

Great Powers Competition in Europe during Turbulent Times and Small Powers Attempting of Manage their Security

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Abstract

The world is moving from unipolarity towards a multipolar system of great powers. How should smaller powers in Europe manage during those turbulent times of great power competition? This article argues that while it can be beneficial for smaller powers to participate in European integration and enhance their security via a defence alliance lead by a single great power, such as NATO, those smaller powers should in a multipolar world avoid unnecessary tensions and conflicts with other great powers in the system. Further expansion of NATO is highly questionable as it has already contributed the greatest conflict in Europe since World War II.

Keywords: Great power competition, small powers, European integration, defence alliances.

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1. Introduction

In the bipolar world during the Cold War there was competition between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union. NATO as defence alliance was formed by the western countries, while the Soviet Union, dominated by Russia, had the Soviet Republics and Satellite states united under the Warsaw Pact. NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries viewed each other's as mortal enemies.

The fall of the Soviet Union meant that the alliance under the Warsaw Pact dissolved and western organizations, most notably the EU and NATO, expanded. After the fall of the Soviet Union, we entered a unipolar world with the US as the most powerful country and the only remaining superpower.

Recently we have entered a multipolar world where Russia with its abundant natural resources, has to some extent recovered, and remains a military power with nuclear capabilities. It strongly opposes further EU and especially NATO expansion. China has grown and has the potential to become a much larger economy than the US if it achieves the per capita income level of Asian countries, such as South Korea and Singapore. In fact, in 2017 the Chinese economy became larger than the US economy when GDP is measured in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms.

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China's growing economy is likely to result in growing military power and possible interference in other regions outside Asia, including in Europe. How should European small powers behave in this changed world of great power competition?

2. Methodology

The methodology used in the article is the case study method. Compared to other research methods, a case study enables the researcher to examine the issues involved in greater depth (Yin 2009). Comparative analysis is used as it enables a researcher to assess and explain the political phenomenon among cases (Lancaster & Montinola 1997). It helps capture the effects of complex and interrelated causal influences and facilitates our understanding of political issues at national, regional, and international levels (Ragin 2014). Additionally, the literature on the comparative analysis is rich with suggestions on how such an inquiry should proceed (Lijphart 1975). Comparative country case studies involve analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across different country cases that can produce knowledge about how and why particular policies work or fail to work.

3. From bipolar to a unipolar to a multipolar world order

From 1945 to 1989 we lived in a bipolar world with two major superpowers dominating the system, namely the US and the Soviet Union. During this period, the so-called cold war, the US exercised what could be labeled as Europe first policy. Europe was the most important ally of the US ever since World War II ended.

Important alliances were formed during the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, followed by the US funded Marshall Plan and then the establishment of the US lead the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. The transatlantic alliance was key in US-European security cooperation with European countries relying on the so-called Article 5 guarantee provided by NATO.

The Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union fell in 1991. A unipolar system emerged between around 1990 to about 2017 with the US remaining the only superpower in the world. This period came to be known as the "unipolar moment."

Absent of threats from the Soviet Union and with a weak Russia, US interest in Europe diminished with talk about US pivot to Asia. The US supported EU expansion, not only including former satellite states of the Soviet Union, but also former Soviet Socialist Republics, the Baltic states.

No nation state in the EU, not even the largest EU member states, Germany, and France, had the wealth and the population to dominate Europe and challenge the US which also lead NATO and supported its expansion to the east in parallel with EU expansion. Even to date it is unknown how far the EU and NATO intend to expand.

Recently we have entered an era of a multipolar system with at least three great powers: (i) the US still the most powerful country economically and militarily,

(ii) China as rising economic and now also fast-growing military power², and finally, (iii) Russia, still a military power covering a huge landmass with natural resources and with nuclear capabilities.³ Prior to the Russian invasion into Ukraine, Russia was perceived stronger than it had been after fall of the Soviet Union, but significantly weaker than both the US and China.

