



Bolstering Collective Resilience in Europe

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Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine puts the necessity for European resilience into sharper focus and argues for a new framing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) approach to resilience. While resilience is primarily a national responsibility that needs political commitment, investment, supporting policies and institutions, and prioritization, there is a strong case for resilience to become a collective imperative as well as a domestic one. Resilience should be reconceptualized as the individual and collective capacity to withstand, fight through, and quickly recover from disruption caused by military and non-military threats to Euro-Atlantic security from authoritarian actors and strategic competitors as well as global challenges. It merits a top priority in NATO and national planning, significant investment in building Europe's credible resilience posture, and new approaches to amplifying allies' combined capacity to tackle shared challenges and threats as well as increasing vigilance amid heightened tensions. Creating a NATO Resilience Planning Process akin to the NATO Defence Planning Process will be instrumental in harmonizing and integrating national resilience plans, strategies, and capabilities to marshal NATO's strong collective response. In addition, a high-level resilience task force should be created to identify multidimensional resilience lessons from Ukraine across the spectrum of conventional, hybrid, and societal threats, as well as to make recommendations for future policies and investments that will bolster European resilience.

EUROPEAN RESILIENCE IN LIGHT OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

Russia's war in Ukraine has been the trigger for a reshaping of European self-defense. Confronted with the immediate danger Russia represents, European nations have begun rethinking national security objectives and commitments, reinforcing military strength, and providing political and financial support as well as an unprecedented supply of advanced weapons to Ukraine. Finland and Sweden have **applied for NATO membership**, after decades (in the case of Finland) or even centuries (for Sweden) of neutrality. Denmark has **lifted its 30-year opt-out** from the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. Germany is planning to **beef up its defense spending and modernize its forces** after

years of underspending and neglect. Poland is making unparalleled investments in defensive capabilities, **doubling its army** from 150,000 to 300,000 soldiers and championing military aid in Ukraine. And Ukraine itself has been granted official EU candidate nation status and **applied for accelerated NATO accession**. In effect, a common threat has served to unite NATO and the European Union in a way that previous debates about developing a common security policy had not. Epitomized by German chancellor Olaf Scholz's characterization of this development as "Zeitenwende"—a historic turning point—in his address to the **Bundestag's emergency session on February 27**, this resurgence of traditional security threats brings defense collaboration to the top of the political agenda in Europe.

The reshaping of European self-defense thus creates an opportunity for innovation that goes beyond measuring nations' investments into their capabilities and forces. While European nations have individual policies about their defense forces and resources, there are many benefits that accrue from identifying, considering, and building on interdependencies and interconnectedness.¹ Deepening collaboration between like-minded nations can provide credible military options and faster decisionmaking to respond to a wide range of contingencies, both in peacetime and at times of crisis or conflict.

Many of these interdependencies align with questions about resilience. The concept of resilience—incorporating military capacity, civil preparedness, and emergency planning—was central to the Cold War narrative as a first line of defense against the Soviet Union. Moored into [Article 3](#) of the North Atlantic Treaty, it committed allies to “separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, . . . maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.”

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, concerns about resilience took a back seat to other issues. They have a new salience today. Russia's aggression against Ukraine joins the Covid-19 pandemic, intensified geostrategic competition with China, technological advancement, and climate change to underscore the need to better prepare for disruption, pervasive instability, strategic shocks, emerging vulnerabilities, and persistent threats. By their very nature, those overwhelming systemic challenges are far greater than any nation can address on its own and involve interests vital to the security and well-being of all European and North American allies. Moreover, as Ganesh Sitaraman observed in his 2020 *Foreign Affairs* [essay](#), “what unites those seemingly disparate threats is that each is not so much a battle to be won as a challenge to be weathered.” Enduring them requires constant adaptation and agility, as well as the ability to understand shortfalls and vulnerabilities and the willingness and means to address them head-on. And while not free of cost, it is well worth the effort.

