The Economist

SPECIAL REPORT:
NATO at 70

→ March 16th 2019
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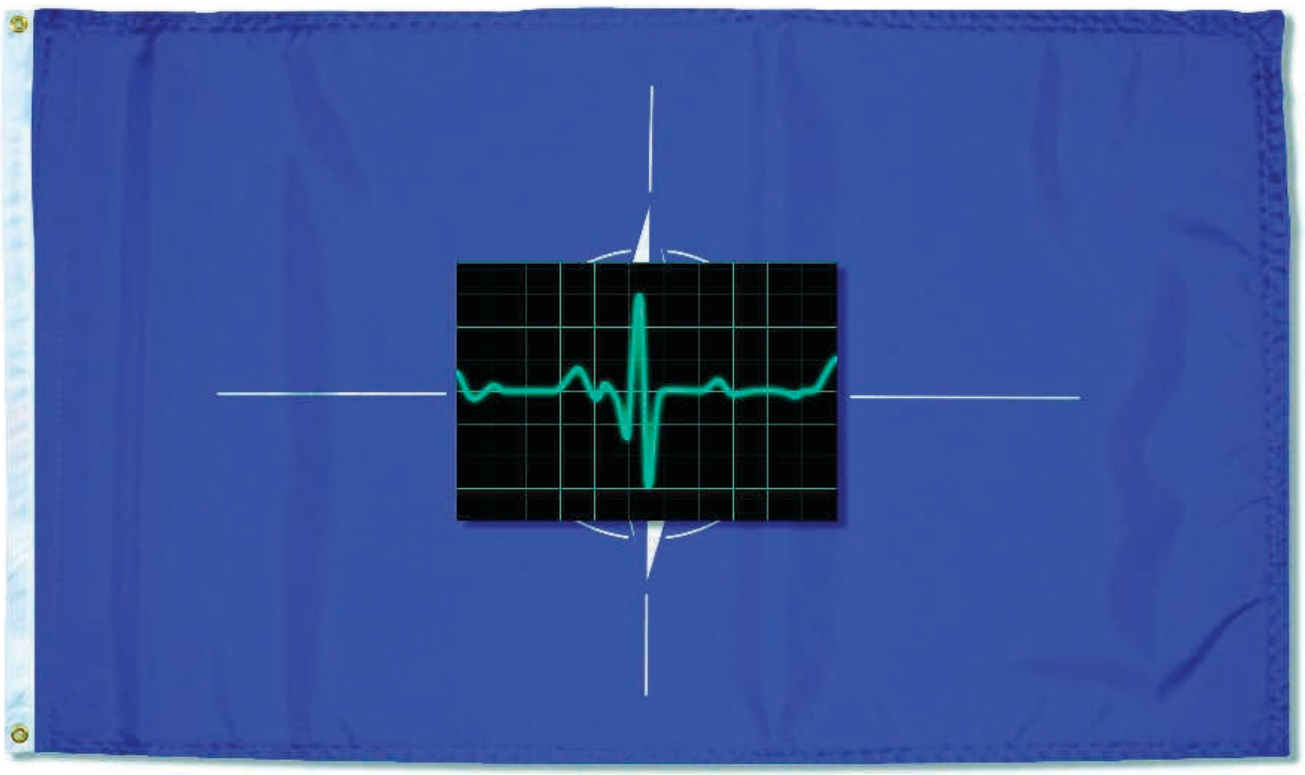


Mature reflection

The Atlantic alliance has proved remarkably resilient, says Daniel Franklin. To remain relevant, it needs to go on changing

Reaching 70 is an extraordinary achievement for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Most alliances die young. External threats change; national interests diverge; costs become too burdensome. Russia's pact with Nazi Germany survived for only two years. None of the seven coalitions of the Napoleonic wars lasted more than five years. A study in 2010 by the Brookings Institution, a Washington think-tank, counted 63 major military alliances over the previous five centuries, of which just ten lived beyond 40; the average lifespan of collective-defence alliances was 15 years.

"NATO is the strongest, most successful alliance in history", says Jens Stoltenberg, the organisation's secretary-general, "because we have been able to change." It has expanded from 12 members at its birth to 29—soon to be 30 when North Macedonia joins, its dispute with Greece over its name now settled. Of the eight countries that made up its erstwhile rival, the Warsaw Pact, seven have become part of NATO, as have three former Soviet republics. The eighth one, the Soviet Union itself, has ceased to exist.

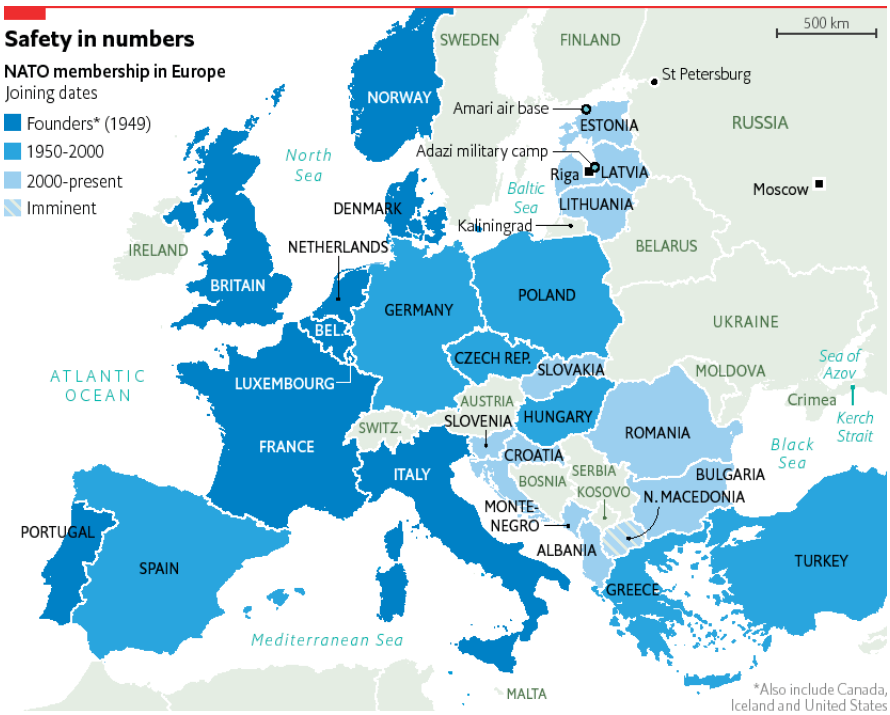
For its first four decades NATO was busy deterring the Soviet threat. Its role was to keep "the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down", as its first secretary-general, Lord Ismay, put it. But after communism collapsed, the alliance did not proclaim victory and shut up shop; instead it reinvented itself, helping to stabilise the new democracies of eastern Europe.

