U.S. president could unilaterally withhold military support in the face of Russian aggression, undermining NATO's deterrence architecture.

At the 2025 NATO summit in The Hague, Trump again cast uncertainty over Article Five compliance, saying his commitment "depends on your definition" of mutual defense (PBS 2025). While NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte publicly affirmed U.S. support, stating *"I have no doubt... the U.S. is totally committed to NATO, totally committed to Article Five"*, the damage to perceived credibility was already done (Reuters 2025).

This uncertainty reflects a broader erosion of trust. During his previous term, Trump imposed trade sanctions on NATO allies (e.g., steel and aluminum tariffs), criticized the utility of NATO, and repeatedly questioned its value to U.S. interests. Analysts have warned that his return to office may signal a shift toward transactional multilateralism, where commitments are contingent on short-term gains (Atlantic Council 2025).

Nonetheless, Trump has made high-profile efforts to frame his 2025 NATO policy as a "breakthrough." At the Hague Summit, the U.S. administration claimed victory after persuading more allies to commit to 2% or higher defense spending, floating a new "5% Club" proposal to push burden-sharing even further (White House 2025). While this move was designed to show strength and leadership, it also reinforced the perception that U.S. engagement is conditional rather than guaranteed.

These contradictions are at the heart of NATO's current dilemma. On one hand, U.S. defense capabilities remain unmatched, and



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American leadership continues to be essential for NATO's strategic planning and operations. On the other hand, NATO's ability to act decisively depends on the assumption that all allies, especially the United States, will honor Article Five, not just in principle but in action. While the institutional and military weight of the United States anchors NATO, its political reliability under Trump remains in serious question. For the Alliance to maintain deterrence and strategic coherence, contingency planning must assume the possibility of U.S. partial or non-participation. Binding commitments from U.S. institutions beyond the presidency, such as congressional action, may be necessary to preserve NATO's credibility in the face of a crisis.

## Some Proposals for Action

To strengthen Article Five mutual security assurances and ensure Alliance credibility, NATO could consider the following:

**Codify Cyber Thresholds for Article Five.** NATO can adopt a doctrine clarifying which cyberattacks constitute an "armed attack." Using guidance from the Tallinn Manual and UNODA norms, thresholds should include critical infrastructure disruptions, mass civilian harm, or direct effects on command-and-control systems (UNODA 2023). A public declaration would help deter adversaries and reassure member states.

**Create a NATO Hybrid Warfare Response Annex.** Develop a formal addendum to Article Five procedures addressing hybrid threats, drone incursions, election interference, GPS spoofing, etc. The annex should list potential responses: sanctions, cyber retaliation, public attribution, or military reinforcement (Lieber Institute 2023).

**Adopt a Reverse Veto Mechanism.** Instead of requiring consensus for collective action, consider automatic responses unless blocked by a supermajority (e.g., 75% of members). This would streamline Article Five deliberations, reduce paralysis, and signal resolve during crises.

**Expand and Modernize Rapid Reaction Forces.** Increase funding for NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and scale joint exercises to include realistic cyber, hybrid, and gray-zone scenarios. Improve interoperability through shared logistics, AI integration, and real-time data sharing platforms.

**Secure Legal Commitments from the United States.** Encourage the U.S. Congress to pass binding legislation affirming commitment to NATO and Article Five, regardless of administration changes. A congressional resolution could mitigate fears of future withdrawal or abandonment (U.S. National Security Strategy 2024).

**Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication.** Launch targeted campaigns in all NATO countries highlighting the importance of collective defense and burden sharing. Counter disinformation about NATO's purpose and cost through digital literacy, media partnerships, and community outreach.

**NATO Resilience Index.** Develop a standardized resilience index measuring readiness across cyber, energy, communications, misinformation, and infrastructure. Publish annual rankings to incentivize preparedness and transparency.

**Institutionalize Article Five Simulations.** Conduct regular tabletop exercises in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) specifically focused on ambiguous, low-threshold Article Five scenarios. Simulations should test decision-making under pressure, legal ambiguity, and member dissent.



## Strengthening NATO Article Five Mutual Security Assurances



### **NATO–UN Coordination Mechanism.**

Establish a standing liaison office for peacebuilding and humanitarian operations. Joint planning could improve legitimacy during NATO-led post-conflict stabilization missions.

### **Expand NATO–EU Intelligence Sharing.**

Build a real-time intelligence fusion center co-staffed by NATO and EU analysts. Share satellite imagery, cyber threat intelligence, and early warning indicators for hybrid attacks.

## **Further Proposal: Strengthening Decision-Making Under Pressure**

A core vulnerability within NATO's mutual defense system is the need for consensus under high-pressure conditions. Article Five requires consultation and agreement among all 32 member states, yet the nature of modern threats, from cyber incursions to ambiguous hybrid operations, demands rapid, sometimes preemptive, decisions. Delays not only undermine deterrence but can embolden adversaries to test NATO's limits.

