



## PERSPECTIVES

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# NATO Must Survive

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The recent urgent push by NATO to provide a defensive framework to Poland and the Baltic states is by no means a false alarm intended merely to shore up a sense of common purpose during a period of crisis. It reflects a serious threat that must be addressed.**

Seventy years ago, at the dawn of the Cold War, NATO was forged as a pan-Atlantic alliance to resist Soviet aggression. From its outset, the US served as its main pillar, providing the bulk of military and economic support. All members of the alliance joined voluntarily, however, and shared a common interest in resisting the Soviets.

The reemergence of Russia as a belligerent force has, ironically, created the most serious rift in the alliance since its inception. Turkey, once its weakest and most vulnerable member, has begun asserting itself as a major independent political player. Russia, its northern neighbor and centuries-old enemy, is no longer considered by Ankara a threat to its stability and ambitions. This new friendship goes far beyond politics. Military ties between the two countries are flourishing, culminating with the purchase by Turkey of Russian-made S-400 batteries despite vehement NATO and US objections.

But that is not the only issue NATO is facing. President Donald Trump is demanding that the European allies contribute more. France wants Europe to have a more independent say in NATO affairs, but does not possess the means to support such a plan. Germany wants to engage Russia economically and resist its expansionist moves, but refuses to contribute more military spending.

All these mutually exclusive ideas put together have plunged the alliance into deep crisis even as it faces the very enemy it was originally created to confront.

There is a tendency to dismiss the latest scramble by NATO to strengthen its eastern defenses as a publicity stunt devoid of substance or real danger. These voices claim this latest battle cry is purely for internal consumption to invigorate the ailing alliance and instill a common purpose. Why, they ask, would Russia attack the Baltic states? The idea sounds absurd. But ten years ago, an imminent military conflict with tens of thousands of casualties in the heart of Europe was difficult to imagine, yet that nightmare became a reality for Ukraine.

Russia wants to create a continuous buffer zone of instability between itself and NATO. That zone consists of slowly simmering conflicts (eastern Ukraine, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia) that Russia controls and can reignite at will. This gives Moscow great leverage and blocks many of the newly independent states from departing its sphere of influence.

Another element, which many in the West tend to underestimate, is the Kremlin's anger at the former republics, particularly the three Baltic states. This anger reflects Russia's envy of their economic progress since gaining independence. Moscow would like to teach them a lesson.

Just as the Soviets did years ago, Russia is depicting the Baltic states as fascist entities. Under the Soviets, the goal was to assimilate them with an influx of Russian-speaking settlers. Today the Russian propaganda machine portrays those countries as Nazi allies that have not repented that evil association.

The Russian leadership is rational, and is adept at sensing weakness even an ocean away. Putin knows full well that NATO's failure to defend the Baltic states would be a death knell to the alliance.

NATO needs to exist. As long as Russia has imperial ambitions, there must be a unified military force in Europe to counterbalance it. It is also clear that NATO in its current form will not survive the test of time. Europeans need to contribute more in terms of both funds and manpower. Turkey must be expelled, as its interests are at conflict with those of the rest of the members. It is more a foe than a friend.

The Russian threat remains real, and it is urgent that NATO survive as a potent military force to counterbalance it.

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