Realising that it needed to go "out of area or out of business", it then embarked on a period of far-flung crisis-management, from the Balkans (with interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo) to the Horn of Africa (where an anti-piracy mission ran from 2009 to 2016) and Afghanistan (where it still leads some 16,000 troops in Operation Resolute Support). NATO's founders would have been stunned by such mission creep—as well as by the circumstances in which Article 5 of its treaty, which says that an armed attack against one member will be considered an attack against them all, was put to use. The only time the allies invoked this pledge was on September 12th 2001, the day after al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks on America.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 the alliance moved swiftly back to its core business of deterrence against its eastern neighbour. Now for the first time it is having to juggle invigorated collective defence and crisis management simultaneously. At 70, it is hardly settling for an easy life.

Its birthday celebrations will be modest: just a one-day gathering of foreign ministers on April 4th in Washington, DC, where the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in 1949. NATO wants to avoid a repeat of the bruising confrontations that took place at its summit in Brussels last July, where America's president, Donald Trump, berated his allies for not pulling their weight on defence. If they did not shape up, he said, his country might go its own way. Another damaging row is the last thing the organisation needs as it struggles with intimations of its own mortality. "We don't have a guarantee that NATO will survive for ever," says Mr Stoltenberg.

At times Mr Trump has seemed to suggest that he would be happy to see it die. On the campaign trail he called it "obsolete". Once in office, he initially avoided backing its collective-security pledge; instead, he seemed to regard NATO as just another deal, in which American taxpayers were getting ripped off. In January the *New* ▸▸



York Times reported that several times last year he privately said he wanted to pull the United States out of NATO. Such reports only fuel fears that he might be doing Russia's bidding. Mr Trump calls these suspicions "insulting".

If he were to decide to abandon NATO he would face resistance in Congress, where bipartisan support for the alliance remains strong and control of the purse strings powerful. A record number of more than 50 senators and representatives attended the Munich Security Conference last month to show solidarity. Last July the Senate voted 97-2 to back NATO. In January the House of Representatives voted 357-22 in favour of the NATO Support Act, which would prohibit any use of federal funds for withdrawal. Though heartening for NATO, these votes highlight the sense of threat hanging over it.

Yet its pharaonic new headquarters on the outskirts of Brussels projects the permanence of an organisation preparing for its next 70 years, not one about to perish. Opinion polls show solid public support for NATO in its member countries (with the significant exceptions of Turkey and Greece). Even in America, despite Mr Trump's attacks, 64% of those polled by Pew Research Centre are favourable towards NATO, up from 49% in 2015, and a survey last year by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed that more Americans than at any point since polling began in 1974 favour increasing their country's commitment to the alliance.

NATO optimists offer three reasons for not fretting too much over Mr Trump. First, NATO is no stranger to crises, from Suez in 1956 to France quitting the integrated military command in 1966 and splits over the Iraq war in 2003. It has a record of resilience.

Second, they point out that since becoming president, Mr Trump has said that the alliance is "no longer obsolete", that he is "committed to Article 5" and that America will be "with NATO 100%". True, he continues to lambast his allies for failing to pay their fair share of their own defence, but on this matter his bullying is justified and useful: the allies do need to spend more.

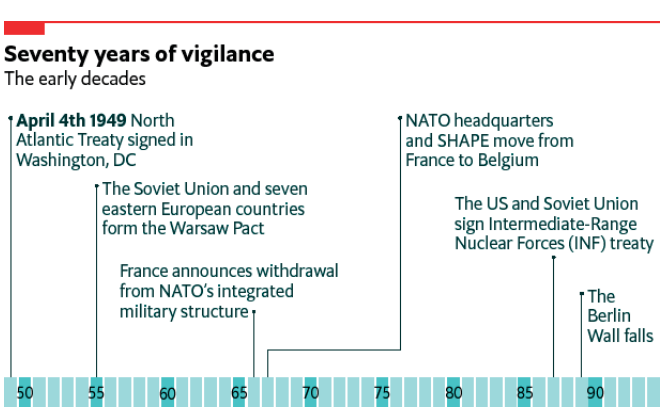
Their third and strongest argument for remaining sanguine about Mr Trump is based on his deeds rather than his tweets. On his watch America has increased, not decreased, its defence efforts in Europe, with more equipment, more troops and more money. Funding for America's military presence in Europe, under what is called the European Deterrence Initiative, has risen by 40%.

This is part of NATO's determined response to the increased threat from Russia. At summits in Wales in 2014, Warsaw in 2016 and last year in Brussels—even as the world focused on Mr Trump's bolshiness—the allies took a series of decisions designed to restore robust territorial defence. They created a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, prepared to move within days, and put combat-ready multinational battlegroups into the three Baltic countries as well as Poland. They committed themselves to a costly "Four 30s" initiative, with the aim of having 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 warships ready to move in no more than 30 days by 2020. To ensure swift movement of forces, they planned two new commands, in Norfolk, Virginia, and Ulm in Germany.

Last autumn NATO tested its capabilities in Trident Juncture, its biggest exercise since the end of the cold war, which involved some 50,000 people in and around Norway. Gaps remain, but the erosion of defence capacity that NATO had allowed as a peace dividend after the collapse of communism is being reversed.

This special report will run a health check on NATO. It will assess the alliance's chances of surviving through its 70s and consider how it needs to change in order to remain vigorous to 100. In the short term the wild card remains Mr Trump. For two years the allies were reassured by the presence around him of NATO-friendly "adults in the room", especially generals such as James Mattis, the defence secretary. These grown-ups could not prevent transatlantic rows over trade and the nuclear deal with Iran, which Mr Trump has abandoned, but they could exercise some restraint. They are now gone; Mr Mattis quit in December. His resignation letter pointedly stressed the importance of "treating allies with respect".

Even without Mr Trump, however, the cohesion and the democratic values that the alliance is supposed to share are under strain. It can still summon up solidarity, for example in response to Russia's nerve-agent attack on Sergei Skripal, a Russian ex-spy, and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury in England. But divisions among the



Europeans look worryingly wide.

Britain, usually a NATO stalwart, is consumed by Brexit, and might even elect a seasoned NATO-basher, Labour's Jeremy Corbyn, as its next prime minister. Nationalist governments in Hungary and Poland are at odds with their EU partners. France's relations with Italy sank so low that it recently recalled its ambassador.

