

North Atlantic Treaty Organization - NATO

**TOPIC 1: Considering the integration of new member states to strengthen the alliance
in
response to modern security challenges**

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DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

These are some terms that we recommend you understand and research prior to the MUN to have

a better understanding of our debate. They may vary depending on your country's ideology.

NATO: is short for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization which is an intergovernmental military alliance established in 1949 by 12 countries. It was originally formed to protect countries from the Soviet Union, but its primary purpose today is to guarantee the freedom and security of its member countries through political and military means.

Member States: A candidate country that meets the requirements of access of the Copenhagen European Council of 1993 and agrees to sign the accession Treaty with the individual EU Member States, is able to become a member state of the European Union. Currently there are 27 countries that are member states and they all govern the EU on equal terms.

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/member-states.html>

Alliance: in NATO, an alliance is a collective defense arrangement where all member countries agree that an attack on one is an attack on all, which obligates them to come to the aid of the attacked country.

Modern security challenges: they are a new set of threats that go beyond traditional military and physical security. A key example of a modern security challenge for NATO is countering hybrid threats

Integration: Integration in NATO means the process in which member countries coordinate and unify their military, political, and strategic efforts so they can operate together effectively as part of a single, cooperative defense alliance

Collective Defence: it's a security arrangement where multiple countries agree to mutual defense, meaning an attack on one is considered an attack on all.

Strategic Concept: its a high-level, broad idea or vision that provides a guiding philosophy for achieving an organization's long-term goals.

Hybrid threats: harmful activities that combine overt and covert military and non-military methods to undermine or destabilize a target, often by blurring the lines between war and peace. These can include things like cyberattacks, disinformation , political manipulation, and the use of irregular armed groups or regular military forces.

NATO BACKGROUND

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was established on the 4th of April 1949 when 12 countries from Europe and North America signed the North Atlantic Treaty.¹ Its purpose is centered around 4 main points:

Basic Points:

1) A political and military alliance:

NATO's purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means.

Political - NATO promotes democratic values and provides structure so that its members cooperate on defence and security-related issues. In this way they exchange information, build trust, solve problems and prevent conflict

Military - NATO guarantees military security through a collective defence mechanism where an attack on one is an attack on all.

2) Collective defence

NATO core commitment is that an armed attack against one of its members is considered an attack against all. This is the principle of collective defence, which is stated in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. So far it has only been invoked once; in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. NATO members are committed to assist each other when needed, this assistance may or may not involve the use of armed force.

Article 5 - Armed Attacks

What classifies as an armed attack under Article 5 is assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, there are some clear circumstances that can count as attacks: a state invading another's territory, attacks in space, significant cyber attacks and hybrid threats. So far Article 5 has only been invoked once - in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA.

3) The transatlantic link

NATO is an alliance of countries from Europe and North America. It creates a unique connection between the two continents, allowing its members to consult and cooperate on defence and security matters, act in solidarity to deter potential threats, and carry out multinational crisis management operations together.

¹ <https://www.nato.int/content/what-is-nato/en.html>

4) *The Strategic Concept*

[Strategic Concepts](#) set out NATO's core tasks and principles, its values, the evolving security environment, and its strategic objectives for the next decade. The most recent Strategic Concept, agreed in 2022, reaffirms that NATO's key purpose is to ensure the collective defence of its members, based on a 360-degree approach, and outlines three core tasks – deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.

Consensus decision-making at NATO

All NATO decisions are made by consensus, after discussion and consultation among member countries. A decision reached by consensus means an agreement is agreed upon by all. When a “NATO decision” is announced, it reflects the collective will of all the sovereign states that are members of the Alliance. This principle of consensus is applied at every committee level, ensuring that all NATO decisions are made collectively by its members.

Consensus decision-making has been NATO's foundation since 1949. Instead of voting, members consult until all agree, though they may sometimes “agree to disagree.”

Modern Threats:

Hybrid Warfare:

Hybrid threats combine military and non-military, covert and overt means to blur the lines between war and peace. They are designed to destabilise and undermine societies, target political institutions and influence public opinion rather than just defeat armed forces on a battlefield.

