

ISSN: 2450-6869

eISSN: 2719-6763

No. 20, 2024

# DEFENCE SCIENCE REVIEW

<http://www.journalssystem.com/pno/>

[DOI: 10.37055/pno/202035](https://doi.org/10.37055/pno/202035)

## Selected NATO actions in the third decade of the 21st century

### Original article

Izabela Szkurlat<sup>1,A-F</sup>

ORCID  0000-0001-6320-8421

A – Research concept and design, B – Collection and/or assembly of data, C – Data analysis and interpretation, D – Writing the article, E – Critical revision of the article, F – Final approval of article

<sup>1</sup> Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Poland

**Received:** 2024-10-28

**Revised:** 2025-01-13

**Accepted:** 2025-02-18

**Final review:** 2024-11-21

**Peer review:** 2024-10-11

Double blind

### Keywords:

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, international safety, NATO strategic concepts

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License

### Abstract

**Objectives:** The objective of the article is to present actions involving safety in the third decade of the 21st century within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The present international situation, both non-military threats as military conflicts, among others, in Ukraine and in the Middle East, have triggered the necessity to adjust operations of the Treaty to the new reality. All these threats led to the necessity to realize new tasks which had previously not occurred as part of the Treaty and to the increasing role and responsibility of NATO towards safety, above all, in Europe. Current threats to international safety such as, among others, conflict in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East or the already mentioned terrorism have made it compulsory for NATO to adjust to reacting to current challenges.

**Methods:** In order to achieve the intended goal of the article, an analysis of documents, available scientific publications and official Treaty websites has been performed.

**Results:** The Treaty's functioning has changed over the space of recent years on account of the dynamic international environment, emerging threats and challenges which enforce a different scope of actions. As a result, adoption of the NATO New Strategic Concept, the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept and the use of modern technologies for counteracting threats.

**Conclusions:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization ought to adjust its methods and actions to the changing reality. Lack of proper actions will result in weakening of safety of the Treaty's member states and restricting possibilities of defence against non-military and military threats.

**Corresponding author:** PhD in the field of political science, specializing in security policy; assistant professor at the Department of National Security, Institute of Security and Sociology at the Pomeranian University in Słupsk. Author and co-author of articles related to, among others, the subject of terrorism and border protection. Areas of interest: international security, local security, conflicts, migration phenomenon and international terrorism. Poland; email: [izabela.szkurlat@upsl.edu.pl](mailto:izabela.szkurlat@upsl.edu.pl).

## **Introduction**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was launched pursuant to entry into force of the Treaty of 4 April 1949 signed in Washington. Its key assumptions encompass the provisions of Article 5 which enforces provisions of aid to the state-party of the Treaty in case of an armed aggression. Moreover, duties of states-parties to the Treaty specified in Article 3 which obliges them to possess and develop capacity to fend off an armed aggression individually and collectively. Article 10 states that the organization is open for the European countries and they may be invited pursuant to the unanimity of the Treaty members for it to be accepted (Madej, 2012, pp. 175-176). „To maintain a post-Cold War relevance, NATO sought new missions by embracing peacekeeping operations outside of NATO territory when its interests were at stake. Such operations protected NATO’s concerns by limiting the spillover of conflicts, preserving resource supply lines, maintaining trade flows, curbing refugee inflows, and curtailing the spread of transnational terrorism”(George, Sandler, 2022, p. 784).

NATO activities throughout the whole period of functioning were marked by various challenges faced by the Treaty. Above all, one must indicate the period of the cold war, placement of the Eurostrategic missiles in the 80’s of the 20th century, dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty, collapse of the Soviet Union, conflict in the Balkans and finally, the terrorist attack from 2001 in the United States of America (Czaja, 2005, pp. 51-53). All these threats led to the necessity to realize new tasks which had previously not occurred as part of the Treaty and to the increasing role and responsibility of NATO towards safety, above all, in Europe. Current threats to international safety such as, among others, conflict in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East or the already mentioned terrorism have made it compulsory for NATO to adjust to reacting to current challenges.