The current crisis makes a clear case for building and bolstering resilience in peacetime and coordinating resources, capabilities, supply chains, and logistics across the alliance. Allocating adequate resources to enhancing the ability to absorb strategic shocks can make a crucial difference in winning a war before it begins. Thus, resilience—while primarily a national responsibility that requires political commitment, investment, supporting organization, and prioritization—must become a collective imperative, especially since many resilience challenges cross national borders. [The 2022 U.S. National Defense Strategy](#) (NDS) advances a focus on resilience and collaboration with allies and partners to deter aggression and promote peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, the NDS broadens the concept of NATO collective security commitment to include—on top of conventional deterrence and defense—working alongside allies to build resilience.

This signals a major shift toward embracing resilience as essential to amplifying the combined capacity of allied nations to tackle shared challenges and threats. Consequently, resilience cannot be solely defined as a function of [society's ability to resist and recover from shocks](#) as it is set forth by NATO in current documents. Rather, reflecting the North Atlantic Treaty obligations and the prevailing threat landscape, resilience should be conceptualized as the alliance members' individual and collective capacity to withstand, fight through, and quickly recover from disruption caused by military and non-military threats to Euro-Atlantic security from authoritarian actors and strategic competitors as well as global challenges.

EXISTING NATO RESILIENCE EFFORTS

The war in Ukraine has brought into sharper focus the fact that military resilience overlaps with broader societal resilience requirements. It has highlighted the pressing need to address these wider interdependencies and identify vulnerabilities to disruption that can have cascading effects across societies and economies. In his October 2020 speech, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg observed that “[having a strong military is](#)

¹ Many European nations have a tradition of working together to address common security threats through NATO and the European Union. There have also been smaller groups of nations focused on specific challenges or based on geographic proximity, including the Visegrad Group, Baltic Defense Co-operation, NORDEFCO, and the Central European Defense Cooperation. The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) brings together Northern European nations (the United Kingdom, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) to confront regional security challenges in the High North, North Atlantic, and Baltic Sea.

fundamental to our security, but our military cannot be strong if our societies are weak.” Ukraine’s heroic fight underscores that a robust national resistance strategy based on a whole-of-society ability to signal strength to the adversary while augmenting the effects of posture can make a crucial difference in responding to acute crises and threats.

There is existing groundwork for pursuing new thinking about resilience. Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its increasingly aggressive tactics shattered the 1989 vision offered by President George H.W. Bush of a Europe **“whole, free, and at peace”** facing little threat of a conventional attack. After two decades of shifting its role from collective deterrence and territorial defense against the Soviet Union to undertaking crisis management operations outside its traditional operational theater, NATO was confronted with Russia’s heightened threat to Euro-Atlantic security and stability. And it was woefully underprepared to handle a crisis unfolding on its doorstep.

In response, the alliance embarked on reinforcing its posture. A growing number of allies also began to recognize resilience as essential to developing effective deterrence and reassurance measures, which can be part of a comprehensive security strategy as well as instrumental to tackling mounting societal vulnerabilities. At the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, the alliance’s Heads of State and Government noted that **“civil preparedness is a central pillar of Allies’ resilience and a critical enabler for Alliance collective defense.”** To improve civil preparedness, allies agreed on seven NATO baseline requirements (see text box) for national resilience that serve also as a framework to support the effective enablement of NATO forces to ensure the collective defense and security of all allies. These are centered around continuity of government, essential services to the population, and civil support to the military that must be maintained in times of crisis. In addition, at the 2021 Brussels summit, allies endorsed the **Strengthened Resilience Commitment** and Proposal 3 for improved resilience under the **NATO 2030 Agenda**. This acted as an acknowledgment that safeguarding the alliance’s societies, populations, and shared values requires a new and broader understanding of the importance of national and collective resilience as well as civil preparedness. To address specific challenges, allies agreed to intensify efforts to secure and diversify supply chains, ensure the resilience of critical infrastructure and key industries, and direct attention to the impact of natural hazards compounded by climate change.