4. Great power rivalry and the US pivot to Asia?

With reduced interest in Europe prior to the war in Ukraine, US interest grew in two key areas of the world: (i) In Asia primarily because of the rise of China and (ii) in the Persian Gulf because of oil. If China continues to rise economically it may compete with the US not only as it currently does in Asia, but increasingly in other parts of the world, including the Persian Gulf for the same reason as the US, i.e. for energy. If China manages to dominate Asia it may subsequently seek more influence in other regions of the world.

Given these changes will the US increasingly want to abandon Europe and if so, who will fill the vacuum? Does stronger China mean less US interest in Europe and weaker NATO, followed by growing Chinese influence in Europe? How should European small powers behave in this change world?

There is no question that US pivot to Asia has been delayed due to the war in Ukraine that at the time of writing has been going on for two and a half years. Russia is a powerful force in Europe, but it neither has the population nor the wealth to dominate the world, as the US did during the unipolar moment. But as great power Russia wants to maintain its status in a multipolar world where it is an important player and can influence Europe and other regions, especially in energy. Russia is also increasing its presence in the Arctic.

The US on the other hand wants to return to its supremacy in a unipolar world. If China continues to grow economically it has a chance to dominate all other great powers and become a new hegemon in a unipolar world. In other words, Russia can only hope for a multipolar world while the US and China dream of a return to a unipolar world.

The goal of the three great powers, the US, China, and Russia is not only to survive as great powers, but also to dominate their region and then, if possible, the other regions of the world. The US already dominates America and has a huge military presence worldwide.

A key reason why the US became so dominant after the fall of the Soviet Union was the fact that it already dominated its own region, America. It borders Canada from the north, Mexico from the south and the sea from the west and east. There is no obvious threat in proximity which with the US and this provides the US

² See for example: China has built the world's largest navy. Now what's Beijing going to do with it? <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/05/china/china-world-biggest-navy-intl-hnk-ml-dst/index.html>

³ See for example: Nuclear deterrence today <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/06/08/nuclear-deterrence-today/index.html>

with the necessary peace to be able to keep running round the world and interfere in other regions affairs. This included Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The US became a balancing power in Europe against the Soviet Union during the cold war until the Soviet Union collapsed. This left a power vacuum in Europe. At the same time the rise of China increasingly became a threat to the US as a security guarantor in Asia and resulted in US "Pivot to Asia" policy. China is the main threat to US supremacy in the world but the war in Ukraine has at least for some time diverted US attention from Asia to Europe.

China does not have a comparable situation in Asia as the US has in America. China borders fourteen countries and unlike the US is in proximity with military powers, including four nuclear powers. There are important countries in Asia that can alone or in groups challenge Chinese dominance in the region.

Japan is an economic and technological power and one of the largest economies in the world. It has disputes with China in the East China Sea and will seek to defend those interests alone or more likely in partnership with allies most notably the US. India has a population comparable to China but does not have the wealth to compete with China. However, as its per capita income grows India can in the longer-term challenge Chinese power.

Then there are smaller emerging powers in Asia such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam that do not necessarily have the same interests as China and oppose policies of the Chinese government most notably regarding control over the sea.

Examples of disputes in Asia are boarder disputes between China and India, disputes about Islands between China and Japan, and disputes in the South China Sea with countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam. In addition to this South Korea is a rising power that has disputes with North Korea that has been supported by China. China wants to keep North Korea as a buffer state between itself and South Korea that is supported by the US with US military presence.

Also, there are countries in proximity to Asia such as Australia and New Zealand that play an important role that influences China's status in Asia. Australia remains among the strongest allies of the US.

Given this situation China is not yet a regional hegemon in Asia in the same sense as the US in America. China has several issues to be resolved before it can dominate Asia and then focus on influencing or interfering into the affairs of other regions, such as Europe, like the US has done. Also, it needs to worry about US alliances in Asia, including Quad and AUKUS.