The article takes as its main research problem the answer to the following question: What actions does the North Atlantic Alliance perform to improve the security of the Alliance countries? Specific problems were also posed: 1) How has NATO's Strategic Concept changed? 2) What initiatives is NATO undertaking to improve the security of Alliance countries and adapt to new challenges and threats? 3) How is the Alliance using new technological capabilities to improve security? The following hypothesis was put forward: it is necessary for the Alliance to take action to improve the security of its member states in the sphere of both military and non-military threats.

### **1. NATO Strategic Concepts**

We may assume that “NATO strategic concepts – from the perspective of mutual relations of force and politics organizing joint protective actions – clearly show the formation of two development cycles. The first one, lasting from the end of the cold war, indicated a permanent underdevelopment of the political component and the dominance of the factor of force – as the key element of protective organization of the member states. On the other hand, the second, post-cold-war stage took the shape of a sort of crisis or pursuit of a consensus with regards to goals, methods and places of use (actually possessed) force” (Kupiecki, 2012, p. 56). Over the years, the Treaty functioned on the basis of the subsequently adopted strategies. Whilst the “new strategy from 2010 provided a stronger impulse necessary for the political shifts of the

Treaty left behind its military transformation (proceeding under the pressure of operational needs)” (Kupiecki, 2012, p. 75). This document was in force for 12 years. The Strategic Concept from 20 November 2010 adopted in Lisbon showed NATO which was to be actively engaged in international actions and conduct modern defence. Designating new actions in the field of international safety, overcoming new challenges and threats as well as adjusting the organization to the current requirements were the key assumptions of the document. Within the above-specified concept a commitment of the Treaty to “prevent crises, take control of conflicts and stabilize post-conflict situations including closer cooperation with our international partners, in particular, the United Nations Organization and the European Union” has been included (BBN.gov 2023). The document contains three main tasks to be realized by NATO, namely: collective defence, crisis management, cooperative safety. At the time, the Euroatlantic safety environment was defined as stable and it was suggested that the threats of conventional attack were minor. However, possibilities of military potentials of world states were not to be disregarded. The following threats were also specified: proliferation of weapons of mass description, terrorism, extremism, illegal transnational actions, smuggling of weapons, human-trafficking, drugs trafficking, cyber-power attacks, crises and conflicts outside the borders of NATO (BBN.gov 2023). The concept also discusses certain military issues. Bolesław Balcerowicz notes that: “Military issues almost entirely concern developing the first of the three main tasks – defence and deterrence”. The required defence and deterrence are specified in great detail within thirteen subparagraphs. Unlike in the previous concept, here the focus is placed on different issues with certain new elements being raised. The general formulation of capacity after its particularisation signifies – distinctively – ability to conduct larger combined operations simultaneously and several minor common defence operations as well as to handle crisis management, including in remote strategic areas; it assumes capacity of the Response Forces to perform swift deployment both for the purpose of realizing the tasks under Art. 5 and expeditionary operations. Such presented capacity issue – both for defence and for expeditionary actions – within the chapters discussing deterrence and defence – clearly indicates modern treatment of defence which is more than solely defensive” (Balcerowicz, 2011, pp. 44-45).

Changes in the international situation caused, among others, by the conflict in Ukraine as well as new challenges and threats in the 21st century impacted the need to elaborate a new document. Strategic Concept 2022 was adopted during the Summit in Madrid on 29-30 June 2022. This document defined new challenges related to the safety zone; moreover, certain political and military tasks were outlined which are targeted at meeting the basic challenges (NATO.int 2023). Already the introduction stresses the key objective for NATO, i.e. collective defence which is based on three tasks: deterrence and defence, prevention of crises and their management, cooperation. Furthermore, NATO's tasks is to defend freedoms and safety of the Treaty members and ensure defence against threats which appear from various directions. Through defining the environment of safety it is considered that there is not peace in place in the Euroatlantic territory (Act.nato 2023). The most significant and direct threat is posed by the Russian Federation as “a direct threat to the security of the Allies and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, which seeks to establish spheres of influence and establish direct control

through coercion, subversive activities, aggression and annexation” (Chojnowski, Banasik, 2023, p.196).