One proposed solution is to refine NATO's decision-making framework to allow for greater flexibility in responding to low-threshold or time-sensitive provocations. This could involve the creation of a NATO Emergency Council with pre-delegated authority for certain types of threats, particularly in the cyber and hybrid domains (Lieber Institute 2023). Such a body could operate under strict guidelines but would enhance agility and responsiveness during the initial phases of a crisis.

Simultaneously, NATO must develop clearer protocols for intelligence validation, threshold determination, and public communication. The absence of a shared intelligence framework has led to disagreements over attribution in cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns. An

integrated intelligence-sharing mechanism would mitigate these gaps, ensuring that decisions are informed, coordinated, and trusted (Fiott 2022).

Finally, NATO should institutionalize joint decision-making exercises simulating high-stakes Article Five scenarios. These simulations would test not only the military and logistical readiness of member states but also their political and bureaucratic decision-making processes under duress. By training national delegations and North Atlantic Council (NAC) representatives in such environments, the Alliance can improve its collective crisis performance.

## **Further Proposal: The Role of Civil Society and Democratic Resilience**

While Article Five is a treaty-based commitment between states, its credibility is ultimately anchored in public support. In democratic societies, political leaders must justify military action to constituents, their voters. Therefore, civil society plays a crucial role in reinforcing mutual security.

Disinformation campaigns, often spearheaded by Russian or other adversarial actors, seek to undermine trust in NATO by promoting conspiracy theories, exaggerating costs, and questioning the Alliance's relevance. Civil society organizations, media institutions, and educational systems must collaborate to build media literacy, combat false narratives, and communicate the tangible benefits of collective defense (UNGA 2022).

Civic preparedness and societal resilience are essential during hybrid attacks. Cyber disruptions to energy grids or transportation networks can cause panic and paralysis unless the public is trained and equipped to respond calmly. National governments should integrate civil society actors into resilience planning, including through public awareness campaigns,



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volunteer networks, and continuity-of-service drills.

Moreover, civil society offers a crucial channel for marginalized groups and underrepresented populations to shape national security debates. Inclusive dialogue ensures that NATO policy reflects diverse interests and strengthens democratic legitimacy. As authoritarian regimes often exploit divisions within pluralistic societies, fostering inclusive political discourse enhances Alliance cohesion (Giegerich 2023).

Public opinion influences burden sharing. States that fail to meet defense spending benchmarks often face domestic opposition to increased military budgets. By engaging citizens in open conversations about the necessity and purpose of NATO commitments, governments can generate broader consensus and reduce internal dissent.

### Further Proposal: Rethinking Collective Defense for the 21st Century

The changing nature of global threats compels NATO to evolve its conception of collective defense. Traditional Article Five scenarios assumed conventional military attacks across defined borders. Today, threats are transnational, digital, and persistent. The Alliance must broaden its defensive architecture to match this new reality.

First, NATO should formally recognize non-military domains, such as public health, environmental disasters, and emerging technologies, as potential national security concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how biological threats can paralyze societies and strain allied cooperation. Similarly, climate-induced displacement and infrastructure failures may generate future Article Four or Five discussions (UNODA 2023).

Second, NATO must address the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous systems in both deterrence and escalation. The lack of regulation or shared norms around AI-enabled military systems raises the risk of miscalculation. NATO should lead international efforts to establish ethical frameworks, transparency mechanisms, and joint R&D to avoid a destabilizing arms race (Major & Mölling 2021).

Third, the Alliance must plan for multi-theater contingencies. The U.S. strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific to confront China, and rising tensions over Taiwan may stretch NATO's capacity if simultaneous threats emerge in Europe and Asia. A rethinking of force posture, alliance coordination, and interoperability with non-NATO partners will be essential.

### Conclusion

NATO's greatest strength lies not just in its weaponry, but in the credibility of its commitments. In a world of evolving threats, from drones and disinformation to political polarization, the Alliance must reaffirm the relevance and clarity of Article Five. This includes adapting legal frameworks, enhancing rapid response capabilities, and rebuilding public and political trust.

The stakes are high. If Article Five is seen as ambiguous, delayed, or politicized, it loses its deterrent power. Adversaries will test its limits; only NATO can define them. Proposals like codifying cyber thresholds, introducing reverse veto mechanisms, and reinforcing U.S. legal commitments are not just procedural, they are vital signals of resolve.

The time to strengthen mutual security is before the next crisis. A more resilient, agile, and united NATO is not just a strategic goal, it is a necessity for the security of the Euro-Atlantic community and the integrity of the rules-based international order.



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