

KYALMUN'26

NATO

Study Guide

Agenda Item: NATO's Role in the Arctic amid
Rising Tensions.

Under Secretary General
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Letter from Secretary General

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to the NATO Committee of KYALMUN'26. In this committee, you will step into a strategic environment shaped by rising tensions, geopolitical competition, and the growing importance of the Arctic region. Your decisions will require a careful balance between security, cooperation, and diplomacy.

As representatives of member states, you will be challenged to navigate alliance dynamics while addressing both regional and global concerns. I encourage you to approach this committee with strategic foresight, responsibility, and unity. May your debates reflect not only strength, but also wisdom and restraint.

Sincerely,

Yağmur Sarıtaş

Secretary-General, KYALMUN'26

Letter from the Under-Secretary General

Most Esteemed delegates of Kyalmun'26,

My name is Zeynep Naz Cengiz and I am your under secretary general in this committee. As the academic members of this conference we spent restless nights in order to build a creative atmosphere for each delegate to maintain a great experience and conclude with full potential at the end.

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) is one the most powerful and influential committee that shapes the future of international relations and diplomacy throughout the years. The actions and agreements that the alliance made affects global security and peace with its positive and negative side effects. In this committee, I expect you to think wisely, create sufficient solutions and work together while solving the problems that the committee has in the current situation. You will debate upon the topics that had been a problem since the past and also the recent actions and summits of NATO, with incomes of your actions and debating fruitfully I am sure you all are going to be successful delegates of your representative countries'. My greatest wish is that you all enjoy every second of this conference, I hope that all of you are ready to take part in a change yet to come. I wish you all a great conference and see you soon in Kyalmun'26!

Sincerely,

Zeynep Naz Cengiz

Introduction to the Committee

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an international military and political alliance that works to ensure the safety and security of its 32 member countries 30 in Europe and 2 in North America. Founded in 1949, NATO was created to protect its members through collective defense, meaning that if one country is attacked, all other members will respond together. This principle is based on Article 5 of the NATO treaty and is the core of the alliance's purpose.

NATO's main aim is to prevent war, protect its members, and promote peace and stability in the world. It does this by maintaining strong armed forces, sharing intelligence, conducting joint training and exercises, and responding to crises when needed. Over time, NATO has adapted to new security challenges, such as terrorism, cyberattacks, disinformation, and the effects of climate change on global security.

The mission of NATO is both military and political which includes promoting democratic values, encouraging cooperation among allies, and helping countries strengthen their defense systems. Through partnerships and peacekeeping efforts, NATO supports international stability and works to prevent future conflicts.

NATO is not just a military alliance—it is a complex international organization with both political and military structures. These bodies work together to ensure that decisions are made democratically and that military operations reflect the shared interests of all member countries. NATO agencies and organisations play a vital role in procuring and sustaining capabilities collectively. They specialise in technical fields that complement and form an integral part of NATO's agenda: procurement, support and communications and information.

Introduction to the Agenda Item

As the Arctic melts at an unprecedented rate due to climate change, it is rapidly transforming from a frozen frontier into a strategic military and economic zone. The emerging navigable sea routes, such as the Northern Sea Route, and access to rich untapped resources have turned the Arctic into a contested space. In this evolving landscape, NATO faces both an opportunity and a responsibility to

redefine its Arctic strategy;balancing collective defense, environmental adaptation, and long-term geopolitical interests.

Defense budgets among Arctic NATO states are gradually shifting to account for northern deterrence. Norway, Canada, and the U.S. have increased Arctic-specific investments in naval capabilities, surveillance systems, and rapid-response units. The addition of Finland and Sweden has further strengthened NATO's northern flank, filling a critical geographic gap in the Baltic-to-Arctic corridor. As the Alliance moves toward the 5% GDP defense spending target. Arctic-specific funding is likely to grow, especially in reconnaissance, cold-weather logistics, and cyber resilience for remote infrastructure.

The Arctic is increasingly viewed as a future battleground, not in terms of open war, but in strategic control and deterrence. Russia has militarized its High North region with submarines, airbases, and nuclear assets. In response, NATO has expanded exercises like Cold Response and Trident Juncture, simulating Article 5 scenarios in harsh Arctic terrain. These exercises are not only symbolic, they help test the alliance's ability to defend territory under Article 5 and consult under Article 4 if any Arctic member feels threatened by Russian or hybrid aggression.

With climate change acting as a security multiplier, NATO is also beginning to explore climate adaptation within its operational planning. Melting permafrost, unpredictable weather, and environmental disasters threaten base stability, troop safety, and supply chains. NATO has launched its Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence and encourages members to green their militaries. Yet, significant investment is still needed to match rhetoric with readiness in Arctic zones.

At last, the Arctic raises complex questions about future NATO expansion. Most Arctic-bordering countries may seek deeper integration. However, non-recognized territories or observer states like Kosovo, and possibly neutral countries reconsidering their stance may seek strategic Arctic access through NATO partnerships, especially if tensions with Russia continue to rise.

Key Terms and Definitions

Gross Domestic Product (GDP):Gross Domestic Product, commonly known as GDP, is one of the most important indicators used to evaluate a country's economic performance. It represents the total monetary value of all final goods and services produced within a country's borders during a specific time period, usually annually or quarterly. GDP includes production from industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services, but excludes informal or illegal activities that are difficult to measure. Policymakers, investors, and international organizations use GDP to compare economic growth between countries, assess living standards, and guide economic decisions. However, GDP does not account for income inequality, environmental damage, or overall well-being.

Annexation:Annexation is the act by which a state forcibly or unilaterally incorporates territory that legally belongs to another state into its own sovereignty. This process often occurs after military occupation or political pressure and is typically not recognized by the international community. Under modern international law, annexation is generally prohibited, especially when it violates a country's territorial integrity. Annexation can trigger serious international consequences, including economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and long-term regional instability. Historical and contemporary cases of annexation continue to shape global political tensions.