Russia can exercise more pressure on Europe, especially on countries in geographical proximity such as the Baltic States and Finland. Previously it used Europe's energy dependency to pressure Europe including the most powerful European Country, Germany.⁴ The Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany

⁴ See for example: <https://www.dw.com/en/nord-stream-2-pipeline-row-highlights-germanys-energy-dependence-on-russia/a-47344788>

across the Baltic Sea caused tensions both within the EU, NATO and with the US and has now been severely damaged and is not operational.

5. China's growing interest in Europe

China is already showing increased interest in European affairs including via its Belt and Road initiative. Hungary was the first European country to participate in the initiative.⁵ In addition to being a member of the EU and NATO, Hungary has developed good relations with both China and Russia. Greece announced in 2018 that it was joining China's Belt and Road Initiative, including a large port investment in Piraeus that it wants to make the biggest port in Europe.⁶ Another example was Chinese port investment in Trieste Italy.⁷ Recently Italy withdrew from the Belt and Road Initiative.⁸

For an economy based on export lead growth, access to the EU internal market is critical for China so entering the market via Hungary is invaluable. For Russia it is important to have an ally like Hungary within the EU. China claims that the initiative is a 'win-win' cooperation for the countries involved and the EU while others maintain that China is using a 'divide and conquer' strategy to benefit China at Europe's expense. Many Central and Eastern European countries view EU-Chinese relations as mutually beneficial and they have formed a platform (17+1) to work closer with China.⁹ There have however also been tensions. Lithuania withdrew from the initiative and now the two other Baltic States, Estonia and Latvia, have also withdrawn.¹⁰

Some leading international relations scholars such as Chicago University professor John Mearsheimer maintain that the US should leave Europe militarily.¹¹ This is understandable given the demands faced by the US in Asia with the rise of China, but one could also argue that the US needs sufficient presence in Europe to balance power in Europe as Russia could become stronger. If the US leaves Europe completely, it may lose its credibility completely, and be viewed as an unreliable partner that cannot necessarily return to Europe again as a trusted ally. Europeans need to be careful in their dealings with the US. The US is for example beginning to

⁵ See for example: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/how-hungarys-path-leads-to-chinas-belt-and-road/>

⁶ See for example: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/15/china-wants-to-turn-greece-piraeus-port-into-europe-biggest.html>

⁷ See for example: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/world/europe/italy-trieste-china-belt-road.html> and

⁸ See further: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/italy-withdraws-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>

⁹ See further: <http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/>

¹⁰ See further: See further: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/latvia-estonia-withdraw-china-cooperation-group-2022-08-11/>

¹¹ See for example: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-nato-still-be-relevant-in-the-future/>

show interest in using NATO to fight China as the NATO Brussels Summit Communiqué from 14 June 2021 shows.

China's stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security. We are concerned by those coercive policies which stand in contrast to the fundamental values enshrined in the Washington Treaty. China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and a larger number of sophisticated delivery systems to establish a nuclear triad. It is opaque in implementing its military modernisation and its publicly declared military-civil fusion strategy. It is also cooperating militarily with Russia, including through participation in Russian exercises in the Euro-Atlantic area. We remain concerned with China's frequent lack of transparency and use of disinformation. We call on China to uphold its international commitments and to act responsibly in the international system, including in the space, cyber, and maritime domains, in keeping with its role as a major power (NATO 2021).

In the July 2024 NATO Washington Summit Declaration China is described as "a decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine." (NATO 2024a)

Arguably Europe should to the extent possible avoid open confrontation with China. It is also questionable if European NATO member states should allow themselves to be drawn into US-Chinese security competition in Asia. And Europe is divided on the issue. Before the war in Ukraine broke out French president Macron wanted a European Army and a Europe to emerge as a major power in a multipolar world more independent of the US. This view was not widely supported by EU and European NATO member states that trust the US better for their defense than European powers such as Germany and France.

NATO's frequent demand that China and Russia should follow the rules-based international order sounds naïve as those great powers, especially China, will want to write its own rules and from its own institutions and not follow prescriptions from Washington, DC. China is increasingly using BRICS as a forum to form alliances with countries outside the West. NATO is opening an office in Tokyo, Japan. And NATO is not only expanding in Asia. During the NATO Washington meeting in July 2024 it was decided to open a NATO Liaison Office in Amman Jordania (NATO 2024a), a region where security risks are very high.