SEVEN NATO BASELINE REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIONAL RESILIENCE

1. Assured continuity of government and critical government services: for instance the ability to make decisions, communicate them and enforce them in a crisis;
2. Resilient energy supplies: back-up plans and power grids, internally and across borders;
3. Ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people, and to de-conflict these movements from NATO’s military deployments;
4. Resilient food and water resources: ensuring these supplies are safe from disruption or sabotage;
5. Ability to deal with mass casualties and disruptive health crises: ensuring that civilian health systems can cope and that sufficient medical supplies are stocked and secure;
6. Resilient civil communications systems: ensuring that telecommunications and cyber networks function even under crisis conditions, with sufficient back-up capacity;
7. Resilient transport systems: ensuring that NATO forces can move across Alliance territory rapidly and that civilian services can rely on transportation networks, even in a crisis.

Source: Language from “Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3,” NATO, September 20, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

Resilience was also prominently featured in the discussions leading to the adoption of the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, which serves as blueprint that will profoundly shape how NATO and its allies think about addressing security challenges for a decade to come. Some experts argued that **building comprehensive resilience to disruptive threats to allied societies** should be added as a core task for the alliance—alongside collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. The new Strategic Concept agreed upon by the NATO Heads of State and Government at the Madrid summit in June 2022 acknowledges resilience as a key issue for the alliance. Although it falls short of explicitly designating it as a fourth core task, it highlights the need to **“pursue a more robust, integrated, and coherent approach to building**

national and alliance-wide resilience.” The Strategic Concept also notes that resilience is critical to tackling both military and non-military threats.

ESTABLISHING A NATO RESILIENCE PLANNING PROCESS

The breadth of these efforts at the highest political levels of the alliance is an indicator of the nations’ and NATO’s understanding of the importance of resilience. However, these mostly top-down policy-focused statements lack robust implementation plans to achieve a desired strategic and operational intent.

NATO has developed an initial set of evaluation criteria to facilitate national resilience self-assessment efforts, and it has been appraising the state of the alliance’s resilience every two years since 2018. However, many shortfalls remain. The inability to effectively tackle the persistent challenges of increasingly contested logistics, vulnerable transport infrastructure, dependence on Russian gas supplies, and the emergence of cyber and hybrid threats points to the stressors across the alliance. Left unaddressed, these challenges will almost certainly result in weakening NATO’s response to unfolding crises.

NATO is therefore confronted with the urgent task of operationalizing collective resilience objectives and enacting nationally developed goals as well as robust follow-through mechanisms to assess, review, and monitor progress. Recent decisions to voluntarily share data on national policies and plans are encouraging, but their nonmandatory and discretionary nature makes it difficult to identify existing national resilience shortfalls and generate a comprehensive and complete picture of the stress points that can undermine shared resilience. Moreover, the majority of NATO allies do not have resilience plans, nor do they have resilience organization in place. The fragmented and uneven nature of resilience building efforts, policies, investments, and activities across the alliance shows that these priorities need to be aligned in a more integrated manner—and tailored to specific threats and challenges—in order to combine and coordinate allies’ strengths to maximum effect.

There is a system in place that can be used as a model for new resilience policies. The **NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP)** works to “provide a framework within which national and Alliance defence planning activities can be harmonised to enable Allies to provide the required forces and capabilities in the most effective way.” However, if incorporated directly into NDPP—a complex and already overstretched process encompassing 14 different

defense planning domains—resilience will always take a back seat and not receive the attention it requires. Moreover, the problem set and the expertise needed to address resilience requirements are different. Therefore the development of a new NATO Resilience Planning Process following the NDPP methodology would be much more effective in harmonizing and integrating national resilience plans, strategies, and capabilities to marshal NATO’s strong and collective resilience posture. A key goal of the NATO Resilience Planning Process would be to ensure that the new process can drive both national and collective resilience requirements and help achieve more effective unity of effort. As planning for resilience, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, goes beyond the realm of defense budgets, standing up a distinct—yet familiar—framework will help convert political will into tangible commitments and increased resilience capabilities. Alliance-wide resilience planning will be vital in helping to influence national behaviors and allocate adequate resources by incorporating NATO resilience guidelines into national strategies.