Inflation: Inflation refers to the sustained rise in the overall price level of goods and services within an economy over time. As inflation increases, the purchasing power of money decreases, meaning individuals need more money to buy the same products. Inflation can be caused by factors such as increased demand, rising production costs, or expansion of the money supply. Central banks closely monitor inflation and use tools like interest rates to keep it under control. While low and stable inflation is considered healthy for economic growth, high or unpredictable inflation can erode savings, distort markets, and create social and economic instability.

Article: An article is a formally numbered provision within legal, constitutional, or international documents such as treaties, conventions, or laws. Each article addresses a specific issue, rule, or obligation and helps structure complex legal texts in a clear and organized manner. Articles are legally binding when part of official agreements and are often referenced in legal interpretations and court decisions. In international relations, articles are especially significant because they define state responsibilities, enforcement mechanisms, and the conditions under which agreements operate.

Buffer-Zone: A buffer-zone is a designated geographic area established between two states or groups that have a history of conflict or potential hostility. Its main function is to reduce the risk of direct confrontation by creating physical distance and limiting military presence. Buffer-zones are often created through ceasefire agreements or peace treaties and may be supervised by international peacekeeping forces. While buffer-zones can help maintain stability and prevent violence, they may also create political, economic, or humanitarian challenges for the populations living within them.

Collective Defense: Collective defense is a core principle of NATO stating that the security of each member state is interconnected with that of all others. Under this concept, an attack against one member is considered an attack against the entire alliance, requiring a collective response. This principle is formally enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and serves as a major deterrent against external aggression. Collective defense strengthens unity among allies and reassures smaller or more vulnerable states that they will not face threats alone.

Deterrence: Deterrence is a security strategy aimed at preventing hostile actions by convincing potential adversaries that the costs of aggression will outweigh any possible benefits. NATO achieves deterrence through a combination of military readiness, credible defense capabilities, and political unity among its members. This includes conventional forces, nuclear deterrence, and forward deployment of troops in strategic regions. Effective deterrence reduces the likelihood of conflict by discouraging opponents from initiating attacks.

Peacekeeping Operations: Peacekeeping operations involve the deployment of military, civilian, or police personnel to help maintain or restore peace in conflict or post-conflict regions. NATO peacekeeping missions typically focus on stabilizing fragile areas, supporting ceasefires, protecting civilians, and assisting local authorities in rebuilding security institutions. These operations are often conducted in cooperation with the United Nations or regional organizations. While peacekeeping does not eliminate the root causes of conflict, it plays a vital role in preventing renewed violence.

Burden Sharing: Burden sharing refers to the fair distribution of responsibilities, costs, and risks among NATO member states. This includes financial contributions, troop deployments, military capabilities, and participation in missions. The concept is closely linked to NATO's guideline that members spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense. Effective burden sharing strengthens alliance

cohesion and ensures that no single member carries a disproportionate share of the security responsibilities.

Allied Command Operations (ACO): Allied Command Operations is one of NATO's two strategic commands and is responsible for planning and executing all NATO military operations. Headquartered at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), ACO ensures that NATO forces are prepared, coordinated, and capable of responding to crises and security threats. It operates under the authority of the North Atlantic Council and is led by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). ACO plays a crucial role in maintaining NATO's operational effectiveness and military readiness.

Historical Background

When NATO was founded in 1949, the Arctic region already held strategic value due to its position between North America and the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, the Arctic became a critical military frontier. The shortest flight path for Soviet and American bombers and missiles ran over the North Pole, turning the region into a silent battleground. Arctic NATO members focused on early warning systems and anti-submarine defenses. Although NATO did not develop a specific Arctic strategy, it coordinated closely with Arctic allies, especially Norway, which served as the alliance's northernmost front line against Soviet power.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, tensions in the Arctic significantly declined. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to widespread demilitarization across the High North. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Arctic security was largely replaced by environmental cooperation and indigenous rights discussions. The Arctic Council, established in 1996, became the main forum for regional governance, focusing on scientific research and sustainable development rather than military coordination. NATO's engagement in the Arctic was minimal during this period, as the alliance focused on peacekeeping and crisis response in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and other regions.

The 2010s brought renewed attention to the Arctic, largely due to climate change. As polar ice melted, new maritime routes like the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage became navigable during the summer, and vast reserves of oil, gas, and minerals became accessible. This economic potential led to increased interest and competition. Most notably, Russia began to militarize the region again, reopening Soviet-era bases, expanding its Northern Fleet, and establishing new Arctic brigades. China, though not an Arctic state, declared itself a "near-Arctic power" and invested heavily in infrastructure projects under the banner of the "Polar Silk Road." NATO began to view these moves with growing concern, especially due to the military implications of Russia's buildup.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO-Russia relations deteriorated, and Arctic security became more prominent on NATO's agenda. While the alliance still lacked a formal Arctic policy, it began conducting large-scale exercises in and around the region. One notable example was Trident Juncture 2018, held in Norway, the North Atlantic, and the Arctic Circle, involving over 50,000 troops. Additionally, the U.S. reactivated its Second Fleet to patrol the North Atlantic and safeguard the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap, a key naval passage for Russian submarines entering the Atlantic Ocean. Norway also increased its defense spending and Arctic surveillance capabilities, often with NATO support.

The 2020s have seen Arctic tensions rise further. As Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, NATO once again shifted its strategic posture. Although the conflict lies outside the Arctic, Russia's overall

aggression and increased naval activity in the Arctic have alarmed NATO allies. In response, the alliance deepened its Arctic readiness and intelligence-sharing. Exercises like Cold Response in Norway tested NATO's ability to operate in extreme Arctic conditions. The accession of Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) to NATO drastically changed the security geometry of the Arctic. With seven of the eight Arctic nations now under NATO's umbrella, the alliance has gained more territorial coverage and strategic depth in the High North.

Despite its increased involvement, NATO still lacks a comprehensive Arctic strategy, and its presence in the region remains somewhat fragmented. However, the Arctic is no longer seen as a purely cooperative zone—it is now a theater of strategic competition. NATO faces the dual challenge of deterring Russian militarization and monitoring growing Chinese economic ambitions, all while navigating environmental and climate-related changes. As tensions continue to rise and the ice continues to melt, the alliance's role in the Arctic will likely grow more central to its overall security planning.