6. Small power behavior in a multipolar world of great powers

How should small powers in Europe behave in a changing world of great power rivalry? Here are some considerations: (i) Smaller states must find their place in a world that has moved from unipolarity and to multipolarity. In this new situation policymakers must address the possible decreasing influence of the US in many places around the world including in the Pacific region and the increasing power of China and the instability Russia poses in Europe. Less powerful US in relative terms means that it may no longer be able or willing to serve as a security guarantor in Europe because of tensions in the Pacific that it needs to attend to, and consequently

it eventually may also be unable to serve as a security guarantor in the Pacific. (ii) While smaller European states should maintain to the extent possible good relations with the US they can hardly neglect all economic opportunities that can be found on the Chinese market.

Some European countries may see China as a potential source of capital and participate in 17 + 1 (now 14+1 after the departure of the Baltic States), since the EU may be unable to supply them with the grants and loans that they need in the future. The initiative is to promote business and investment relations between China and the participating countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The initiative lumps together EU and non-EU states into one group which may be a source of irritation for the EU. As Pendrakowska (2018) points out 'Brussels tends to emphasize that the 16 + 1 platform undermines the EU unity by rule and divide tactics' (Pendrakowska 2018). The participating countries were: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. The three Baltic states have already left as stated above. The possibility of gaining better access to Chinese market seems important and should be included in the discussion about these countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

There will be obstacles on the way especially with investment since the EU and China operate under different systems, e.g. rules for procurements as well as environmental standards. While the Chinese are willing to construct large projects from a to z, EU systems do not allow this without competition under which companies from other countries are allowed to participate in a competitive bidding. Projects in Europe need to follow EU standards that are different from those in China. China is more interested in large projects than bits and pieces or small projects. There are also differences in planning in European democracies where an elected official serves for a few years as compared to China with a single party government and a leader that has been selected for life.

In China actions are typically planned for at least a decade, whereas in Europe they are often planned to the next election. In such situations the main activities of the parties are concentrated on maintaining power. The concern here is not only that China thinks and plans decades ahead and Europe thinks mostly months ahead, but that these two standpoints need to be brought together and need to form a common strategy.

Another important phenomenon is the asymmetry of expectancies that could perhaps be reduced by promoting communication between scientists, academics, journalists, etc. This could help avoid misunderstanding and help in building a more shared view between European and China's counterparts what is realistic and help manage expectations. European policymakers tend to concentrate on short-term goals, whereas Chinese political system allows more time to achieve a bigger success with grand plans that take decades to implement.

The Three Seas Initiative, also known as the Baltic, Adriatic, Black Sea initiative or simply as the Three Seas, is a forum of thirteen states, in the European

Union, running along a north-south axis from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic and Black Seas in Central and Eastern Europe. The Initiative aims to create a regional dialogue on questions affecting the member states and seeks to facilitate interconnectivity on energy and infrastructure projects in Central and Eastern Europe. Led by Poland and Romania the participating countries are: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The Three Seas Initiative is supported by the US. Unlike the Chinese supported initiative discussed above, the Three Seas Initiative only includes EU member states. There are EU countries that participate in both initiatives. Those are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

So, there are countries that are willing to work with both China and the US under two different initiatives to promote the reconstruction of Eastern and Central Europe

7. Small power strategy in multipolar world of great powers

In a multipolar world of great powers, small powers should avoid having themselves dragged into situations where they can only work with and become totally dependent on a single great power. A great power would often want to have small powers totally on their side and under their control.