At the same time it is underlined that NATO is not interested in confronting the Russian Federation, nor does it pose a threat to it. The document outlined other threats as well which impact the overall safety, namely: terrorism, conflicts and instability, among others, in Africa and in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Sahel, violence towards civil populations, degradation of critical infrastructure, theft of intellectual property, breakthrough technologies, lack of control over armaments and climate changes, illegal immigration, threats on the side of Iran and North Korea (growth of nuclear and missile programmes). Meanwhile, other challenges include, among others, politics and declared ambitions of China and competition in new and cutting-edge technologies (Act.nato 2023). Moreover, EU is referred to as a unique and essential partner. Development of partnerships between Bosnia and Hercegovina, Georgia and Ukraine are also stressed. What is more, the strategic importance for NATO of Western Balkans and the region of the Black Sea, Middle East, Northern Africa and the areas of Sahel was also reinforced (Act.nato 2023).

An important conclusion after analysing the concept formulated by Professor Luis Simon who stated that “preparation of the Treaty for conditions in which competition of the leading superpowers will be more and more visible, requires expanding beyond the current crisis in Eastern Europe and considering a broader development of geostrategic situation. This is particularly important in light of the decreasing central position of the Euroatlantic region in the global strategic competition and the fact that development of non-European situation will gradually impact the dynamics of safety in Europe and around it. The Treaty will have to work out a more global approach to the issue of safety and, in particular, a better understanding of the progressing geostrategic situation in the region of India and the Pacific and its likely implications for Euroatlantic safety”. (Simon, 2022).

## **2. Selected initiatives undertaken by NATO towards safety**

NATO Strategic Concepts set the directions of actions of organizations. It should be underlined that actions of the organization also involve a number of other initiatives undertaken for the sake of safety. One of those was establishing the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). It was agreed during the NATO summit in Wales in 2014 and its adoption occurred in 2016 during the summit in Warsaw. The plan was a response to the shifting safety environment. The main objective of the plan was to strengthen the collective defence capacity, which was planned to consist, among others, in planned land, maritime and air actions, numerous actions involving collective defence and crisis management actions. As part of the project realization of the following actions was envisaged: threefold increase in the size of NATO Response Forces (NRF), appointment of Very High Readiness Joint Task Forces (VJTF) – high readiness and fast deployment, support for Standing NATO Maritime Forces, appointment of the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) – eight units, creating the headquarters of the Multinational Corps Northeast – Szczecin and Multinational Division Southeast – Bucharest. In addition, the headquarters of the joint group involved in logistics support was launched (NATO.int.cps 2022). It should be stressed out that “elements of the plan encompass resources referring both to the constant need for ensuring safety to allies as well as the strategic adaptation of forces and

military resources of the Treaty to modern challenges in the safety area” (Banasik, 2015, p. 35).

Importantly, the Plan involved specific actions towards improving safety. Precautionary measures were undertaken targeted at strengthening defence. Display of military presence of NATO in Eastern Europe was a reaction to aggressive behaviours of Russia (annexation of Crimea). In 2017, four multinational battle groups in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Latvia. After Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022, subsequent four groups were launched in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The size of battle groups is variable. They are of the size of a battalion but when it is necessary they may increase their numbers to the size of a brigade. Moreover, the fast response plan of strengthening NATO had already been realized since 2016. In 2022, a new model of NATO forces was additionally formed during the summit in Madrid. It is to be implemented by the end of 2023 (NATO.int.cps 2024). According to this model, among others, NATO forces “are to amount to more than 800 thousand soldiers within three levels of readiness – up to 10 days (above 100 thousand) up to 30 days (approx. 200 thousand) and up to 180 days (at least 500 thousand). They are to be ready for conduct of land and sea operations, air and space operations as well as cyber-space operations” (Pszczel, Szymański, 2024).