Points to Cover in the Debate

1-Defense Spending Budget

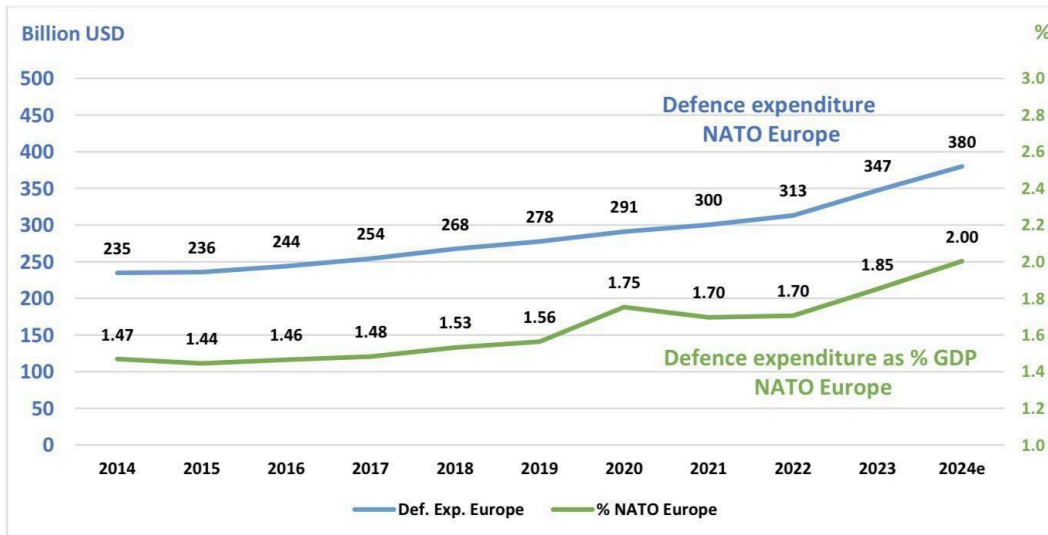
Defence expenditure is defined by NATO as payments made by a national government (excluding regional, local and municipal authorities) specifically to meet the needs of its armed forces, those of Allies or of the Alliance. For the purposes of this definition, the needs of the Alliance are considered to consist of NATO common funding and NATO managed trust funds. The list of eligible NATO trust funds is approved by all Allies. At the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, Allies made a commitment to investing 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually on core defence requirements and defence- and security-related spending by 2035. They will allocate at least 3.5% of GDP annually based on the agreed definition of NATO defence expenditure by 2035 to resource core defence requirements and to meet the NATO Capability Targets. Allies agreed to submit annual plans showing a credible, incremental path to reach this goal. They will account for up to 1.5% of GDP annually to inter alia protect critical infrastructure, defend networks, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defence industrial base. Previously, in 2014, NATO Heads of State and Government had agreed to commit 2% of their national GDP to defence spending, to help ensure the Alliance's continued military readiness. This decision was taken in response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and amid broader instability in the Middle East. NATO members will have to decide on their own where they'll find the extra cash to allocate to defence.

Mark Rutte, NATO's secretary general and the Netherlands' former prime minister, stated it was "not a difficult thing" for members to agree to raise defence spending to 5 percent of GDP because of the rising threat from Russia. But ministers in the UK, for example, have not made it clear where they will get the extra money to spend on defence. The European Union, meanwhile, is allowing member states to raise defence spending by 1.5 percent of GDP each year for four years without any disciplinary steps that would come into effect once a national deficit is above 3 percent of GDP.

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Defence expenditure as percentage of GDP NATO total and NATO Europe

Defence expenditure in 2015 prices and as a % of GDP NATO Europe



GDP and defence expenditures in 2015 prices (billion USD)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024e
GDP NATO Total	35,304	36,167	36,839	37,856	38,782	39,585	37,917	40,233	41,341	42,276	42,827
GDP NATO Europe	15,987	16,315	16,639	17,151	17,465	17,752	16,616	17,709	18,356	18,769	18,970
Def. Exp. NATO Total	910	896	913	904	929	999	1,018	1,057	1,037	1,075	1,159
Def. Exp. Europe	235	236	244	254	268	278	291	300	313	347	380
% NATO Total	2.58	2.48	2.48	2.39	2.40	2.52	2.69	2.63	2.51	2.54	2.71
% NATO Europe	1.47	1.44	1.46	1.48	1.53	1.56	1.75	1.70	1.70	1.85	2.00

One of the most immediate issues is the uneven economic capacity of NATO members. Larger economies like the United States, Germany, or France may eventually absorb the increase through budget restructuring, but smaller or indebted states particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe will struggle to meet the 5% target without sacrificing essential domestic services such as healthcare, education, and public infrastructure. For these countries, defense is often a secondary concern to internal development, and this mandate could create serious economic strain or force politically unpopular trade-offs. In many cases, these countries are already facing high levels of national debt. Asking them to raise defense spending to 5% of GDP would require either borrowing more money or cutting budgets from other sectors. This may lead to rising inflation, cuts in public salaries, or fewer social programs, which would negatively affect the population. As a result, citizens might protest or vote against pro-NATO governments, seeing this policy as something imposed by wealthier countries that do not understand their economic reality. Since the 5% target is based on GDP, a country in recession would appear to be spending more, even if its military budget stays the same. On the other

hand, fast-growing economies would need to keep increasing their defense spending just to maintain the 5% level. This makes the rule unpredictable and harder to manage for long-term planning.

There is also the issue of public opinion as in democratic countries, large increases in military spending can cause backlash from citizens. People may feel that the government is spending too much on defense while ignoring important issues like inflation, housing, or education. For society, their quality of life should be measured more closely and further implementations should be taken into consideration of social life as opportunities. This could lead to protests, political division, and even a loss of trust in NATO itself. If the plan is seen as unfair or forced by larger allies, it could damage unity within the alliance. In order to prevent any negative consequences for the bright future of NATO, a discussion upon the situation of GDP should be conducted by the delegates and scenarios need to be compared to find the best perfect way.