During an official visit to Iceland in September 2019, then U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence stated when meeting the Icelandic media that ‘[t]he United States is grateful for the stand Iceland took rejecting China's Belt and Road financial investment in Iceland. We truly believe that it is essential that we strengthen the ties that bind nations across this region of the world. And for Iceland to take that stand was an important step and one that we greatly welcome.’¹²

This was an embarrassing statement since the government of Iceland had NOT rejected to participate in the Chinese lead Belt and Road (BRI) initiative.¹³ But this was a clear statement from the US that Iceland better reject this initiative if it wanted to be in good standing vis-à-vis the US government. The Chinese ambassador to Iceland, Jin Zhijian, said that Pence’s statement that the Icelandic government had rejected participation in the BRI was ‘fake news’ and that the purpose of the Vice-President’s comments was to interrupt and damage the bilateral relationship between China and Iceland.¹⁴ This shows how tense the US – Chinese relations are and one wonders if the US Vice president was attempting to engage in decision making for the government of Iceland.

It is notable that Iceland had already in 2016 made the decision to join the Chinese lead Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) along with all the other Nordic countries. Many NATO member states such as Belgium, Croatia,

¹² See further: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-vice-president-press-gaggle-reykjavik-iceland>

¹³ See further: <https://www.isdp.eu/pressure-in-the-arctic-china-iceland-relations/>

¹⁴ See further: <https://www.ruv.is/frett/segir-fullyrdingar-pence-meinfysinn-rogburd>

Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Spain also joined the AIIB. It is also notable that the large European NATO member states France, Germany, Italy and the UK joined the AIIB. Some other European states that are not members of NATO such as Austria, Belarus, Ireland, Malta, Serbia and Switzerland joined the AIIB, see Table 1.¹⁵ Why would Iceland not explore cooperation with China like those countries did via the AIIB?

European member states in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

Table 1

2015 Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom
2016 Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Malta, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland
2017 Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Spain
2018 Romania
2019 Belarus, Belgium, Greece, Serbia
2021 Croatia

Source: AIIB (2024)

Vice president Pence was also critical of Russia’s involvement in that Arctic during this visit. Iceland had for a long-time important trade relations with the Soviet Union even at the height of the Cold War and had important trade relations with Russia prior to the sanctions due to the war in Ukraine. Why would Iceland as a small state not continue with such trade in addition exploring further trade and investment from China, and also Russia if relations with Russia can be normalized with a negotiated peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia?

Iceland participates in EU sanctions against Russia because of the war in Ukraine and it is likely that it will take a long time to repair relations between Europe and Russia. However, the very idea that Ukraine should become a NATO member state in 2008 was an ill thought through proposition and unnecessary confrontation with Russia at that time (See for example Hilmarsson 2019). This decision contributed to a crisis in Ukraine since 2014. It would have been better for Ukraine to take smaller gradual steps towards EU integration and perhaps reach a partnership agreement with NATO. Full NATO membership was untimely in 2008 and is still untimely in 2024, sixteen years later. Ukraine is now getting destroyed and has no immediate prospects to join either NATO or the EU.

Small states should try to maintain some neutrality in their dealing with great powers and try to avoid being drawn into great power tensions. Good relations with the US are important for countries that participate in US lead NATO. Finland and Sweden also participated in NATO military exercises before those countries joined NATO, Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024.

Also, many European countries participate in European integration, albeit at different levels, and need to consider their commitments with the EU.

¹⁵ See further: <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/governance/members-of-bank/index.html>

But that does not mean that they cannot and should not cooperate with China in the future.

Avoiding trade and investments with China if it continues to grow economically is also practically impossible because Chinese trade and investments will be such a large part of world trade and investments. Good relations with Russia are also important in the long term if a settlement because of the war in Ukraine can be reached.

In fact, given the potential growth of China as becoming the largest economy in the world, it is surprising that the US did not make more efforts to settle its disputes with Russia prior to the war in Ukraine. The same could be said about Europe that needs stability. Now China and Russia have close partnership that is a challenge for the US and Europe.

Further EU and especially NATO expansion should be reconsidered as it can result in confrontations with Russia and now also China. While European NATO countries should be open with doing business with China, they should for practical reasons avoid having those relations so close that it creates serious problems with the US and within the EU. This is a tricky balancing act, but relying on relations on one of the great powers only would be a mistake.