Relations between America and strategically critical Turkey, which will soon be overtaking Germany as NATO's second-most-populous country, have been strained, too. Turkey's plan to buy a Russian air-defence system is a sore topic in Washington. The two countries have also been at odds over Turkey's detention of an American pastor (now released) and over America's refusal to extradite a Turkish cleric, Fethullah Gulen, whom President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blames for an attempted coup in Turkey in 2016. And they disagree over the fate of Kurds in Syria who fought alongside America but are seen as terrorists by Mr Erdogan. If relations were to sour badly, America could "devastate Turkey economically", Mr Trump has said. Both sides seem to be working to avoid that.

These are not the best of times for the allies to be tackling an issue as thorny as intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF). On February 1st America pulled out of the 31-year-old INF treaty banning land-based missiles with a range of 500-5,500km, in response to what it called clear Russian violation. NATO has backed America's move, but the issue threatens to become as fraught as when American cruise and Pershing II missiles were being deployed in Europe in the 1980s to counter the Soviet Union's mid-range nuclear arsenal. Now, as then, there is a risk of holes in America's nuclear umbrella that could leave the European allies vulnerable.

Look farther east

NATO has been very effective for 70 years, says Mike Pompeo, America's secretary of state, who will host the anniversary meeting in Washington, "and we want to make sure that it continues to be effective for the next 70 years." That will not be easy. The tectonic plates of geopolitics are shifting. A return to great-power rivalry is in prospect. Although Russia has a potent nuclear-tipped military force and an opportunistic willingness to disrupt the status quo, in the long run it is seen as a declining power. The emerging giant is China. The old Soviet Union peaked at less than 60% of America's GDP and a population about a fifth bigger. In China, America faces a rival that has four times as many people and will soon outstrip its economy. As China rises, challenging America's interests around the world, it will take up ever more of America's attention and resources. That process started before the Trump presidency, and will continue and intensify far beyond it.

How can the transatlantic alliance hold together as America becomes less focused on Europe and more immersed in Asia? That is a vital question, but so far NATO has barely started tackling it. ■

Keeping Russia in check

Disquiet on the eastern front

The increased threat from Russia has prompted a vigorous, if uneven, response from the allies

"FOR ME, I'M living the dream," says Major Pierre Gosselin, a Canadian company commander in NATO's multinational battlegroup in Latvia. A bleak, freezing-cold firing range in January at Camp Adazi, a military base 45 minutes' drive from Riga, is not everyone's idea of heaven. But Major Gosselin and his men, recently arrived for their six-month stint here, are loving the camaraderie, testing their weapons and trying out the different models of the small contingent from Montenegro, NATO's newest member, which has sent troops to the battlegroup for the first time.

Last July, asked in a television interview why Americans should defend Montenegro from attack, President Trump seemed to question whether NATO's mutual-defence guarantee made sense. Montenegrins "may get aggressive", he said, "and congratulations, you're in world war three." The Montenegrins at Adazi, however, are blending in easily. Their leader is particularly impressed by the interoperability of the magazines.

The Canadian-led battlegroup is one of four that NATO has deployed since 2017 as part of its "enhanced forward presence"; the others are in Estonia (under British leadership), Lithuania (led by Germany) and Poland (where America takes the lead). The battlegroup in Latvia is the most international of the four: nine countries contribute to its 1,400-strong force. Colonel Josh Major, the commander of Task Force Latvia, calls it a "pretty good representation of all of Europe". His forces have been involved in outreach activities all over the country, helping to counter Russian efforts to discredit NATO's presence there. It's been a "great experience for all our troops", he says.

But they are not there to have fun. Their job is to change the calculus in Russia, making any incursion much costlier to an aggressor. "The closer you get to Latvia, the more the sense of threat becomes real," he notes. Part of this is a reflection of history. At the Latvian War Museum in Riga a new exhibition marks the centenary of the country's war for independence, hard-won with help from allies including Britain and France. But in 1940 the Latvians allowed the Russians in without a fight, and then lived under Soviet occupation for half a century. Next time, if there is one, they are determined to shoot.

In 2014 Russia provided a fresh reason for Latvians to feel ▸▸

threatened: it invaded Ukraine, with devastating speed, surprise and the use of "hybrid" tactics involving disinformation and disguised troops. It is all too easy to imagine how the same tactics could be applied in the Baltics. "War with Russia", a novel by General Sir Richard Shirreff, describes exactly such a scenario, drawing on his experience at NATO, where he served as deputy supreme allied commander for Europe.

The Latvians and their Baltic neighbours are also on their guard because Russia has been building up its forces near their borders in recent years. Russian military modernisation has reached a stage, says Rose Gottemoeller, NATO's deputy secretary-general, "where we have to be hyper-alert".

Land, sea and air

That is why NATO has enhanced its presence not only on the ground but also in the air. At Amari in Estonia it has added an extra arm of its Baltic air-policing operation (the leading part of it remains in Lithuania). NATO countries take turns to do four-month stints at Amari; currently the Germans are there. Twice a day two of their Eurofighters are in the air within 15 minutes of the siren sounding. Once or twice a week these are live interceptions, typically of Russian planes flying between St Petersburg and the enclave of Kaliningrad. The interceptors get close enough to identify the Russian planes, but without provoking them.

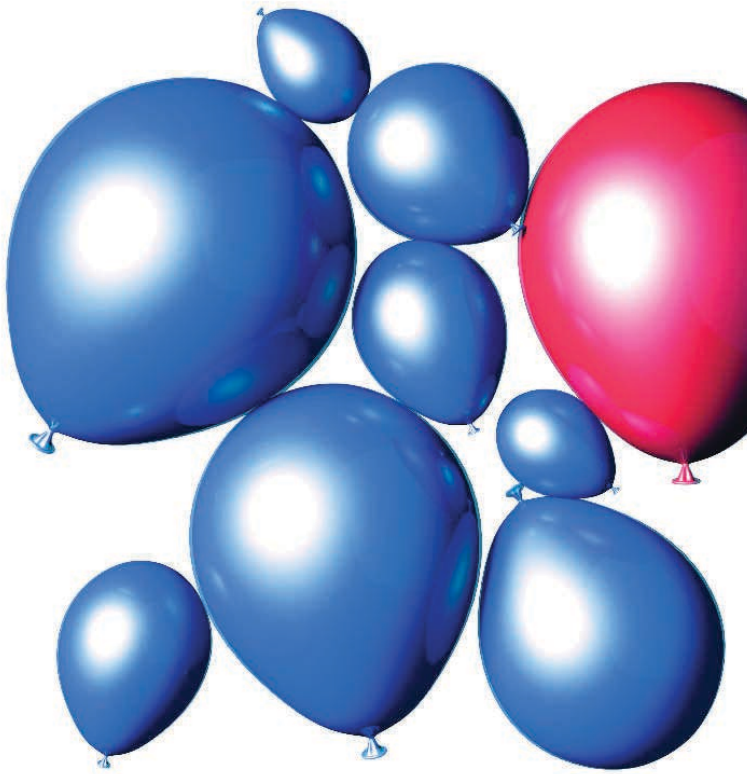
NATO's presence in Adazi and Amari is just a start. Some would like to see both missions beefed up to convert the Baltic air policing into air defence and to enlarge the battlegroups and make them permanent. Radek Sikorski, a former Polish foreign minister, calls the Baltic battlegroups "symbolic".