2-Battlegrounds That Needs to be Known

A) Russia-Ukraine Relations

NATO condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's brutal and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine - which is an independent, peaceful and democratic country, and a close NATO partner. NATO and Allies continue to provide Ukraine with unprecedented levels of support, helping to uphold its fundamental right to self-defence. Since Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has helped to reform Ukraine's armed forces and defence institutions, including with equipment and financial support. Allies have also provided training for tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops. Ukrainian forces have also developed their capabilities by participating in NATO exercises and operations. Since 2016, NATO's support has been organised through a Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), which includes a wide range of capacity-building programmes, focused on key areas like cyber defence, logistics and countering hybrid warfare. Allied Leaders agreed a strengthened CAP at the 2022 Madrid Summit, and further support to Ukraine under the CAP at the 2023 Vilnius Summit and 2024 Washington Summit. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, NATO and Allies have been providing unprecedented levels of support to Ukraine.

Since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilisation of eastern Ukraine in 2014, NATO has adopted a firm position in full support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The Allies strongly condemn and do not recognise Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, and denounce its temporary occupation.

NATO also condemns Russia's illegal attempt to annex four regions of Ukraine – Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia – in September 2022, which is the largest attempted annexation of European territory by force since the Second World War. The sham referenda in these regions were engineered in Moscow and imposed on Ukraine. They have no legitimacy, and NATO does not recognise them. These lands are Ukraine and will always be Ukraine. The overwhelming vote in the United Nations General Assembly condemning Russia's attempted annexations sent a clear and strong message that Russia is isolated and that the world stands with Ukraine, in defence of the rules-based international order.

However, NATO's actions are defensive, designed not to provoke conflict but to prevent conflict. The Alliance has a responsibility to ensure that this war does not escalate and spread beyond Ukraine, which would be even more devastating and dangerous. Enforcing a no-fly zone or deploying combat

troops to Ukraine would bring NATO forces into direct conflict with Russia. This would significantly escalate the war and lead to more human suffering and destruction for all countries involved.

NATO Allies and partners have imposed unprecedented costs on Russia, including severe sanctions to weaken its economy and deprive the country of critical technologies and markets, decreasing its ability to rebuild its military at a faster pace. Allies continue to refine these sanctions in order to increase the pressure on Moscow. Sanctions will make it harder for Russia to repair its armoured vehicles and aircraft, manufacture missiles, and finance its war. President Putin's decision to attack Ukraine is a terrible strategic mistake, for which Russia will pay a heavy price, both economically and politically, for years to come.

NATO condemns all those who are facilitating, and thereby prolonging, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. North Korea is directly supporting Russia with troops, weapons and ammunition. Iran is likewise supporting Russia with drones and missiles. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has become a decisive enabler of Russia's war through its so-called "no limits" partnership and its large-scale support for Russia's defence industrial base, including the transfer of dual-use materials, such as weapons components, equipment and raw materials that serve as inputs for Russia's defence sector. Belarus continues to enable Russia's war by making available its territory and infrastructure, including for Russia's announced stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus. NATO Allies urge all countries not to provide any kind of assistance to Russia's aggression.

At the 2025 NATO Summit, former U.S. President Donald Trump made headlines by announcing that several NATO countries, including the United States, would send new Patriot missile systems to Ukraine. This move is part of a broader effort to strengthen Ukraine's air defense against continued Russian missile and drone attacks. The Patriot system is one of the most advanced in the world and can intercept both ballistic and cruise missiles, offering Ukraine much-needed protection for its cities, infrastructure, and military bases. While the decision shows strong NATO support for Ukraine, it also raises tensions with Russia and increases the risk of escalation. Some NATO members worry that supplying more advanced weapons may provoke a stronger Russian response, while others argue that it is a necessary step to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty. The deployment of Patriots also reflects the alliance's growing focus on long-range defense and missile threats, especially in Eastern Europe.

B) Current Iran Crisis

NATO's position on the current Iran war has been characterized by restraint, caution, and an emphasis on de-escalation, rather than direct military involvement. As an alliance, NATO has not initiated any collective military operation against Iran, nor has it invoked Article 5, which would require a unified defense response. NATO officials have consistently clarified that recent military actions involving Iran (particularly strikes conducted by Israel or the United States) were unilateral decisions by individual states, not operations conducted under NATO command or authorization. The alliance's leadership has repeatedly stressed the importance of preventing further escalation in an already volatile Middle East. NATO's Secretary-General and senior officials have publicly underlined that widening the conflict could have severe consequences for regional and global security, including risks to energy supply routes, civilian populations, and neighboring states. As a result, NATO's public messaging has focused on diplomatic engagement, dialogue, and crisis management, rather than military confrontation with Iran.

At the 2025 NATO Summit, hundreds of people have protested in the Netherlands against NATO and increased military spending in advance of a summit, as Iran's conflict with Israel and the United States

intensifies by the day. People demonstrated against the military alliance, Israel's punishing war in Gaza and the Israel-Iran conflict, hours after the US targeted three nuclear sites in Iran in a sudden escalatory move in support of its biggest ally in the Middle East in July 14, 2025 NATO Summit. US strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities, and questions surrounding their legality, also pose a longer-term risk. At major forums such as the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, the Iran crisis was discussed within the broader context of global security challenges. While the summit reaffirmed NATO's commitment to deterrence and collective defense in the Middle East, including tensions involving Iran, was addressed as a strategic concern rather than an operational priority. This reflects NATO's view that instability beyond the Euro-Atlantic area can still indirectly affect allied security without necessitating direct intervention.

NATO members have had different responses to the US military action. Mark Rutte clearly wanted to avoid rocking the boat ahead of the summit, refusing to comment on the legality of the strikes and highlighting that NATO has long opposed Iran developing nuclear weapons. However, individual NATO countries have been more critical. Expectations for the Hague NATO summit are high and much effort has gone into ensuring a smooth process. But focusing the summit so narrowly on keeping the US – and the US president – happy, is risky. It keeps the alliance focused on internal rather than external risks and this can backfire if priorities change. It is also not a good long-term strategy for ensuring that the alliance is ready to deal with the most severe external threats. There is a tendency within NATO to keep public criticism of other members to a minimum and to present a united front, as criticizing one member's sovereign actions might undermine the alliance. However, as NATO's biggest security concern stems from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, there is a significant risk that US action against Iran feeds into a narrative of Western double standards when it comes to the application of international law. This could reduce the effectiveness of calling out Russia for its violations of international law.