The main hybrid threats for NATO include:

1. Disinformation Operations: They spread false narratives via the media and tools such as AI to polarise societies and erode trust in NATO and governments
2. Cyber attacks: Intrusions into networks and infrastructure for espionage, disruption or data theft (e.g., Russian hacks on Allied parliaments; People's Republic of China espionage against certain defence systems)
3. Political interference and subversion: Hostile countries fund proxies, influence elections and cultivate elites to weaken NATO support, often through dishonest means (e.g., Russian backing of fringe parties in Allied states)
4. Irregular armed groups and ambiguous military force: Hostile countries deploys deniable proxies or unmarked troops with regular forces for coercion (e.g., Russian

"little green men" in Crimea/Ukraine: Russian unmarked soldiers without insignias to hide their identity and provide Russia with plausible deniability)

Russia

NATO condemns Russia's brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms. Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, following its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and aggression in Donbas. This war, coupled with Russia's nuclear threats, large-scale military exercises like Zapad near Allied borders, repeated airspace and maritime violations, destructive cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, hybrid sabotage operations (e.g., Baltic cable cuts), and ongoing military buildup (including enhanced missile forces, drones and troop concentrations on NATO's eastern flank) has made Russia the most significant and direct threat to the Alliance's security. NATO has responded by reinforcing its eastern flank with over 500,000 troops at high readiness, providing unprecedented aid to Ukraine (over €40 billion annually in military support), and enhancing deterrence across all domains to prevent further aggression

INTEGRATION OF NEW MEMBER STATES

NATO enlargement history

Initial Members

NATO began with 12 founding members in 1949: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, United States

Additional Members

Since 1949, NATO's membership has increased from 12 to 32 countries through 10 rounds of enlargement.

1952: Greece, Türkiye

They joined to secure NATO's southeastern flank. It was driven by U.S. and British concerns about Soviet influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Their entrance into NATO strengthened NATO's access to this region, but did create certain disputes over Cyprus and the Aegean, which later created tension in the alliance.

1955: West Germany

The Paris Agreements allowed the Federal Republic of Germany to join NATO in 1955 as part of integrating German forces under Allied control, with some countries such as France fearing renewed militarism. The Soviet Union condemned this and responded with the Warsaw pact.

1982: Spain

Spain joined after its transition from Franco's dictatorship into democracy, having to consolidate democratic institutions and Western alignment. This was disputed internally, so a referendum took place in 1986 where Spain joined by a small margin and with agreements on foreign military bases and nuclear weapons.

1999: Czechia, Hungary, Poland

This was the first post-Cold War enlargement. It integrated former Warsaw Pact states after they had undergone political and military reforms under the Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plans. Russia opposed this move as it believed it breached the expectations that NATO would stop expanding eastward.

2004: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

These countries joined after implementing extensive defense reforms and interoperability measures. This extended the alliance across most of central Europe and into the former Soviet space, which was reclaimed by Russia as encirclement and a threat to its security.

2009: Albania, Croatia

Albania and Croatia joined in 2009 after fulfilling multiple requirements on democracy, rule-of-law and defense-reform. This allowed NATO to move forward in its plan to stabilize the Balkans after the Yugoslav wars. However, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were left outside the alliance, which exacerbated the regional political sensitivities, especially over Kosovo.

2017: Montenegro

After Montenegro joined in 2017, NATO had a near complete control of the northern-Adriatic coast. However, this process was increasingly opposed by Russia, and there were even allegations of Russia being linked to a plan for a coup in 2016 on the day of the parliamentary elections to prevent Montenegro from joining. Russia denies these allegations though it had issued threats to Montenegro if it joined NATO.

2020: North Macedonia

North Macedonia joined after the Prepsa Agreement resolved its long-time dispute with Greece, however certain tensions still remained, especially in the country with the nationalistic youth.

2023: Finland

Finland abandoned decades of military non-alignment as a response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. With the invasion, popular support for joining increased exponentially. Their accession greatly lengthened NATO's land border with Russia, and sharp criticisms and threats were given in response.

2024: Sweden

Sweden joined in 2024, ending its traditional policy of military non-alignment and aligning fully with other Nordic states in NATO. The process was delayed by Turkey and Hungary, which used their veto power to demand concessions on counterterrorism, Kurdish groups and bilateral issues, which shows how internal political disputes affect how countries can enter NATO.

Requirements for accession

Article 11 of the North Atlantic Treaty

By unanimous agreement, NATO can invite any other European country to join. The country must be in a position to further the principles of the treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic Area. To (formally) join NATO, a country must deposit its instrument of accession (final legal document) to the US government.

A study on enlargement by NATO in 1995

Countries must have:

- a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy;
- the fair treatment of minority populations;
- a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to NATO operations; and
- a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.

Accession Process

The major steps are:

1. Accession talks with a NATO team
2. Invitees send letter of intent to NATO, along with a timetable for completion of reforms
3. Accession protocols are signed by NATO countries
4. Accession protocols are ratified by NATO countries
5. The Secretary General invites the members to accede to the North Atlantic Treaty

Countries must also commit to all the policies that other members follow.