So keen is the current Polish government to host a bulkier American force that it has offered to pay the United States about $2bn to set up a permanent base. Poland's European allies frown on such bilateral deals, which are at odds with NATO's collective spirit. Critics fear the move could divide the alliance and provoke Russia. Polish officials are confident of getting a beefier American presence in return for "enhanced host-nation support", stressing that they see this as a regional hub benefiting NATO.

NATO has plenty on its plate implementing the decisions it has already taken. The credibility of its forward presence depends on having reinforcements ready and being able to deploy them rapidly to prevent Russia from creating a fait accompli in the Baltic states. Simply clearing away obstacles to moving troops across Europe is a big task.

This is not just about NATO's eastern front. The alliance needs to be able to respond to threats wherever they may arise. "The alliance has got to get the initiative back, rather than always reacting to Russia," says Lieutenant-General Ben Hodges, a former commander of the US army in Europe, now at the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a think-tank.

Recently Russia has been flexing its muscles in the Black Sea region. In November it seized three Ukrainian navy ships trying to cross, as they are entitled to do, from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait. Mr Hodges worries that NATO has not paid enough attention to the area. Russia's actions have now brought a fresh focus on it.



NATO's individual members have different perceptions of potential threats. Whereas the Baltic countries are alert to any change in the wind from Russia ("We feel it on our skin," says Latvia's defence minister, Artis Pabriks), what Greeks feel on their skin is menace from Turkey, a fellow NATO member. Italians are less worried about Moscow than about migrants crossing the Mediterranean. The French concentrate especially on efforts to stabilise former colonies in Africa. And the Germans seem to feel threatened mainly by the thought that if NATO and the EU were to collapse they would lose the cornerstones of their stability and prosperity.

To accommodate these diverse interests, the allies have developed what they call a 360-degree approach to security. That involves tackling threats not just from Russia but also from north Africa and the Middle East, sources of migration and terrorism. This has bolstered solidarity among NATO members. It is why Canada is happy to lead a training mission in Iraq and why Latvians have fought and died alongside Americans in Afghanistan.

But this inclusive approach has its problems. One is that NATO may try to do too much and lose focus on its core mission of defence against Russia. Another is that, though speed is of the essence, decisions get gummed up in a search for consensus among 29 countries. Efforts to cut through this by granting more autonomy to NATO's military chief, the supreme allied commander for Europe, meet resistance from members wary of ceding sovereignty.

Contrasting perceptions of threat also make it harder to resolve what has become one of the most contentious issues for NATO: the level of its members' defence spending, the agreed aim for which is at least 2% of GDP. Because they are so wary of Russia, Latvia and Poland are among the countries that meet this target, but the same is not true for many other members, especially Germany—which is why Mr Trump has criticised it loudly. ■

Compare and contrast

2018 or latest available

	GDP, $trn	Population, m	Defence spending % of GDP	Nuclear warheads
NATO Europe	17.0	570	1.5	515
Russia	1.6	144	4.3	6,850

Sources: IMF; NATO; UN Population Division; SIPRI

Spending

Promises, promises

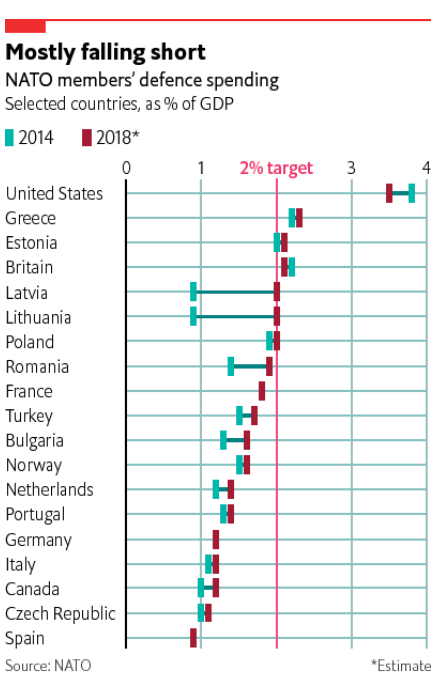
Germany is in the crosshairs for not spending enough on defence

THE PRESIDENT did not mince his words. "We cannot continue to pay for the military protection of Europe while the NATO states are not paying their fair share and living off the fat of the land. We have been very generous to Europe and it is now time for us to look out for ourselves." A tweet from Donald Trump? In fact the words were John F. Kennedy's, speaking to his National Security Council in 1963. Complaints about the Europeans' failure to spend enough on their own defence are almost as old as the alliance itself. But Mr Trump's attacks have been angrier and more sustained. He links complaints about the perceived NATO rip-off with gripes about trade, where he thinks the European Union is "killing us". "We pay for LARGE portions of other countries [sic] military protection," he tweeted last November, "hundreds of billions of dollars, for the great privilege of losing hundreds of billions of dollars with these same countries on trade."

The allies may not like the bullying (and could argue with the economics), but on the matter of military spending Mr Trump has a point. At their summit in Wales in 2014, NATO leaders agreed to a guideline of spending no less than 2% of national GDP on defence, of which at least 20% should go on major equipment, including research and development. At the time only three countries met the 2% target; all the rest pledged to "move towards" it by 2024.

Now eight countries more or less pass the 2% test, and 15 meet the 20% target for major equipment. Taken together, the 2018 defence budgets of NATO's European members would have needed to be $102bn bigger (an extra 38%) to reach 2% of GDP, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Still, their spending has been rising significantly since 2015. At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, Mr Stoltenberg said that since 2016 members other than the United States had spent an extra $41bn in real terms and that, based on their national plans, by the end of 2020 the figure would be $100bn. If his remarks were designed to catch Mr Trump's attention, it worked. "Now we have secured more than $100bn of increase in defence spending from NATO allies," the president boasted a couple of weeks later in his state-of-the-union speech. "They said it couldn't be done."