Strategically, NATO views the Iran war as a potential destabilizing factor that could spill over into regions where alliance members have security interests or deployed forces. Although NATO has not taken operational action against Iran, internal discussions have focused on risk assessment, intelligence sharing, and preparedness, especially in relation to threats such as missile proliferation, proxy warfare, cyber operations, and disruptions to international trade routes.

Differences among NATO member states have also shaped the alliance's cautious approach. While some members maintain close bilateral relationships with Israel or the United States and support strong deterrence against Iran, others prioritize diplomacy and conflict prevention. These diverging perspectives make a unified military response unlikely and reinforce NATO's preference for acting as a forum for consultation rather than as a combatant in the conflict.

Overall, NATO's response to the current Iran war demonstrates the alliance's limited but significant role in Middle Eastern crises. While NATO is not directly engaged militarily, it remains actively involved at the political and strategic level, seeking to balance deterrence, alliance unity, and regional stability. The alliance's approach underscores its evolving role in a multipolar security environment—one where managing escalation and preserving international order are often prioritized over direct intervention.

2-Handling Divergent Member State Policies Towards Russia and China

One of the most difficult challenges NATO faces today is the lack of unity in how member states view and interact with countries like Russia and China. Although NATO is a military alliance built on shared values and collective defense, not all members have the same political interests, threat perceptions, or economic relationships. These differences often lead to slow decision-making and inconsistent policies, especially in times of crisis or tension.

For example, many NATO countries in Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Estonia, and Lithuania, see Russia as a direct and immediate threat due to their history, geography, and past conflicts. These countries usually support stronger military action, heavy sanctions, and long-term deterrence. Meanwhile, countries like Hungary and Turkey have taken a softer or more pragmatic approach toward Russia, maintaining open diplomatic channels or energy cooperation. This difference makes it hard for NATO to agree on collective actions, especially when quick responses are needed.

A similar division exists when it comes to China. The United States and the United Kingdom often lead the push for NATO to recognize China as a long-term strategic rival, especially due to concerns about cybersecurity, technology theft, and influence in the Indo-Pacific. However, many European countries—including Germany, France, and Italy—have strong trade relationships with China and prefer a more balanced approach. These countries fear that labeling China as an enemy could harm their economies. As a result, NATO's position on China often remains vague or non-committal, which limits its ability to act as a united strategic actor.

These policy differences are not just about foreign policy also affect military planning and readiness. If members cannot agree on whether a country is a threat, they will not agree on how to prepare, where to station forces, or what kind of intelligence sharing is needed. This creates gaps in NATO's defense posture and weakens the alliance's credibility in the eyes of both partners and adversaries.

Furthermore, these divisions can be exploited by rival powers. Countries like Russia and China often use diplomacy and trade to build stronger relations with more neutral NATO states, hoping to divide the alliance from within. This “divide and influence” strategy makes it even more important for NATO to find common ground, build trust among its members, and agree on minimum standards of response and cooperation.

3-International Law

International law is one of the main tools NATO relies on when addressing rising tensions in the Arctic. Instead of approaching the region purely from a military perspective, NATO consistently emphasizes the importance of rules, agreements, and legal frameworks that help prevent conflict. By grounding its actions in international law, NATO aims to show that its presence in the Arctic is defensive, responsible, and focused on maintaining stability rather than asserting power or territorial claims.

At the center of Arctic governance is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This agreement defines how countries can claim territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and extended continental shelves. NATO member states such as Canada, Norway, and Denmark use UNCLOS to resolve overlapping claims through scientific evidence and legal processes rather than force. NATO supports this approach because it reinforces the idea that Arctic disputes should be settled in courts and commissions, not on the battlefield.

Freedom of navigation is another issue where international law plays a critical role. As melting ice opens new shipping routes, especially the Northern Sea Route, legal disagreements have grown over who controls these waters. Russia considers parts of the route to be under its national jurisdiction, while NATO members argue that international maritime law limits how much control a single state can exercise. NATO's position is that open access to international waters must be preserved, as restricting them could set dangerous precedents beyond the Arctic.

International law also shapes how military forces operate in the region. NATO stresses that its exercises and patrols take place in international waters and airspace and follow legal norms regarding transparency and proportionality. Advance notifications, clear defensive objectives, and compliance with sovereignty rules are all ways NATO tries to reduce misunderstandings. This legal discipline is especially important in the Arctic, where harsh conditions and limited communication increase the risk of accidents.

Environmental protection is another legal dimension that NATO increasingly acknowledges. The Arctic is extremely vulnerable to pollution and environmental damage, and international environmental agreements place responsibilities on states operating there. NATO members often argue that respecting environmental law is part of security itself, since ecological disasters could destabilize the region just as much as military conflict. This perspective adds a more cooperative and long-term view to NATO's Arctic strategy.

NATO recognizes the importance of legal and diplomatic institutions such as the Arctic Council. Even though the council does not deal with military security, it remains a key platform for cooperation on scientific research, environmental protection, and indigenous rights. By supporting these institutions, NATO sends a clear message that international law and multilateral cooperation are essential for keeping the Arctic peaceful, even in a time of growing global competition.

Overall, NATO's involvement in Arctic tensions can be both supported and criticized when viewed through the lens of international law. On one hand, NATO's emphasis on legal frameworks helps reduce the risk of conflict by encouraging states to resolve disputes through law rather than force, while its defensive presence reassures member states and promotes stability in a rapidly changing region. On the other hand, critics argue that even legally justified military exercises and patrols may contribute to the gradual militarization of the Arctic, increasing mistrust and prompting rival powers to strengthen their own military presence. Furthermore, international law in the Arctic **is not always clearly defined**, allowing different interpretations over maritime routes and continental shelf claims, which limits its effectiveness in preventing disputes. While NATO presents itself as a stabilizing actor committed to transparency and cooperation, there are concerns that growing security priorities could overshadow environmental protection and diplomatic dialogue. As a result, NATO's role in the Arctic remains a delicate balance between upholding international law and avoiding actions that could unintentionally escalate tensions.