Strengthening the forces of the Treaty in the East is supposed to be held through increasing the already held equipment resources and weapons, capacity for an integrated defence system, both air and anti-missile, verification of defence plans at the regional level and strengthening of command and control. NATO evolution commenced in 2014 and was targeted at leading the organization to the skills of fast reacting to crises within the borders of NATO and externally. In 2018, within the region of the Black Sea, NATO increased its presence as well. It was a reply to the actions undertaken by Russia. Whilst in February of 2022, the territory of NATO in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe was equipped in additional battleships, airplanes and soldiers. Moreover, during the summit in Vilnius in 2023 new regional defence plants were established. These actions are designated to ensure cohesion of planning in case of realizing collective defence of NATO (NATO.int.cps 2024). The Vilnius Summit adopted “regional defence plans for three operational areas: North (the European part of the Arctic and the Atlantic), Centre (the region of Western Europe north of the Alps and Central Europe) and South (the Black Sea and Mediterranean basin)” (Lorenz, 2023, p. 1).

### **3. The NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept and the technological growth**

The Treaty strives to maintain military and technological advantage. Thus, in June 2021, during the summit in Brussels, a consent was expressed for the implementation of the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC). This is a functional project until 2040 the task of which will be to increase readiness to deter and defend against enemies or use and increase possibilities of the treaty in order to anticipate threats and analyse safe environment on a higher level than potential opponents, gain skills to act in different domains with different entities and authorities and strive for perfection as well as use the military diversity of NATO members to take over initiatives and ensure victory over potential enemies under different circumstances (Act.nato.int 2023). „(...) NWCC provides a new required vision for warfare development. Alliance’s ambition to succeed in transitioning more proactively to the future operating

environment and the activities of potential adversaries drive this vision. It is expected that the NWCC and its future renewals will aim to set a realistic and agile path towards this vision and allow for continual improvement and advancement of crucial warfare development efforts. Over time, the Alliance's vision will support building military advantage, proactively shaping the operational environment to Allied strengths, and creating an enabling environment for political authorities to make the right decisions by developing viable military options." (Bicer, 2024, p. 178).

Additionally, The NWCC concept is targeted at creating integrated military structures which will allow to ensure advantage over the opponent in a crisis situation. Such actions are supposed to impact the training skills of commanders who must be able to act in diverse environments. Leading missions is to take place, among others, through constant updates of communication and information systems. Integration of the remaining data, including intelligence data, which is to impact an advanced data analysis and - as a consequence - lead to undertaking relevant decisions as part of military-strategic actions. The development is also linked to obtaining the right personnel. It is recommended that countries belonging to NATO should apply the right system for recruiting, selecting and training personnel as well as personnel maintenance system. It is assumed that the treaty is in need of both leaders and employees who will be able to cope with the fast-changing reality and new technologies. The possibility of training in the below units is also indicated: NATO Défense College i NATO School Oberammergau (Act.nato.int 2023).

NWCC concept assumes the conduct of live trainings and elaboration of scenarios. Such actions are to impact the skills of undertaking decisions, modelling situations and identifying areas which should be improved or completely changed. Experiments and live trainings are also designated to impact testing and implementing new technologies. Integration of the whole environment related to NATO is of significance as well, including various partnerships, cooperation with international organizations, the UN, the EU, NGOs and civil entities (Act.nato.int 2023).

At present, the NATO Treaty strives for technological development. Defence and safety involve the necessity to obtain new technological possibilities. One of the significant programmes enabling realization of this task is the DIANA accelerator programme which was launched in June of 2023. It facilitates submission of application forms. All member states attend the programme and each state has its representatives on the Board of Directors. Whereas the managing director of the project is Professor Deeph Chana (Diana.nato 2024)

The goal of the programme is "connecting the most talented scientists, innovators and start-ups working on new, cutting-edge <<deep tech>> solutions with units from the defence sector"(prf.pl 2024). One must indicate that the programme uses more than 10 accelerator centres, including: Start-ups incubator in Tehnopol, Laboratory Deep Tech in Copenhagen, PNW MAC in Seatle, MC Masschallenge in Boston and Takeoff in Turin (Diana.nato 2024). Moreover, it has 90 testing centres at its disposal, among others, in Germany, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Slovakia and Poland (Diana.nato.int 2024). In the current DIANA programme, solutions for three fields are pursued: resilience of the power system, disclosure of information in a safe manner, monitoring and detection (prf.pl 2024).It is

assumed that DIANA can have a significant impact on the development of innovation systems and the acceptance of their sensing and funding. Additionally, it can also influence the symbiosis between technological applications and their use by the armed forces (Albrycht, 2023, p. 88).