"You should note that Vladimir Putin sees that increase," says Mr Pompeo. But he also stresses that "there remains tremendous work to be done." It is not even clear that Mr Trump will be satisfied with 2%. At the Brussels summit last year he caused a stir by mentioning a figure of 4% of GDP. (The United States spends 3.5%, though this pays not just for the territory covered by NATO but for America's global role; the IISS calculates that only 5.6% of its defence outlays go directly on Europe, a figure that leaves out its nuclear umbrella and the reinforcements it would send in a crisis.)



Whatever the aim, it is the big countries that count, and several of these fall woefully short of 2%, including Canada, Italy and Spain (see chart). But the most notable laggard is Germany, which has the largest economy.

Germany spends just 1.24% of its GDP on defence. It has promised only that the share will rise to 1.5% by 2025. Even that may be optimistic, since the spending is not "plumbed in" to actual budget plans, notes Claudia Major of SWP, a think-tank in Berlin. She expects the number to be 1.3% by 2024.

The Germans have lots of excuses. A coalition government makes it hard to agree on higher defence spending. Germany's economy is so large that even a modest increase in the share of GDP going on defence translates into a lot more money. The country hosts facilities that are important for America's wider role, including its Africa Command in Stuttgart and a state-of-the-art military hospital near Landstuhl where Americans wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq are treated. Besides, the 2% target is a crude one, measuring input not output, so it should not be taken too literally.

You cannot be serious

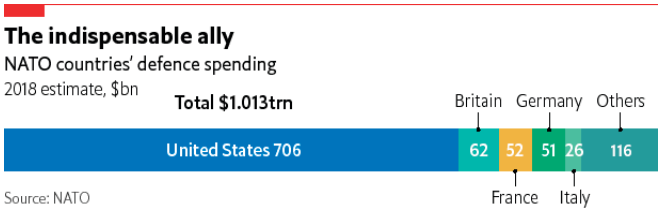
Yet it is what Germany signed up to in 2014, and it does need to spend more. Last year's annual report to the federal parliament on the state of the country's armed forces was devastating. It pointed to "major gaps in personnel and materiel in all areas of the Bundeswehr". All six of its submarines were out of action. At times not one of its 14 Airbus A400M transport planes was flying. This year's report was scarcely better, urging "immediate action". The contingent that took part in the recent Trident Juncture exercise had to plunder all sorts of gear from other units, according to Julie Smith, an American expert on transatlantic security currently at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin. "It's just hard to fathom how it got this bad, for a country of its size and resources," she says.

Another puzzle is Germany's embrace of Nord Stream 2, a pipeline that by the end of this year is due to bring it Russian gas. Because this bypasses Ukraine, it leaves that country open to pressure from Russia. Mr Trump says it will also make Germany "a captive of Russia". The Germans suspect that his true motive is to sell them American gas, but the project has many other critics.

Despite Russia's deployment in Kaliningrad of nuclear-capable missiles that can reach Berlin in less than five minutes, Germans do not seem to feel unduly threatened. As Jan Techau of the German Marshall Fund in Berlin puts it: "We have exactly the kind of armed forces we want: basically unusable."

What can be done? Mr Trump's ire is not the best incentive for Germany to tackle its gaps in military spending: only 10% of Germans are confident that he will do the right thing in world affairs, according to Pew Research Centre. But politicians could do more to explain the need for extra resources, and they could be more creative, tackling problems of civilian infrastructure that also pose problems for military mobility. Germany's rail system is "completely inadequate" for moving troops at scale, says Ben Hodges of CEPA. "We don't need more German tanks, we need more German trains." Counting such investment could help nudge Germany towards 2%.

One way to make European defence spending go further would be to improve collaboration between member countries, ▸▸



cutting duplication and reaping economies of scale. Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, has asked why Europe needs 160 weapons systems when America has 50 or 60, not to mention all the replication of training and support staff across the continent. Initiatives to do better are at last under way. One, called permanent structured co-operation, or PESCO, aims to attract commitments to projects identified in a Co-ordinated Annual Review on Defence, or CARD.

The EU has also launched a European Defence Fund. From 2020 it hopes to have €500m a year to invest in joint research projects and €1bn a year (leveraged to perhaps €5bn with the help of national financing) for collaborative development and buying equipment. Crucially, this has been plugged into the machinery of the European Commission. But Britain, a European defence giant, could find itself relegated to third-country status after Brexit. And Germany has inhibitions about arms exports, evident in its recent willingness to all but ground Saudi Arabia's Eurofighter Typhoon fleet by blocking parts. That makes it tricky to work with the more gung-ho French. More collaboration may improve matters, but at best slowly. Meanwhile, what if Mr Trump, or a successor, were to carry out the threat to quit? ■

European defence

Going solo?

Time to start thinking the unthinkable

WHY, A STRATEGIST from Mars might wonder, do Europeans doubt their ability to defend themselves against Russia without American help? The total GDP of NATO's European members is more than ten times that of Russia, which has an economy about the size of Spain's. They spend three-and-a-half times as much on defence as Russia, which has lately had to cut its budget sharply because of a broader squeeze on its economy. True, Russia has 13 times as many nuclear warheads as western Europe has, but surely Britain and France, the two nuclear powers, have more than enough to deter an attack?

For decades Europeans did not need to worry about the Martian's question, because America's commitment to their defence was not in doubt. That has changed. "The times when we could unconditionally rely on others are past," Angela Merkel told the European Parliament in November. She echoed the call of France's president, Emmanuel Macron, for "a true European army". In January the two leaders signed a treaty between France and Germany which includes a mutual-security pledge similar to NATO's Article 5 (as well as Article 42.7 of the European Union's Lisbon treaty).

This is sensitive territory. Mr Macron's talk of a European army, and of "strategic autonomy", irritates Americans. It is only prudent for Europeans to start hedging their bets against over-reliance on America, but hedging can be costly, and they have to be careful lest the hedge become a wedge, as François Heisbourg of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, a think-tank, pithily puts it.

Still, Mr Trump's ambivalence about allies is almost an invitation to think through the implications of an end to Pax Americana. Suppose one morning a tweet announces that the United States is leaving NATO. Under Article 13 of the alliance's founding treaty, a country can cease to be a member one year after notifying the government of the United States. So, bizarrely, Mr Trump would be serving notice on himself. An optimistic version of what happens next, apart from howls of protest, is that Europe makes a concerted effort to organise its own defence. Call it Europe United.