4-Collective Defence and Deterrence

Collective defense lies at the heart of NATO's identity and remains the alliance's most important responsibility. Enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, collective defense commits all member states to respond jointly if any ally is attacked. This principle not only provides physical security but also acts as a powerful political signal, discouraging potential aggressors by making clear that any attack would trigger a unified response. NATO's credibility therefore depends heavily on the strength, unity, and readiness of its collective defense mechanisms.

Deterrence is the primary means through which NATO seeks to prevent conflict before it begins. Traditionally focused on conventional military threats, deterrence today has expanded to include hybrid and non-traditional challenges, such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and interference with critical infrastructure. NATO must ensure that its deterrence posture remains adaptable, combining military strength with intelligence sharing, cyber resilience, and rapid decision-making. This broad approach reflects the changing nature of warfare and the need to defend allies across multiple domains.

Military readiness and capability development are essential to making deterrence credible. NATO places increasing emphasis on rapid deployment forces, joint exercises, and interoperability among member states' armed forces. These efforts demonstrate NATO's ability to respond quickly and effectively to threats, while also improving coordination among allies. However, readiness is not only a military issue; it also depends on political will, adequate defense spending, and fair burden sharing across the alliance.

At the same time, NATO recognizes that deterrence must be carefully balanced to avoid escalation. The alliance consistently emphasizes that its posture is defensive, not aggressive, and that it does not seek confrontation. Transparency, dialogue, and risk-reduction measures remain important tools alongside military preparedness. By combining strength with restraint, NATO aims to maintain stability, prevent miscalculation, and ensure that collective defense continues to serve as a foundation for peace rather than a trigger for conflict.

4-Article 4 and Article 5

Article 4

"The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened."

Article 4 commits NATO parties to discuss together whenever, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened. When the article is invoked, NATO members meet to consult in the North Atlantic Council. Article 4 has morphed into a tool used by member states when they feel threatened, even if not under direct attack. This may result in coordinated action from allies, though it does not have to.

Originally, it was included in the NATO treaty to cover Europe's declining colonial interests. Unlike Article 5, it does not specify a territorial scope for any threat, allowing members to call on NATO resources and support in their overseas territories. In practice, it has rarely been used; regardless, it sends a strong message to the greater world that NATO is concerned about the situation.

Since the Alliance's creation in 1949, Article 4 has been **invoked** seven times:

1. On 10 February 2003, Türkiye formally invoked Article 4, asking for consultations in the NAC on defensive assistance from NATO in the event of a threat to its population or territory resulting from armed conflict in neighbouring Iraq. NATO agreed a package of defensive measures and conducted Operation Display Deterrence from the end of February to early May 2003.

2. On 22 June 2012, Türkiye requested a NAC meeting under Article 4 after one of its fighter jets was shot down by Syrian air defence forces.
3. On 3 October 2012, Türkiye requested Article 4 NAC consultations when five Turkish civilians were killed by Syrian shells. Following these incidents, on 21 November 2012, Türkiye requested the deployment of Patriot missiles. NATO agreed to this defensive measure to help Türkiye defend its population and territory, and to help de-escalate the crisis along the border.
4. On 3 March 2014, Poland invoked Article 4 following increasing tensions in neighbouring Ukraine, as a result of Russia's aggressive actions.
5. On 26 July 2015, Türkiye requested that the NAC convene in view of the seriousness of the situation following terrorist attacks, and to inform Allies of the measures it was taking.
6. On 28 February 2020, Türkiye requested consultations following the death of Turkish soldiers in air strikes by the Syrian regime and its backer Russia in Idlib province.
7. On 24 February 2022, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia requested to hold consultations under Article 4 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Article 5

"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."

The principle of collective defense is the keystone of NATO meaning that an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies. It states that an "armed attack" against one member is an attack against all and sets in motion the possibility of collective self-defense. However, it commits each NATO member to "assist the party or parties so attacked" and to take "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force." It does not automatically result in military action.

With the invocation of Article 5, Allies can provide any form of assistance they deem necessary to respond to a situation. This is an individual obligation on each Ally and each Ally is responsible for determining what it deems necessary in the particular circumstances. This assistance is taken forward in concert with other Allies. It is not necessarily military and depends on the material resources of each country. It is therefore left to the judgment of each individual member country to determine how it will contribute. Each country will consult with the other members, bearing in mind that the ultimate aim is to "to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area".

The United States was the object of brutal terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. The Alliance's 1999 Strategic Concept had already identified terrorism as one of the risks affecting NATO's security. The Alliance's response to 9/11, however, saw NATO engage actively in the fight against terrorism, launch

its first operations outside the Euro-Atlantic area and begin a far-reaching transformation of its capabilities. Moreover, it led NATO to invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for the very first time in its history. On the evening of 12 September 2001, less than 24 hours after the attacks, the Allies **invoked** the principle of Article 5. Then NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson subsequently informed the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the Alliance's decision.

The North Atlantic Council – NATO's principal political decision-making body – agreed that if it determined that the attack was directed from abroad against the United States, it would be regarded as an action covered by Article 5. On 2 October, once the Council had been briefed on the results of investigations into the 9/11 attacks, it determined that they were regarded as an action covered by Article 5. By invoking Article 5, NATO members showed their solidarity toward the United States and condemned, in the strongest possible way, the terrorist attacks against the United States.

Although NATO Allies have only invoked Article 5 once, they have coordinated collective defence measures on several occasions.

On the request of Türkiye, on three occasions, NATO has put collective defence measures in place:

- in 1991 with the deployment of Patriot missiles during the Gulf War,
- in 2003 with the agreement on a package of defensive measures and conduct of Operation Display Deterrence during the crisis in Iraq, and
- in 2012 in response to the situation in Syria with the deployment of Patriot missiles.