Current aspirants

Ukraine

In 2008, Allies agreed at the Bucharest Summit that Ukraine would become a member of NATO, provided it completed the Membership Action Plan (MAP). However, from 2010 until 2014, Ukraine pursued a policy of non-alignment, but this ended with Russia's annexation of Crimea. In June 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted legislation reinstating membership in NATO as a strategic foreign and security policy objective. In 2019, a corresponding amendment to Ukraine's Constitution entered into force.

In 2022, Volodymyr Zelensky approved of Ukraine's National Security Strategy. In September 2022, following Russia's invasion, Ukraine reiterated its request for NATO

membership. Allies have reaffirmed that Ukraine's future is in NATO and that they will continue to support it on its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration.

Georgia

Georgia regained independence in 1991 and joined NATO's North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992, which became the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. Practical cooperation began in 1994 with Georgia joining the Partnership for Peace, accelerating after the 2003 Rose Revolution. In 2008, NATO declared Georgia would become a member once it met requirements, reaffirmed at subsequent summits.

NATO strongly supports Georgia's sovereignty, condemning Russia's 2008 invasion and occupation of parts of Georgia. The NATO-Georgia Commission formed in 2008 to facilitate reform and dialogue; the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package launched in 2014 and updated in 2020 to strengthen defense. NATO established a Liaison Office in Georgia in 2010 to support cooperation and reforms. In 2022, NATO endorsed tailored support measures responding to external security threats from the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

NATO has supported peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the early 1990s, aiding efforts to end the Bosnian conflict. Bosnia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 2006 and was invited into the Membership Action Plan (MAP) in 2010. From 1995 to 2004, NATO led peacekeeping missions IFOR and SFOR to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement and maintain security post-war. The Political Engagement Support Cell was established in 2024 to boost political dialogue and cooperation.

In response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, NATO increased support, endorsing in 2023 a new Defence Capacity Building package to enhance Bosnia's crisis management, cyber defense, and counterterrorism capabilities. Bosnia created the Commission for Cooperation with NATO in 2021 to coordinate reforms.

Throughout all of this, Republika Srpska (Serb Republic), as one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, has complicated the country's entry into NATO, because of its remaining close ties to Russia.

Security implications of enlargement

Positive implications

NATO enlargement extends Article 5 collective defense guarantees to new members, deterring aggression and stabilizing regions like the Baltic states and Western Balkans. It distributes defense burdens across more allies, boosts overall military interoperability and capabilities, and promotes democratic reforms, civilian control of militaries, and Euro-Atlantic integration, creating a more unified and secure Europe

Negative implications

Enlargement heightens tensions with Russia, which perceives it as encirclement and a direct threat to its sphere of influence, fueling hybrid attacks, military posturing and rhetoric about NATO aggression. Uneven defense spending among members creates perceptions of some countries doing less than others, straining cohesion and burden-sharing debates (e.g., calls for 5% GDP targets post-2025 Summit). There are also divergent threat perceptions and priorities. Eastern allies focus more on Russia while southern allies focus more on migration and terrorism. This can limit strategic flexibility and create internal divisions. Rapid expansion can also overstretch resources, dilute focus on core areas and expose vulnerabilities if new members lack full readiness.

Political debates among Allies

Some allies (e.g., US, Poland, Baltics) view enlargement as essential for deterrence, exporting stability and countering Russian revanchism, prioritizing speed for candidates meeting standards. Others (e.g., Germany pre-2022, Hungary, Turkey) caution against provoking Moscow, and emphasize prioritizing consensus. These countries often use vetoes to extract concessions. With Trump's new spending priorities, debates have also emerged on equal contributions to NATO, and whether new members can contribute to the required defense spending.

There are also doubts on the readiness of aspiring members: Some allies think that since candidate countries meet the required political, military, and democratic standards for membership, it is possible to push for faster integration but others think that enlargement should be more cautious.

Risks and strategic calculations

Allies have to weigh extended deterrence and enhanced cohesion against Russian escalation risks, which include hybrid sabotage (e.g., Baltic cables) and attacks on borders. The strategic calculations that have to be made are security gains from a deeper seat in the eastern flank defenses versus overextension, internal friction over spending (23/32 meet 2% in 2024;

whereas 5% is the proposal), and geopolitical costs like worsened Moscow ties or Indo-Pacific shifts. Certain trade-offs include diverting resources from non-Russian threats that still remain important (China, terrorism) and testing Alliance unity if provocations demand Article 5 invocation.

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