Initially, the NATO Resilience Planning Process could hew closely to the NDPP’s five-step approach.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH POLITICAL GUIDANCE AND SET PRIORITIES

The first step is to incorporate resilience questions into top-level political guidance documents, which NATO produces every four years. The political guidance derives from higher-level strategic policy and is a single cohesive framework that lays out the overall aims and objectives that the alliance must meet in the next five to ten years. Future political guidance documents—including the upcoming 2023 political guidance—should include specific objectives for resilience. Along with the operational level of ambition (defined as the number, scale, and nature of the operations that the alliance should be able to conduct in the future, along with the capability requirements needed to support them and the associated priorities and timelines), it should include a resilience level of ambition.

STEP 2: DETERMINE REQUIREMENTS TO MEET NATO RESILIENCE LEVEL OF AMBITION

Analytic work will be necessary for developing and defining a consolidated list of minimum resilience requirements. This should be the full set of resilience capabilities and assets that NATO needs if it is to support the effective enablement of its forces to ensure the collective defense and security of all allies. Juxtaposing these requirements with existing

or already planned capabilities (national, multinational, or common-funded) will be instrumental in identifying resilience shortfalls across the alliance. This should include baseline national requirements and recommendations for cross-cutting layered resilience across national borders. The requirements should be updated every four years, following the recommendations in the political guidance documents.

STEP 3: APPORTION RESILIENCE REQUIREMENTS AND SET TARGETS

This next step starts the implementation process by defining specific goals. These minimum resilience requirement targets should have associated priorities and timelines and should allow for innovative solutions rather than requiring specific approaches. They can be allocated to allies either individually, multinationally, or collectively, and they should follow the principles of fair burden sharing and reasonable challenge to determine the contributions of individual nations. The NATO resource committee can decide which resilience investments are eligible for common funding so as to provide additional support for the goals.

STEP 4: FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION

This framework will provide a new context for resilience activities. Investments in capabilities like energy and cybersecurity are not new to the allies, but connecting them into an overarching capability framework will require new approaches to implementation and measurement. This will be most effective if NATO can provide continuous assistance to allies in implementing the targets. This can include facilitating multinational initiatives and streamlining NATO efforts to help nations address priority resilience shortfalls and share best practices. NATO may need to invest in a new central resilience organization to support national efforts.

STEP 5: REVIEW RESULTS AND OFFER ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WHERE NEEDED

Setting clear goals should facilitate periodic assessments of how NATO's resilience objectives, ambitions, and targets are being met. The goals of this assessment can include identifying shortfalls, which may mean that new strategies or support structures will be needed—and that allies will require financial support to overcome these shortfalls. However, a periodic assessment could also offer a pathway for seeking out success stories and useful insights on a regular basis, lessons that will then be able to be rolled out to other nations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

As Step 4 suggests, facilitating implementation will require support structures, both at the NATO level and at the national level. Allies will need to invest in NATO's capacity to provide a platform for political consultation and collective action on resilience, support resilience efforts on an alliance level, and strengthen national capabilities, especially when it comes to smaller states. The recently established NATO Resilience Committee is one approach. Chaired by the assistant secretary general for defense policy and planning and reporting directly to the North Atlantic Council, the committee should be further strengthened and given a clear mandate to provide strategic and policy advice and planning guidance, as well as coherence for resilience activities across NATO. But NATO committees often face system- and process-level constraints that limit their ability to act with authority. To overcome these, NATO needs empowered senior leadership and champions from both senior military and civilian officials to give resilience issues greater visibility and accountability and drive forward progress, including identifying and naming a senior official with the specific responsibility and authority to oversee and ensure coherence between civilian and military collective resilience efforts. Senior national officials for resilience, **who met for the first time on November 16, 2022**, should focus on coordinating interagency efforts at national levels and on developing concrete deliverables for NATO and allies. Moreover, clearly defining collective objectives that the alliance must pursue to strengthen resilience will be key to ensuring tangible and timely progress—and this needs to happen before the NATO Vilnius summit next July.