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the rise of security challenges from the south, including brutal attacks by ISIL and other terrorist groups across several continents, NATO implemented the biggest increase in collective defence since the Cold War. For instance, it tripled the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF), a highly ready and technologically advanced multinational force; established a 5,000-strong Spearhead Force within the NRF; and deployed multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. NATO also increased its presence in the southeast of the Alliance, centred on a multinational brigade in Romania. The Alliance further stepped up air policing over the Baltic and Black Sea areas and continues to develop key military capabilities, such as Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, Allies recognised cyberspace as a new operational domain, to enable better protection of networks, missions and operations. At their meeting in November 2019, NATO Foreign Ministers agreed to recognise space as a new operational domain, to "allow NATO planners to make requests for Allies to provide capabilities and services, such as hours of satellite communications."

5-Main Requirements for NATO Membership

Article 10 and Open Door Policy

"The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession."

Article 10 poses two general limits to non-member states. First, only European states are eligible for new membership, and second, these states not only need the approval of all the existing member

states, but every member state can put some criteria forward that have to be attained. In practice, NATO formulates a common set of criteria. However, for instance, Greece blocked the Republic of Macedonia's accession to NATO for many years because it disagreed with the use of the name Macedonia. Turkey similarly opposes the participation of the Republic of Cyprus with NATO institutions as long as the Cyprus dispute is not resolved.

In 1995, the Alliance published the results of a Study on NATO Enlargement that considered the merits of admitting new members and how they should be brought in. It concluded that the end of the Cold War provided a unique opportunity to build improved security in the entire Euro-Atlantic area and that NATO enlargement would contribute to enhanced stability and security for all. It would do so, the Study further concluded, by encouraging and supporting democratic reforms, including the establishment of civilian and democratic control over military forces; fostering patterns and habits of cooperation, consultation and consensus-building characteristic of relations among members of the Alliance; and promoting good-neighbourly relations.

It would increase transparency in defence planning and military budgets, thereby reinforcing confidence among states, and would reinforce the overall tendency toward closer integration and cooperation in Europe. The Study also concluded that enlargement would strengthen the Alliance's ability to contribute to European and international security and strengthen and broaden the transatlantic partnership.

According to the Study, countries seeking NATO membership would have to be able to demonstrate that they have fulfilled certain requirements. These include:

- 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.

Once admitted, new members would have all the rights and assume all the obligations of membership. This would include acceptance at the time that they join of all the principles, policies and procedures previously adopted by Alliance members.

NATO membership requires long, multi-step process



NATO's approval of new members is possible only after technical and legal processes consisting many phases

Membership requires unanimous vote of 30 members



7-STEP ACCESSION PROCESS AFTER NATO'S OFFICIAL INVITATION

- 1 NATO experts and representatives of the invited country **hold talks**
- 2 The invited country sends an official letter of intent to the NATO secretary-general and declares that **it accepts the obligations and commitments of NATO membership**
- 3 If reforms are to be made, **a calendar of reforms is also laid out in this letter**
- 3 NATO prepares additional accession protocols to the Washington Treaty. These protocols **are signed by NATO countries**
- 4 The protocols must be ratified by NATO member states in line with **their national laws and procedures**
- 5 All member states, **after completing**
- 6 **their ratification processes**, issue a notification that **they have accepted the protocols** that envisage the accession of the new member state
- 6 When all these stages are completed, the NATO secretary-general invites **the new member to join the alliance**
- 7 The new member completes its own national legal process and submits its accession document to the US, which has kept **the Washington Treaty, and becomes a NATO member**

NATO: FROM 12 FOUNDERS TO 30-MEMBER ALLIANCE IN 73 YEARS

The US (1949)	Canada (1949)	Poland (1999)	Bulgaria (2004)
Belgium (1949)	Norway (1949)	Czech Republic (1999)	Estonia (2004)
The UK (1949)	Portugal (1949)	Hungary (1999)	Albania (2009)
Denmark (1949)	Luxembourg (1949)	Latvia (2004)	Croatia (2009)
France (1949)	Türkiye (1952)	Lithuania (2004)	Montenegro (2017)
The Netherlands (1949)	Greece (1952)	Romania (2004)	North Macedonia (2020)
Italy (1949)	Germany (1955)	Slovakia (2004)	
Iceland (1949)	Spain (1982)	Slovenia (2004)	

COUNTRIES VOICING WILL TO BECOME NATO MEMBERS

Ukraine Georgia Bosnia-Herzegovina Sweden Finland

Countries' Policies upon the Agenda Item

United States of America:

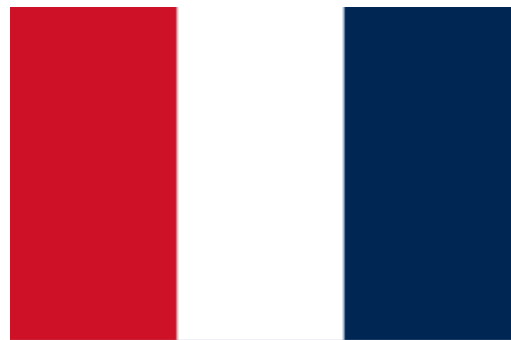
The United States approaches NATO Arctic tensions through a strong security and deterrence lens, viewing the Arctic as an emerging strategic arena due to increased Russian militarization and China's growing interest in the region. Washington prioritizes freedom of navigation, expanded military presence, and close cooperation



with Arctic NATO allies such as Canada, Norway, and the Nordic states. On Ukraine, the United States has been one of Kyiv's most significant supporters, emphasizing Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to self-defense under international law. U.S. policy combines military assistance, economic aid, and sanctions against Russia, while also leaving room for diplomatic solutions. Regarding Iran, the United States sees Tehran as a destabilizing actor, particularly due to its nuclear program and support for regional proxy groups. U.S. policy focuses on sanctions, deterrence, and diplomatic pressure to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to limit its regional influence, which also has implications for NATO security.