The conventional wisdom on Europe's ability to protect its interests may be too defeatist, suggests Kori Schake of the IISS. The middle powers, in which she includes countries like Britain, France, Italy and the Netherlands, have been talking themselves into "exquisite uselessness", but they have impressive capabilities. And, she argues, "the high-end American way of war is not the only way of war."

A pale shadow

Yet the Europeans would immediately face institutional hurdles. Compared with Russia's top-down system, command and control is hard enough in consensus-bound NATO. It would be a bigger challenge for Europeans alone, especially if they did not inherit NATO's command structure. The EU may want to take the lead, but military thinking is not in its DNA. Besides, an EU-only alliance would be a pale shadow of NATO: after Brexit, non-EU countries will account for fully 80% of NATO defence spending.

There would be gaps in capabilities, too. How bad these were would depend on the mission, and how many operations were under way at the same time. The European-led interventions in Libya and Mali exposed dependence on America in vital areas such as air-to-air refuelling and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. A detailed look at the sort of scenarios Europe might face would help to identify other gaps, and what it would take to fill them. Bastian Giegerich of the IISS, who is starting to work on such assessments, reckons that realistically the gap-filling could take 15 years or so. That is a long time for places like Poland and the Baltic countries that feel under threat. Fear and mistrust could quickly conspire to make narrow national interests trump efforts to maintain European unity. Hence a second, perhaps likelier, version of what might follow an American withdrawal: Europe Divided.

Jonathan Eyal of the Royal United Services Institute in London imagines a frenzy of activity, a cacophony of summits—and a renationalisation of defence strategies. Lots of countries would seek bilateral deals. In central Europe he would expect an alliance between Poland and Romania to guarantee the eastern border. The Russians and Chinese would not sit idly by, he says, but would play their own games with the Greeks, Hungarians and others.

It is these games of mistrust that the American security guarantee has largely helped to avoid. They could all too easily resurface. "Establishing a purely European defence", warns Michael Rühle, a long-time NATO official, "would overwhelm the Europeans politically, financially and militarily."

That is why a third way forward for Europe looks more attractive: what might be called Europe Upgraded. This would involve the Europeans doing a lot more to improve their capacity in defence, but in ways that would help persuade the Americans to stay in: less loose talk about a European army, more effort to develop capabilities currently lacking.

Europe Upgraded sounds like an easy option, but it is not. It would demand cash, creativity and care. A serious push to plug the gaps in Europe's capabilities would not be cheap. European governments, especially the big ones, would have to find a way to sell

far larger defence budgets to their voters.

As for creativity, the European Intervention Initiative, championed by Mr Macron and launched last year, is an example of the sort of innovation that could help. It is inclusive: its ten members include Finland, not part of NATO, and Britain, soon to be out of the EU. The aim is to foster a common strategic culture that will help Europe respond more nimbly to crises in its neighbourhood without calling for American help.

The care is needed to make sure a more robust Europe is seen as supporting NATO rather than undermining it. America is suspicious of any duplication of NATO's efforts, such as the creation of rival headquarters. And bigger spending on defence could trigger disputes over industrial protectionism, especially if broader trade rows between Europe and America rumble on.

Even as the allies grapple with different visions of the future, a nuclear elephant has entered the room. Last October America declared (without warning the Europeans) that it was leaving the INF treaty, claiming a blatant violation by Russia, and served formal notice in February. Russia has since responded by pulling out too, threatening to develop new missiles. To make matters worse, the New START treaty, which limits strategic nuclear warheads and has strong verification provisions, is up for renewal in 2021.

A new nuclear-arms race would be a nightmare for NATO. In Berlin, Claudia Major is "enormously worried" that arguments over INF could divide Germany, Europe and the transatlantic alliance. Radek Sikorski fears that Russia's missiles will leave Europe "defenceless" if it lacks a proportionate response to a first use of nuclear weapons by Russia, giving the Russians time to get where they want to by using conventional forces.

NATO has been here before. In the 1980s concern that Russian SS-20 intermediate-range missiles would "decouple" the European allies from America led to a dual-track approach: pursuit of arms control along with deployment of American cruise and Pershing II missiles in several European countries. The deployment went ahead despite mass protests, but the INF treaty signed in 1987 resulted in their removal and a long period of relative nuclear calm.

A new nuclear-arms race would be a nightmare for NATO

America is keen to maintain alliance solidarity, and officials say there are no plans to deploy intermediate-range missiles. There are other tools in the kit to keep Europe coupled. These include submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles, currently in development, and new low-yield warheads for existing Trident missiles. A strengthening of missile defences would ramp up tensions with Russia.

The abandonment of the INF treaty is the most urgent reason to ask questions about the nuclear future. But the broader doubts about the strength of America's commitment to defend Europe are also stirring things up. Like it or not, for the first time this century Europeans are having to brace themselves for a serious debate about the role of nuclear weapons on their continent.

Taboos could tumble. In a paper last November for the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, a French expert, Bruno Tertrais, suggested a range of "realistic" scenarios for expanding French and British nuclear protection, with or without NATO. Maximilian Terhalle, of the University of Winchester, and Mr Heisbourg recently argued that France should extend its nuclear umbrella to its European partners, including Germany. They acknowledge that "great leadership skills" would be needed to win support for this at home while not "prompting the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe".

The context for this debate extends far beyond Europe. Russia's deployment of its 9M729 missiles is in part a response to the growing muscle of other countries, notably China, which is not bound by the INF treaty. President Trump has floated the idea of broader arms-control efforts also involving China and others, though there is little sign of Chinese interest. The INF question is an early indicator of how China's rise might affect the future of the alliance. ■

Future-gazing

The next ACT

When the world changes, NATO must change too

FOR AN IDEA of what the alliance will be dealing with in the years to come, head to Norfolk, Virginia. It is home to Allied Command Transformation (ACT), one of NATO's two strategic commands, the other being its operational one with its headquarters at Mons, in Belgium. Since 2009 French generals have been at the helm of ACT, a reward for France's return to NATO's integrated military structure; the most recent American in charge was James Mattis, seen by some in Europe as NATO's saviour as defence secretary for the first two years of Mr Trump's presidency.

What makes ACT interesting is its focus on the future. Its job is to shape NATO's response to emerging demands as the world changes. That includes devising "minimum capability requirements" for new technology. It also involves getting out a crystal ball to divine big global trends and their military implications decades ahead. General André Lanata, the current supreme allied commander transformation (SACT), says his command "is one of the motors of adaptation for NATO".

