Weekly Report
National Security Division
Week ending April 5, 2019

NATO 70th Anniversary Special Edition

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), history's most enduring multi-national military alliance, turned 70 Thursday, April 4. The American Legion does not currently have a NATO resolution on the books. Should we? To help answer that question, the National Security Division has prepared a short survey for you to take on the issue.

TAKE THE SURVEY HERE: **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YTCFKBC**

Please note, the results are for internal National Security Commission purposes only and will not be made public. The first question asks for your identity. We would appreciate an answer, but it is not required to complete the survey. Thank you in advance for your participation.

As background, please find below 3 articles about NATO today. The first reports on pressing issues facing the organization today. The other two make PRO and CON arguments about NATO expansion.

5 Dark Clouds Hanging Over NATO's 70th Anniversary

President Trump listens as NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday.

(Courtesy of NPR) — History's most enduring multination military alliance turned 70 Thursday, but it was a milestone more notable for festering disputes than celebrations of harmony. Formed to protect a World War II-ravaged Europe in the throes of a Cold War with the Soviet Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is now grappling with ongoing uncertainty about the United States' commitment to its leading membership in NATO, questions about burden-sharing fairness, and criticism of the growing ties of some members with longtime adversaries.

The organization's original mission was clear. In the words of Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, NATO's first secretary-general, the alliance was created "to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Today, with the Soviet Union long gone and Germany reluctant to boost modest military outlays, NATO continues to fret about keeping America in and keeping Russia out. Here's a look at five dark clouds hanging over NATO as it enters its eighth decade.

1. Mixed signals from NATO's most powerful member

Washington is where the treaty that established NATO was signed by its 12 original members. There are now 28 nations in the alliance in addition to the United States, but they sent only their foreign ministers — and not, notably, their heads of state or government — to the American capital for the 70th anniversary. It was a move that ensured President Trump, an unapologetic critic of NATO, would not appear. When Vice President Pence told the assembled NATO foreign ministers on the eve of the anniversary that "NATO is stronger today because of the commitment of our allies but also because of the resolute American leadership of President Trump," he failed to muster a single clap of applause.

The visiting top diplomats were certainly aware of reports that in meetings with his advisers over the past year, Trump had repeatedly broached pulling out of NATO.

It's the U.S. Congress that has taken the lead in reassuring NATO that the United States remains committed to the alliance. In January, the Democratic-led House overwhelmingly approved legislation that prohibits the expenditure of any funds on a U.S. withdrawal from NATO.

At the invitation of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday became the first NATO secretary-general to address a joint meeting of Congress, an honor that also served as a rebuke to Trump's jabs at NATO.

2. Bad blood over defense spending

Tensions between the U.S. and its NATO allies over their defense spending levels are at their highest level in decades. After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, those allies made a commitment to boost their defense expenditures to at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product by 2024. Only seven of Washington's 28 NATO partners have reached or surpassed that target. While speaking to the foreign ministers gathered for the anniversary, Pence specifically name-checked Germany for planning to spend 1.3 percent of its GDP on defense this year.

"It is simply unacceptable," Pence scolded, "for Europe's largest economy to continue to ignore the threat of Russian aggression and neglect its own self-defense and our common defense at such a level."

3. Turkey arms purchase standoff

Turkey has been a member of NATO since 1952; it has the second-largest military in the alliance after the U.S. and is valued as a key strategic linchpin as a nation bordering the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. But the U.S. is in a quickly escalating standoff with Turkey over Ankara's decision to buy Russia's S-400 air defense missile system — an acquisition that the U.S. insists would endanger the fleet of 100 F-35 stealth jet fighters that Turkey plans to buy from the warplane's manufacturer, Lockheed Martin Corp.

"Turkey's purchase of a $2.5 billion S-400 anti-aircraft-missile system from Russia poses great danger to NATO and to the strength of this alliance," Pence told the assembled foreign ministers, among them Turkey's Mevlut Cavusoglu. "If Turkey completes its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system, Turkey risks expulsion from the joint F-35 program."

That threat from Pence came hours after Cavusoglu declared in an interview at the Washington-based Atlantic Council, "S-400 is a done deal and we will not step back on this."

4. Russia

Trump's decision in February to withdraw from the Reagan-era Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty prompted Moscow, the pact's only other signatory, to do likewise. That removes restrictions that have kept the two nations from deploying ground-based nuclear-tipped missiles whose short flying times leave little margin for defending against them.