8. Economic and Military Alliances – EU and NATO Expansion.

The European Union (EU) has expanded three times since the fall of the Soviet Union, in 2004, 2007 and 2013. Several European countries seek membership, see Table 2 below. Currently the EU has 27 member states.

EU member states joining the EU after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991

Table 2

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2004 Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. 2. 2007 Bulgaria and Romania 3. 2013 Croatia
<p>EU candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine.</p>

Source: European Union (2024)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has expanded seven times since the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1999, 2004, 2009, 2017, 2020, 2023 and 2024 and a few countries in addition seek membership, see Table 3 below. NATO currently has 32 member states.

NATO member states joining NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991

Table 3

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1999 Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. 2. 2004 Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia 3. 2009 Albania and Croatia
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4. 2017 Montenegro
5. 2020 North Macedonia
6. 2023 Finland
7. 2024 Sweden
Countries currently seeking NATO membership: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine.

Source: NATO (2024b)

The Soviet Union had its own defense alliance under the Warsaw Pact. That alliance was abolished when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Eventually all the Warsaw Pact Soviet satellite states and the Baltic states, previously Soviet republics, joined NATO, see Table 3 and 4.

Warsaw Pact membership, 1955-1991

Table 4

1955	Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union.
1968	Albania withdraws.
1991	The break-up of the Warsaw Pact was quickly followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Eventually all the Warsaw Pact Soviet satellite states and the Baltic states, previously Soviet republics, joined NATO.

Source: NATO (2024c)

The EU has a mutual defense clause (Article 42.7 TEU) for its member states and NATO have the so-called Article 5 Guarantee.

The EU mutual defense clause states that: “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.”¹⁶

The wording “**by all the means in their power**” demonstrates a firm commitment to defend other members of the EU, but it is also notable that the EU does not have any common army, there are only national armies.

Many EU member states are also members of NATO. The clause also states that „Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation“.¹⁷

NATO was established in Washington in 1949. The primary aim of the North Atlantic Treaty – NATO’s founding treaty – was to create a pact of mutual assistance to counter the risk that the Soviet Union would seek to extend its control of Eastern

¹⁶ See further: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_en.pdf

¹⁷ See further: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_/sede200612mutualdefsolidarityclauses_en.pdf

Europe to other parts of the continent. The Soviet Union had its own defence alliance the Warsaw Pact.

Under the NATO treaty, every participating country agreed that this form of solidarity was at the heart of the treaty, effectively making Article 5 on collective defence a key component of the alliance. Article 5 provides that if a NATO ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the ally attacked.

NATO Article 5 reads and follows: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”¹⁸

The wording “**such action as it deems necessary**” is not as decisive as in the EU mutual defense clause. However, NATO is backed by national militaries of member states where the US is by far strongest and leads NATO.

9. Conclusions

After the fall of the Soviet Union the world moved from a bipolarity with two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, to a world of unipolarity with the United States dominating. Now the world is moving towards multipolarity with three great powers, the United States, China and Russia. Of those three Russia is the weakest great power.

A world of multiple great powers, that engage in security competition with each other, is more dangerous for smaller European powers than when the world was unipolar with only one great power, the United States. How should smaller European powers behave during those turbulent times of great power competition?

This article argues that while it can be beneficial for smaller powers to participate in European integration via the EU and enhance their security profile via a defence alliance such NATO, led by the United States, those same powers should avoid unnecessary tensions and conflicts with other great powers. Further expansion of NATO is questionable as it has already resulted the largest war in Europe since World War II.

While many smaller powers in Europe are allied with the United States via NATO, they can also benefit by engaging in trade with other great powers such as China and cooperate via institutions such as the Chinese led AIIB. They, however, also need to consider the interests of the other member states in the EU and NATO,

¹⁸ See further: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm#:~:text=Collective%20defence%20means%20that%20anof%20the%20North%20Atlantic%20Treaty.

as well as to avoid excessive debt dependency. They also need to maintain good relations with the US.

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