That motor is having to speed up. Digital technology is moving at a faster rate than traditional military investment, often driven by the private sector, leading ACT to do things in new ways: more bottom-up, more plugged into outside networks and with a greater willingness to accept the risk of failure. "Experimentation is key," says General Lanata.

Technology is opening up whole new dimensions for warfare

ACT co-ordinated more than 20 experiments at Operation Trident Juncture last year. One tested in-field "additive manufacturing" (known as 3D printing) for critical components. Another tried out unmanned sensors that could cut the personnel needed to protect forces and bases. A third sought to show how autonomous vehicles could improve battlefield logistics and cut manpower.

The West used to assume that it could count on maintaining its technological superiority. Today that looks complacent. The Aspen Strategy Group, in a recent book, "Technology and National Security: Maintaining America's Edge", sees a "transformative era" ahead which could threaten America's position as the world's strongest military power. The Pentagon's National Defence Strategy, published last year (the first for a decade), notes that many vital new technologies come from the commercial sector and are available to rivals, eroding the "conventional overmatch" that America has grown accustomed to. Russia innovated in the field of hybrid warfare to devastating effect in Ukraine, blurring the line between peace and war. China has ambitions to be a world-beater in artificial intelligence, big data and quantum computing, all of which will have major military uses.

Such technologies promise to compress the time available to deal with a crisis, which can put a 29-country alliance at a disadvantage. NATO's need for consensus is often seen as its Achilles heel. Advances in hypersonic weapons, moving at more than five times the speed of sound, will shorten response times further. Military types are fond of talking about responding at the "speed of relevance"; that speed will get ever faster.

Technology is also opening up whole new dimensions for warfare. One is space. Some of the alliance's larger members—America, France, Britain—are thinking hard about it. President Trump recently launched a new space force. Oddly, ACT does not yet have a mandate to tackle it, but cyberspace is now one of its core areas. In 2016 NATO agreed that a cyber-attack could ▸▸

The art of info-war

Social media are being weaponised

WHEN LATVIA conducted its biggest-ever national military exercise last August, which mobilised more than 10,000 people, a group of researchers discovered that using only open-source information they could identify about 10% of the individuals involved—and use that knowledge to track the exercise in real time. They also found they could make a soldier leave his post, against orders. Janis Sarts, director of NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which ran the experiment, said it was very simple.

The StratCom unit was set up in 2014. It now has about 40 people and is already outgrowing its home in a white building in Riga. Its expansion reflects the rising importance of information warfare in the age of social media.

Part of its job is to do something for which surprisingly few governments have the capacity: monitor the information environment. It tracks the "weaponisation" of social media, including the use of bots and a growing trend towards "hybrid" activity involving both humans and machines. It studies what Russia and terrorist groups are up to. Iran is also increasingly active, says Mr Sarts, and China is quickly becoming the most capable country, though it is less willing than Russia to take risks in Europe.

The other part of the job is to put this knowledge to use. The unit helps with training, introduces information warfare into NATO exercises and gets involved in operational support beyond the military sphere, such as election resilience. Tracking Russian propaganda efforts to undermine NATO's new multinational battlegroups in the Baltics allowed StratCom to push back quickly and effectively.

As data get ever richer, Mr Sarts expects information to be increasingly used to influence behaviour; he talks of "cognitive warfare". Deep fakes will make it hard to know whether a video or voice recording is genuine or not, undermining trust and making more people move to closed groups with embedded beliefs, he predicts. Some of the tech giants, including Instagram (owned by Facebook) and YouTube (owned by Google), deserve more scrutiny, he says. He does not think that self-regulation will work, and sees a need for a proper regulatory framework.

StratCom collaborates on some projects with a well-regarded centre in neighbouring Estonia that specialises in cyber-defence. Lithuania has an outfit for energy security. They are among 25 NATO-accredited "centres of excellence" with a range of expertise—one way in which small countries can make an outsized contribution to the alliance.

trigger an Article 5 response. It has recognised cyber as a separate domain for warfare, alongside land, sea and air. Last year it established an operations centre for cyber at Mons.

So far NATO has concentrated on cyber-defence. It is reckoned to have done a good job at protecting its own installations from cyber-attack. But many of the broader networks on which communications among the allies depend, as well as national military facilities, are more vulnerable. The alliance has not developed collective offensive capabilities in cyber (those remain national, like intelligence), though it is said to be contemplating them.

At ACT, work on a cyber-doctrine should be approved within a year or so. As in other areas, interoperability is at the core, be it for defending networks, ensuring situational awareness or carrying out plans. By the end of 2019 NATO should be able to start conducting cyber-operations. Even so, the whole cyber area remains a huge task for the alliance which it has only just started to tackle.

Russia today, China tomorrow

In the long term it is the rise of rival powers that concentrates minds. The central challenge identified in America's National Defence Strategy is the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition from China and Russia, out to shape the world according to an authoritarian model. Russia is a declining power and increasingly a regional one. Over time, the global challenger is China.

Every four years NATO's crystal-ball-watchers at ACT produce their "Strategic Foresight Analysis" (SFA), looking ahead two decades and beyond at the big trends that will affect the security environment. Now, as part of the next round, they plan to look at regions: north Africa, a potential source of mass migration; the Arctic, increasingly on the security radar because of global warming; Russia, NATO's traditional focus; and, last but not least, Asia-Pacific. In the most recent SFA report, released in 2017, China was mentioned more than twice as often as Russia. China's joint exercises with Russia in the Baltic in 2017 and its growing interest in the Arctic are part of the trend.