France:

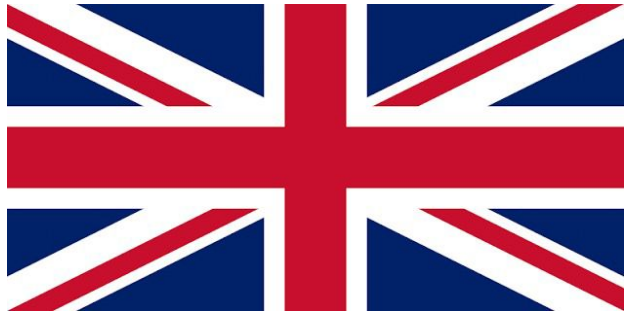
France supports NATO's involvement in Arctic security primarily through alliance solidarity rather than direct regional rivalry, as it is not an Arctic state itself. Paris emphasizes the importance of avoiding escalation, respecting international law, and maintaining NATO unity while contributing naval and strategic capabilities when necessary. In the Ukraine conflict, France strongly supports Ukraine's



sovereignty and has provided military aid, intelligence support, and diplomatic leadership within Europe. French policy also highlights the need for long-term European security architecture and greater European responsibility alongside NATO. On Iran, France follows a dual-track approach of pressure and diplomacy, supporting sanctions and non-proliferation efforts while keeping diplomatic channels open to prevent nuclear escalation and broader regional instability.

The United Kingdom:

The United Kingdom views Arctic tensions as a growing NATO priority, particularly in response to Russia's increased military activity in the High North. London stresses deterrence, collective defense, and close cooperation with Nordic allies, while also emphasizing alliance cohesion and shared responsibility. In the context of Ukraine, the



UK has taken a firm stance against Russian aggression, providing military assistance, training, and political support to Kyiv. British policy frames the war as a direct challenge to the international rules-based order. Concerning Iran, the UK aligns closely with U.S. and EU policies, supporting sanctions and diplomatic efforts to restrain Iran's nuclear ambitions and counter its regional activities, which are viewed as threats to wider Euro-Atlantic security.

Türkiye: Türkiye supports NATO's collective defense framework but approaches Arctic tensions with a relatively cautious and balanced stance, focusing more on alliance unity, dialogue, and scientific or strategic cooperation rather than direct militarization. On Ukraine, Türkiye recognizes Ukraine's territorial integrity and has opposed Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories, while simultaneously maintaining pragmatic



relations with Moscow. This balanced approach reflects Ankara's broader regional strategy and its role as a mediator, particularly in diplomatic initiatives such as grain corridor agreements. Regarding Iran, Türkiye pursues a pragmatic and regionally focused policy, cooperating with Iran on certain economic and security matters while remaining cautious about Tehran's regional ambitions. Ankara generally favors diplomacy and regional dialogue over confrontation, aiming to reduce instability that could affect its own security.

Germany: Germany approaches NATO Arctic tensions with a strong emphasis on alliance unity, restraint, and respect for international law. While not an Arctic state, Berlin recognizes the strategic importance of the High North due to increased Russian military activity and supports NATO's deterrence measures through deployments, exercises, and logistical support. On Ukraine, Germany has become one of Ukraine's key

European supporters, providing military equipment, financial aid, and political backing, while also stressing the importance of coordination within NATO and the European Union. German policy frames the war as a threat to European security and the rules-based international order. Regarding Iran, Germany supports diplomatic efforts to limit Iran's nuclear program and aligns with EU sanctions, favoring negotiation and multilateral diplomacy over escalation while remaining firm on non-proliferation.



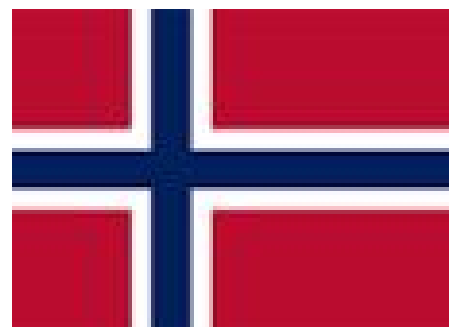
Canada: Canada plays a central role in NATO's Arctic strategy as one of the alliance's key Arctic members, prioritizing sovereignty, territorial defense, and security in the High North. Ottawa closely monitors Russian military activity in the Arctic and supports increased NATO cooperation, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises in the

region. In the context of Ukraine, Canada strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, providing military training, financial assistance, and humanitarian aid. Canada views the conflict as a direct challenge to international law and NATO security. On Iran, Canadian policy aligns with broader NATO positions, supporting sanctions and diplomatic pressure to address Iran's nuclear ambitions and regional behavior, while emphasizing human rights and international accountability.



Norway: Norway plays a critical role in NATO's Arctic strategy as a frontline Arctic state sharing a border with Russia. Oslo prioritizes deterrence, surveillance, and allied presence in the High North while carefully balancing these measures with efforts to avoid unnecessary escalation. Norway strongly supports NATO's collective defense and hosts joint exercises and forward deployments to strengthen alliance

readiness in the Arctic. On Ukraine, Norway firmly backs Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, providing military assistance, humanitarian aid, and financial support, while viewing Russian aggression as a serious threat to European security. Regarding Iran, Norway supports NATO and EU non-proliferation efforts and diplomatic engagement, favoring dialogue and international cooperation to prevent nuclear escalation and reduce regional instability.



Questions to be Answered

- 1-How can NATO maintain alliance unity on Arctic policy?
- 2-How effective is the current percentage of GDP defense spending target in strengthening NATO's collective security?
- 3-How does NATO manage security responsibilities in multiple regions at the same time?
- 4-How can NATO enlargement strengthen regional stability within working upon its own actions?
- 5-How can NATO create a suitable space for solution- based responses to emerging security threats?
- 6-What implementations can be taken in order to develop the current status in order enforcements in NATO?
- 7-How should NATO prioritize defense spending between conventional forces, cyber defense, and emerging technologies?
- 8-What response is the most appropriate if arctic shipping routes become contested?
- 9-What kind of unified strategy should NATO obtain and how to maintain peacekeeping operations?
- 10-What kind of measurements should be taken upon new Arctic governance frameworks?
- 11-What are NATO's priorities while maintaining security and having operations, is the aim to ensure protection or stabilize peace with operations?

Further Readings

- https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_135843.htm
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3ve3dy676wo>
- <https://youtu.be/dGtnTx6S7e4?si=QgmkFBvSgGeKUfbc>
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- <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>
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- <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2025-irans-threat-regional-and-euro-atlantic-security-gsm-report>

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- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08185.10>
- <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-nato-the-most-dangerous-organisation/>