A next step would be to ensure that NATO can draw on national resilience capabilities in crisis situations and create a rapid response capability or crisis center focused on resilience support in emergency situations or contingencies. NATO has existing models for this, including **a NATO rapid reaction team designed to fight cyberattacks**. It also recently sent counter hybrid warfare support teams to both **Lithuania** and **Montenegro**. The creation of policies to support the creation of similar resilience-focused crisis response teams that could be deployed within 24 hours would speed recovery from disruption. This resilience rapid response capability should be exercised regularly to develop and ensure efficacy, with the goal of becoming part of Europe's deterrence posture.

As these efforts span multiple domains and involve cross-cutting issues, improved civil-military coordination amid

increasing demands on NATO forces and the civil sector in times of crises to ensure uninterrupted provision of vital services is key. While NATO continues to cope with day-to-day resilience challenges, such as cyberattacks or acts of sabotage against critical infrastructure, it is time to also lay the foundation for a longer-term resilience strategy. This will allow NATO to be more proactive and better prepared to more effectively build enduring resilience, rather than focusing on being reactive to crises. In addition, embedding military resilience in the broader context of collective resilience will be vital to absorb the full range of future threats. In order to help ensure greater coherence across military and civilian dimension of resilience, more synergies are needed with the military concepts that set the direction for NATO's ongoing adaptation: the **Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area**, which focuses on force employment to deter and defend today, and the **NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept**, which outlines a vision to guide the alliance's long-term warfare development. In particular, NATO should further leverage efforts undertaken by the Allied Command Transformation to develop the notion of *layered resilience*, as part of the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept. Encompassing logistics, warfighting capability, perseverance, military infrastructure, situational awareness, command and control, and response planning, layered resilience underscores the interconnected nature of military and civilian resilience. Both are necessary—and mutually reinforcing—to build the ability to withstand immediate shocks and disruptions over long periods of time.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has led to the largest war in Europe since 1945. This conflict is the most recent and most relevant operation of its kind, and it possesses an unprecedented potential to develop useful lessons for building resilience against further Russian aggression and gray zone coercion. However, this will not happen without sustained, deliberate, and focused effort. To ensure that it is done effectively, the North Atlantic Council should stand up a high-level resilience task force to identify preliminary resilience lessons from Ukraine across the spectrum of conventional, hybrid, and societal threats, as well as to make recommendations for future policies and investments that can bolster European resilience. Alternatively, the United States could take the lead on creating such a task force with the goal of bolstering European resilience and strengthening NATO's ability to respond to crises, allowing the United States to take more of a "reinsurer" role under Article 3 rather than acting as a first line of defense. The FY 2023 National Defense

Authorization Act, currently in deliberations, could be the opportunity to initiate such a task force.

A serious implementation concern is always funding. New policies and organizational structures are never free. However, developing the required policies and structures for increased resilience represents a marginal cost when compared to national efforts already in place or required by NATO guidance. While NATO HQ and International Staff funding can be contentious, at the end of the day, NATO nations get value from their investments. Resilience is too important a task to be absorbed by existing staff and processes, and NATO members must be prepared to allocate the marginal resources needed to support efforts to strengthen resilience. New capital investments in ensuring operational resilience will be the greater cost—but NATO has shown that it is willing to make investments to support its priorities, including the recent standup of a **€1 billion innovation fund**. The **Defense Investment Pledge (DIP)**, adopted by NATO leaders in 2014, framed the political narrative on transatlantic burden sharing and committed allies to spending at least 2 percent of GDP on defense within the next decade. At the Madrid summit, allies decided to build on that pledge to ensure that increased national defense spending and NATO common funding would be "commensurate with the challenges of a more contested security order." One question for NATO to decide as an alliance within the next year is to what extent subsequent commitments beyond 2024 should reflect resilience. Investing in resilience should be a priority and resilience expenditures should be in addition to other commitments, and this may require the development of a robust methodology to determine national contributions to collective resilience. This also spotlights an opportunity to shift the political narrative from transatlantic burden sharing to a more unified alliance prepared to share the responsibilities and risks flowing from a volatile security environment.