The U.S. is well beyond the range of such Russian missiles, but Europe most certainly is not. Still, NATO's Stoltenberg insists there will be no tit-for-tat with a Russia he, too, accuses of having cheatedon the INF treaty.

"NATO has no intention of deploying land-based nuclear missiles in Europe," the NATO leader asserted at the joint meeting of Congress, "but NATO will always take the necessary steps to provide credible and effective deterrence." He did not say what those steps might be. Meanwhile, Russia is sowing division in NATO by cozying up to some key members. The sale of its S-400 anti-aircraft system to Turkey does not necessarily violate NATO's rules — "It is a national issue what kinds of arms allies procure," says Stoltenberg — but it does cause doubts about where Ankara's allegiances truly lie.

Ditto for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline Germany is building with Russia. "It could turn Germany's economy literally into a captive of Russia," Pence warned NATO's foreign ministers.

5. China

In his 40-minute address to Congress, Stoltenberg made not one mention of China. It's a touchy subject for some NATO allies who have resisted U.S. entreaties — and ignored threatened U.S. trade sanctions — not to buy Chinese 5G technology upgrades. China has also offered generous financing for infrastructure improvements in Europe as part of its One Belt, One Road initiative. And China's military ambitions could become a threat to NATO that was unimaginable when the alliance formed seven decades ago.

"Perhaps the greatest challenge NATO will face in the coming decades is how we must all adjust to the rise of the People's Republic of China," Pence declared this week, "and adjust we must."

All this has some NATO skeptics wondering how much longer the alliance hangs together.

"If NATO didn't exist, would we invent it?" says MIT political scientist Barry Posen. "I suspect not." Others insist NATO will push on past its current troubles.

"As long as we're facing an aggressive Russia, and I think that means as long as Mr. Putin is in charge and maybe his successor after that, we're going to need NATO for its basic mission of collective defense and deterrence," says Alexander Vershbow, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia and deputy NATO secretary-general. "So I think it has several more decades, at a minimum, in it — and maybe maybe even another 70 years."

PRO: America needs a bigger NATO to stymie Russia's ambitions

(Courtesy of the Heritage Foundation) — Europe needs NATO. America needs NATO. You know who else needs NATO? Vladimir Putin. The Russian leader has long used the existence of NATO to justify his antagonism toward the West.

Moscow's aggressiveness, you see, is merely a response to the "threat" NATO poses to Russian security. It's malarkey, of course — like a burglar claiming it's your fault he robbed your house because you had the audacity to buy a new TV.

Unlike Putin's Russia, NATO poses no threat of aggression. It is and always has been a purely defensive alliance. Even at the height of the Cold War, NATO harbored no designs on Soviet Russia and its satellites.

And once the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union crumbled without a shot being fired, NATO welcomed new members to the alliance — contributing further to the mutual security of all and the expansion of freedom and democracy in Europe.

NATO and the new Russia lived peacefully side-by-side for years, until Putin embraced the fiction that, by increasing its membership, NATO was somehow encroaching on Russia and threatening its security.

Inside and outside the alliance, no one wants to pick a fight with Russia. Yet Putin's aggressiveness — from his invasions of Georgia and Crimea to his militarism in Ukraine — has made joining the alliance even more attractive. And it's not just nations who've already taken casualties who seek membership.

In addition to Georgia and Ukraine, Finland and Macedonia are knocking on NATO's door, membership applications in hand. These countries and more rightly see NATO as a counter to Russia destabilizing adventurism. No wonder Putin wants NATO to stop expanding. It crimps his style.

There is zero likelihood that Putin would stop harassing the alliance if NATO stopped taking in new members. Much like the czars of old, he wants a hard sphere of influence over Europe — something possible only if Moscow can break up NATO and decouple the U.S. from Europe.

And there is good reason for NATO to keep adding willing nations to its ranks.

In a defensive alliance, geography matters. A coherent frontier that keeps the bad guy further and further away is a good thing. Putin isn't going away anytime soon, so NATO must consider the geography of defending its eastern flank for the foreseeable future.

Freedom matters, too. Denying willing nations the right to participate in collective defense would only restrict freedom. Nor does it make any sense to discourage aspirant nations from meeting the political-military standards to qualify for NATO membership.

Know what doesn't matter? Size.