China's importance for the future is awkward for NATO. The alliance was not set up to handle it. It has no policy for dealing with it and no real relationship with it. Yet in the coming years, as America has to devote ever more attention and resources to it, China could profoundly affect the choices the alliance faces. ■

The next three decades

NATO at 100

A new transatlantic bargain could help the allies reach a century

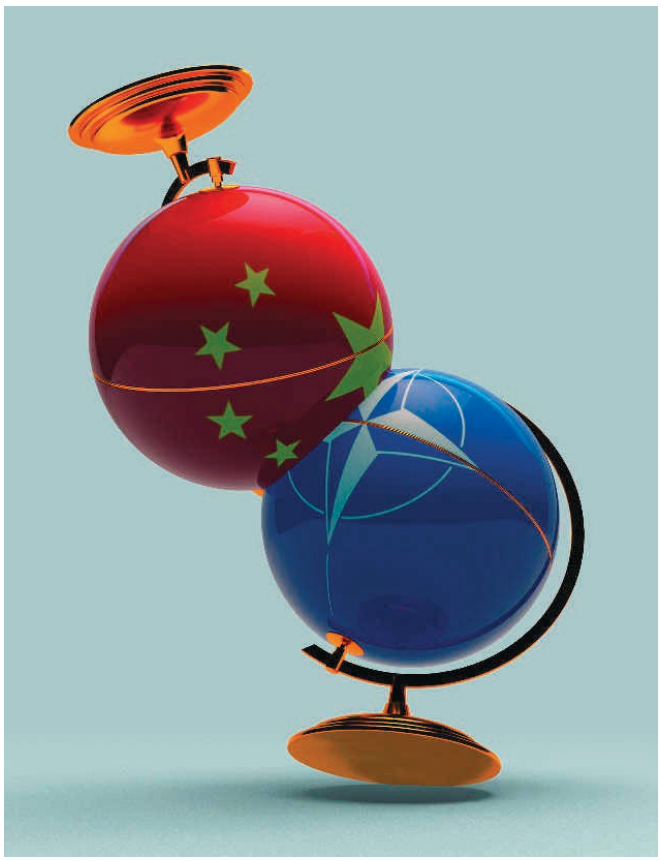
THE TRANSATLANTIC alliance deserves a resounding "happy birthday". It kept the peace for 40 years of cold war, protected western Europe from communism, helped stabilise central Europe after the Soviet Union's collapse and enabled unprecedented prosperity. It has shown admirable openness, adaptability and commitment. "We're incredibly complacent about the continuous delivery of peace and stability in our lives, and a hell of a lot of that depends on NATO," says Sir Adam Thomson, a former British ambassador to NATO, now with the European Leadership Network, a London-based think-tank. "We tend to take it for granted."

In many respects the alliance looks stronger than ever. It will soon have 30 members, encompassing more than 930m people. Together they produce around half the world's GDP and account for about 55% of global defence spending. The allies are getting on with a long to-do list drawn up at last year's summit, from ambitious readiness plans to new command centres.

Yet as this special report has pointed out, NATO is also deeply troubled. Douglas Lute and Nicholas Burns, two former American ambassadors to NATO, say Donald Trump has "hurtled the alliance into its most worrisome crisis in memory". In a thorough assessment of "NATO at Seventy" for Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Centre, they set out a daunting array of the challenges it faces. The greatest of them is "the absence of strong, principled American presidential leadership for the first time in its history".

Still, in some ways Mr Trump has done NATO a favour by concentrating minds on the need for the allies to spend more, and do more, for their own defence. And he has been right to highlight the German problem. To update Lord Ismay's aphorism, NATO now needs Germany to be up, not down.

Mr Trump has also been an antidote to complacency. He has



provoked the alliance into re-examining the fundamental reason for its existence, prompting Congress to spring to its defence and ministers to write editorials explaining why the world still needs NATO. He has set off a frenzy of thinking about the future of European defence. If anyone had started to wonder whether NATO mattered any more, Mr Trump (with more than a little help from Mr Putin) has ensured that it will continue to receive attention.

By keeping Europe secure, NATO serves America's interests. Its defenders say that Mr Trump's transactional approach is wrongheaded. Yes, America's allies should do more, but their contribution adds to American strength, providing forces, firepower and valuable bases. In a coming era of great-power rivalry, it would be folly to give this up. America has many allies, in NATO and in Asia, which makes it quite different from China and Russia, says Mr Burns: "They have none."

These are good reasons for expecting NATO to survive Mr Trump. But beyond the storms of his presidency, the geopolitical climate is anyway changing. If NATO wants to remain strong in the decades ahead, it needs to start preparing now. That will involve still more adaptation, none of it easy. Three areas stand out.

One is speed. Having to co-ordinate 30 countries makes quick decisions harder, yet they will become ever more vital. Streamlining NATO's bureaucracy should help, but it is not enough. James Stavridis, who served as supreme allied commander for Europe, says that if he could wave a magic wand, decisions in the North Atlantic Council (NAC), where members vote, could be reached with a three-quarters majority rather than unanimously. In some circumstances, even that would be too slow: it can take three hours to get the NAC together. "If you have to convene the North Atlantic Council as a missile is flying to Manchester, it's bye-bye Manchester," notes Sandy Vershbow, a former NATO deputy secretary-general. Clear protocols for responses are needed, too.

Second, the alliance should take a hard look at its priorities. Currently it finds itself doing both beefed-up collective defence and crisis-management at the same time. It risks being pulled in too many directions so as to keep its diverse membership on board. Sooner rather than later it should confront tough strategic choices. Which missions could it drop? How much attention should it pay to areas of rising strategic importance, such as the Arctic? Should it continue to keep the door open to new members, or has its expansion reached its practical limits for now?

A fundamental realignment

The third shift in thinking is the one likely to matter most if NATO is to maintain its relevance: adjusting to China's rise. As America's strategic priorities pivot further towards the Pacific, what are the implications for the transatlantic alliance? The European allies are only just starting to become aware of how America's emerging rivalry with China could affect them—through wariness of Chinese 5G telecoms technology, for example, or of infrastructure investments through President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. Not all member countries are equally concerned about this, but they should be in no doubt about its future significance.

Small initial steps for NATO could include gestures such as opening a diplomatic dialogue with China and flying the flag in friendly countries in the Pacific, including Australia and Japan. The more global-minded European allies, notably France and Britain, are becoming more involved in freedom-of-navigation and overflight operations in the Pacific.

But eventually a clearer division of labour between Europeans and Americans will need to be considered. Stephen Walt of Harvard Kennedy School says there could be a time for "a new transatlantic bargain" between America and its European allies: America agrees to stay on in Europe, but at a reduced level of engagement; the Europeans agree to up their game in their own region and take on board America's concerns over China on trade and intellectual property. At the moment the chances for such a grand agreement look slim. It presupposes a shared view of the world that does not exist. Europe and America are at odds on many fronts. Mr Trump has described the EU as a "foe" on trade. The Europeans are making efforts to get round America's extraterritorial reach over sanctions on Iran.

And where would the leadership for an ambitious new division of labour come from? NATO's big players are all distracted: America by the Trump show, Britain by Brexit, France by protests and Italy's populists, Germany by the end of the Merkel era and Turkey by its temptations to wander away from Europe. In such circumstances, just staying together as allies looks like a heroic task.

Still, it would be foolish to underestimate NATO's ability to reinvent itself. It has done so before. If it wants to be in rude health at 100, this septuagenarian is due for another metamorphosis. ■

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