## Conclusions

The changing safety environment forced the Treaty to pursue the necessity to adjust to the new threats. Currently, NATO is facing subsequent challenges related to maintaining safety. The July NATO summit in Washington (9-11 July 2024) revealed the directions of actions of the organization. Above all, the Treaty stands before the necessity to expand its allied actions focused on deterring and defending. The key tasks involve also cooperation with the countries from the Indopacific area (Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand). It is also crucial to adjust the commanding structures and to properly select forces for the newly-created regional defence plans (Pszczel, Szymański, 2024). Therefore, it is so crucial to assign tasks through taking over the relevant Strategic Concept, training possibilities and technological actions. Currently, NATO has become the key organization when it comes to protection of European countries. It is envisaged that it will continue to be the guarantor of safety.

## References

- Albrycht I. (2023). Miejsce Polski w ekosystemie innowacji technologicznych NATO, *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe* 43, 88.
- Balcerowicz B., *Koncepcja Strategiczna NATO 2010. Wymiar wojskowy*, [https://wnpism.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/03\\_2011.pdf](https://wnpism.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/03_2011.pdf).
- Banasik M. (2015). *Zdolności NATO do działań ekspedycyjnych w przyszłym środowisku bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Difin.
- Bicer R. S. S. (2024). NATO's Warfighting Capstone Concept, How Able to Anticipate the Changing Character of War?, *Wschodnioznawstwo* 18, 178.
- Chojnowski L., Banasik M. (2023). *Koncepcja Strategiczna NATO 2022. Koncepcja przełomu czy kontynuacji?*. *Colloquium* 3(51), 196.
- Czaja J. (2005). *Przyszłość NATO. Polski punkt widzenia*. In J. Czaja (Ed.) *Euroatlantycka przestrzeń bezpieczeństwa*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademii Obrony Narodowej.
- George J. , Sandler T. (2022). NATO defense demand, free riding, and the Russo Ukrainian war in 2022, *Journal of Industrial and Business Economics* 49(4), 784.
- Kupiecki R. (2012). *Siła i solidarność. Strategia NATO 1949-1989*. Warsaw: The Polish Institute of International Affairs.
- Lorenz W. (2023). Znaczenie regionalnych planów obronnych NATO, *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, 135 (2756), 1.
- Madej M. (2012). Sojusze polityczno-wojskowe – NATO. In R. Kuźniar, B. Balcerowicz et al (Ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Pszczel R., Szymański P., Szczyt w Waszyngtonie – jubileusz Sojuszu w cieniu wojny, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2024-07-12/szczyt-w-waszyngtonie-jubileusz-sojuszu-w-cieniu-wojny15.07.2024>.

Simon L., Madrycka koncepcja strategiczna a przyszłość NATO, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/pl/articles/2022/06/02/madrycka-koncepcja-strategiczna-a-przyszlosc-nato/index.html13.12.2023>.

### **Electronic sources**

NATO 2022 Strategic concept, <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/290622-strategic-concept.pdf13.12.2023>

Readiness Action Plan, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_119353.htm14.12.2023](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm14.12.2023)

NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm08.07.2024](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm08.07.2024)

NATO WARFIGHTING CAPSTONE CONCEPT 2021, <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NWCC-Glossy-18-MAY.pdf14.12.2023>

Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic DIANA, <https://www.diana.nato.int/about-diana.html10.01.2024>

DIANA Test centres, [https://www.diana.nato.int/resources/site1/general/maps/diana-test-centres-en\\_v5.pdf11.01.2024](https://www.diana.nato.int/resources/site1/general/maps/diana-test-centres-en_v5.pdf11.01.2024)

Polski Fundusz Rozwoju, <https://pfrsa.pl/technologiedlaobronnosci.html#ogolne-informacje-o-diana-i-akceleratorach11.01.2024>