Many small states that have entered NATO have been net contributors to security. They have hit or are on track to hit the agreed upon NATO defense spending targets. They participate in NATO missions. In terms of manpower and operational contributions, they kick in more than they take out — easily outperforming many much bigger countries on a pound-for-pound basis.

Tiny Estonia is a case in point. It easily meets NATO's annual defense spending target of 2 percent of GDP.

Meanwhile, big, rich Germany struggles to do devote more than 1 percent of its GDP to defense; its finance minister recently proposed a budget that would actually reduce defense spending after 2020.

Today, Macedonia is poised to join the alliance. But the prospects of more nations joining the club anytime soon are dim.

Yet, NATO's open door policy is more than symbolism. It represents what NATO is: an alliance of free nation-states committed to mutual defense cooperation. As long as there are rulers like Putin, the need for that kind of commitment will not diminish.

Putin knows that. He fears that. It restrains him. This is no time for NATO to remove that restraint.

CON: If the US succeeds in expanding NATO it would set the stage for another Cold War

(Courtesy of John B. Quigley, professor at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law and a leading scholar on U.S. relations with Russia) — Expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is not a rational step if the aim is to blunt the ambitions of the government of Russia.

The first fallacy is the premise that Russia has ambitions that need to be blunted. Despite claims by some that Russia under President Vladimir Putin is trying to reconstitute the Soviet Union in the territory it held before 1991, Russia has been modest in its aims.

The only territories in which it has indicated expansionist tendencies have been territories that were closely linked to Russia historically.

The Crimean Peninsula never had any connection to Ukraine prior to 1954, when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, for reasons that have never been clear, decided to switch it from the Russian component of the Soviet Union to the Ukrainian component.

Crimea had been part of Russia since the late 18th century, and Crimea's population was and is predominantly Russian, not Ukrainian.

Even Russia's promotion of separationists in eastern Ukraine is a step that reflects historical links, because in that sector, the population is mixed Ukrainian and Russian. The Ukraine government had refused pleas for local autonomy from the population of eastern Ukraine, setting the stage for a push for separation.

Even if I am wrong about all that — even if Russia does harbor broad territorial ambitions — expanding NATO is not a rational policy.

Expanding NATO encourages Russia to be defensive and to feel the need to protect itself. In 1939, the Soviet Union invaded Finland out of fear that Nazi Germany might make a move into Finland.

To date, NATO has expanded significantly into Eastern Europe, creating in the Kremlin the same jitters it felt in 1939.

NATO has brought into membership a number of former Russian allies — Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, East Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Romania. Even more problematic for Russia, NATO has accepted three countries that were part of the Soviet Union — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

These expansions set relations between Russia and the West on a downward spiral, following a time after the demise of the Soviet Union when it seemed that the relationship might be friendly. The West — and specifically the United States — assured Russia that the weakened posture of Russia would not be exploited to expand NATO. But then NATO accepted one Eastern European country after another into its treaty, which dates from 1949. Russia considered the West duplicitous.

The United States should not make the situation even worse by promoting NATO membership for more of Russia's western neighbors.

Despite the influx, NATO still does not count as members Ukraine, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Macedonia and Bosnia.

NATO's expansion has brought a dangerous polarization in east-west relations and has increased militarization on both sides.

President Donald Trump wants new aircraft carriers and upgraded nuclear weapons. He browbeats Western Europe to spend more on its military.

Last year Putin test-launched a supersonic missile that he says can penetrate existing U.S. missile defenses. An arms race is not in the interests of either country.

Staff Activities

- This week, staff continued planning for the National Commander's upcoming Europe travel tentatively scheduled for May 25-June 11.
- This week, National Security staff participated in several NATO 70th anniversary events.

- Thursday, National Security staff attended an event on the topic of "American Primacy In Crisis: Historical Origins And Current Pressures." Hosted by Catholic University of America's Center for the Study of Statesmanship, you can find additional information here.
- Friday, National Security staff met with representatives of the European Parliament Liaison Office to pursue meeting opportunities for the commander during his European travels.

POW/MIA Update

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency made 4 new announcements. Click on the links to read more:

04/01/19: Airman Accounted For From World War II (Rogers, V.)

04/01/19: USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Poindexter, H.)

04/01/19: Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Sandini, A.)

04/01/19: USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Hanson, G.)

Rhonda Powell, Director, National Security Division