



By: The Editorial Board

Is NATO losing the future by trying to preserve the past?



The NATO **summit** in The Hague has again raised the question of the purpose and capabilities of this military alliance in the modern security environment. In the shadow of the war in Ukraine, but also of increasingly complex global security threats, the summit offers more dilemmas than answers.

NATO, established in 1949 as a collective defence system against Soviet expansion, now operates as an organisation that has retained its administrative structure but not its ability to respond effectively to the hotspots of the modern world.

In its more than seven decades of existence, NATO has gone through various phases – from the Cold War and the nuclear balance of fear to post-Cold War expansion and attempts to redefine it through global peacekeeping missions and the fight against terrorism.

However, the key point of stagnation in an operational sense can be located exactly 26 years ago. In 1999, NATO carried out its last direct and independent military **intervention** – the bombing of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Even if many still consider this **intervention** to be controversial and legally problematic, it cannot be denied that it had a clearly defined objective – to end the humanitarian catastrophe and the systematic violence that the regime of then President Slobodan Milošević was perpetrating against the civilian population in Kosovo, especially the Kosovo Albanians.

Since then, the world has been the scene of more than twenty serious armed conflicts and humanitarian disasters. Chemical weapons were used in **Syria**, tens of thousands of civilians died under bombs in Yemen, Libya fell apart after a disorganised NATO intervention, and Afghanistan was abandoned without a clear strategy, and the Taliban returned to power.

In all these cases, NATO had neither a consistent and coherent **strategy** nor the will to intervene politically and militarily. The

justifications ranged from political constraints and consensus problems to the alleged assessment that "it is not their responsibility". It is precisely this formulation that has become synonymous with passivity.

Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 posed a direct challenge to NATO's credibility. Although **Ukraine** is not a member of the Alliance, the fact that the war is taking place on European soil and has implications for all members of the Eastern flank shows that NATO can no longer hide behind bureaucratic fences.

Instead of a strategic initiative, NATO reacted with delay, partial support and dependence on the internal political dynamics of its members. The fact that individual countries have provided more military assistance to Ukraine than the Alliance itself clearly speaks in favour of the lack of operational unity.

Reforming NATO

Today, NATO faces fundamental challenges: institutional inertia, a lack of strategic vision and a mismatch between political unity and military effectiveness. Without clear reform, NATO remains an alliance that exists more on paper and in rhetoric than as a real force of deterrence and protection.

Command is fragmented, decision-making processes are slow and dependent on vetoes, and responses to crises depend on the political will of the most powerful members, first and foremost the United States of America.

Reforming NATO is no longer just a matter of internal discussions among members but a security and operational necessity. The first step must be to redefine the concept of common defence.

Article 5 of the founding treaty – according to which an attack on one member is considered an attack on all – must be extended to new forms of threats: cyberattacks, energy sabotage, information warfare and destabilisation through proxy conflicts. The

old model of an armoured invasion across borders is no longer sufficient.

The second step implies a change in the decision-making structure. The need for consensus among all members often leads to paralysis. In high-risk situations, NATO must be able to act flexibly and quickly, even if this means simple majority decisions with a clear legal and political basis. Operational coherence must take precedence over diplomatic correctness.

The Alliance must strike a balance between collective defence and playing a role in preserving the rules-based international order

Thirdly, NATO must institutionalise cooperation with partner countries beyond its formal membership. Ukraine, Georgia, pre-accession Sweden, and even Asian partners, such as Japan and Australia, have been participating in joint exercises and operations for years. At a time when threats are globalised, it is anachronistic to limit action to the territorial scope of membership.

Fourthly, NATO must become technologically relevant. While China and Russia are investing in hypersonic weapons, quantum communications and artificial intelligence, NATO's operational apparatus still works within the framework of the 20th century. Without serious investment in research and development and the integration of new technologies into command and intelligence structures, the Alliance will not be able to meet future challenges.

Finally, it is necessary to redefine the political mission of NATO itself. The Alliance must strike a balance between collective **defence** and playing a role in preserving the rules-based international order. If it remains neutral or reactive to obvious violations of international law, such as the Russian attack on Ukraine, it not only loses credibility but also encourages other authoritarian regimes to test the limits of international tolerance.

The next test could come tomorrow – is NATO ready?

One of the most important aspects of the reform must be budget cohesion and a realistic **redistribution** of costs among the members. More than two-thirds of total funding comes from the US, while many European members do not even reach the minimum **target** of two per cent of GDP for defence purposes.

Without an equal **contribution**, any strategic modernisation remains incomplete and dependent on a single centre of power, which is incompatible with the principle of collective responsibility.



Can NATO remain relevant in a world where security is no longer based on protocolar membership but on the ability to understand, anticipate and decisively counter threats?

The relationship between civilian and military leadership within NATO also needs to be redefined. Excessive dominance of political authorities over military command leads to procrastination and loss of initiative. A model in which generals are subordinate to politicians but also have the mandate to respond within a certain framework must become the standard if efficiency is desired in situations that require urgency.

In the modern world, which is becoming increasingly unstable and unpredictable, NATO, as the only functioning military alliance, cannot afford to remain stuck in the patterns of the Cold War era. Its role must be redefined in line with real security challenges, because there is simply no alternative. It must become an alliance that looks ahead, plans and acts.

The Hague Summit, while formally focusing on political coordination and symbolic unity, actually highlights a deeper dilemma - can NATO remain relevant in a world where security is no longer based on protocolar membership but on the ability to understand, anticipate and decisively counter threats?

This summit is symbolic, not because it heralds change but because it confirms the current situation. It shows how wide the gap is between the complexity of today's threats and NATO's institutional capacity to respond.

If the Alliance does not find a way to become an operational, rapid and politically clear organisation, it will remain a symbol of missed opportunities and bureaucratic inertia. Reform is not a question of prestige but of survival. Future conflicts will not give us 26 years to react.

The next test could come tomorrow. The question is whether NATO will have an answer to it.