Addressing Russia's threat requires not only refocusing allied nations' capabilities and military readiness but also reframing collective resilience as something centered around the same principles as collective defense—which **"binds its members together, committing them to protect each other and setting a spirit of solidarity within the alliance."** Thus, building capacity along Europe's eastern flank and further strengthening resilience would benefit from the creation of a NATO Resilience Fund. Such a fund, established to directly support the resilience capacity of the

most vulnerable allies and priority partner nations, would also significantly contribute to reinforcing deterrence, including deterrence in the face of Russian threat. As the European Union is increasingly acting in a complementary role to NATO's security objectives, improved cooperation between EU institutions and NATO will help enhance the efficacy of resilience initiatives in Europe. Identifying concrete steps and effective synergies—especially between NATO's baseline requirements for national resilience and the European Union's critical entities resilience directive—as well as continuing work within a formal structured dialogue on resilience and civil preparedness will further increase the coherence of efforts in an already constrained environment.

Cost-effective and creative ideas can come from many places, and many solutions are likely to be offered by and sourced from industry, especially as many resilience assets are owned by the private sector. Setting up a NATO-industry resilience partnership early will ensure that the government requirement-setting process benefits from a clear understanding of current capabilities, knowledge of industry trends, and access to private sector resources.

CONCLUSION

As observed by General Christopher G. Cavoli, NATO's supreme allied commander, Europe, the Ukraine crisis has demonstrated that these complex and interrelated challenges demand “**whole-of-government, whole-of-nation, whole-of-alliance efforts.**” NATO as an alliance and its member nations have the rare opportunity to learn from a serious conflict with a persistent adversary in their own backyard. Focusing on lessons learned is a strategic imperative, both for planning for future warfighting operations and for understanding how and where to invest in resilience to ensure that allies can “maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack,” as called for in Article 3. The need to respond to multiple contingencies at short notice, while building up the ability to withstand and recover quickly from disruptions, has become the new normal amid strategic competition. This newfound urgency to act decisively—not in the distant future but in the next few years—requires not only political will but also sustained

commitment and considerable resources, as well as improved coordination at national and alliance levels.

Given the pronounced imbalance between high-level political statements and current resilience posture, a robust, coherent, and purpose-driven process is needed to achieve the strategic and operational intent of decisions taken at NATO summits and ministerial meetings. Collective resilience is not only a function of burden sharing. It entails high levels of responsibility and risk sharing, and it deserves a distinct approach. Creating a NATO Resilience Planning Process will be instrumental in harmonizing and integrating national resilience plans, strategies, and capabilities to marshal NATO's strong collective response. Following the model of the NATO Defense Planning Process will allow the new approach to align with an accepted strategy that has organizational support, which will help smooth the path to effective implementation.

A comprehensive approach to resilience must also embrace additional resources and strategies, notably development of clearly defined objectives, creation of a rapid response capability, improved civil-military coordination, and robust investment. Implementation should include the establishment of a high-level resilience task force overseen by a new senior official with the specific responsibility and authority to ensure coherence between civilian and military collective resilience efforts. As Russia and other strategic competitors continue to aggressively exploit vulnerabilities, a lack of appropriate urgency in bolstering collective resilience in Europe will imperil the alliance's ability to effectively address the looming threats. ■

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