



Build Resilience for an Era of Shocks

by Jim Townsend and Anca Agachi

NATO needs a fourth core task to protect allied populations from nontraditional threats like COVID and climate change.

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The Chronicle of a Threat Foretold

The novel coronavirus is one of the most formative events of the twenty-first century. Despite warnings about pandemics from public health and intelligence officials, the world was caught off guard by COVID-19. Though they had experience containing MERS and SARS, scientists and doctors had to learn about COVID-19 while trying to control it. Further, governments across the globe were forced to make impossible decisions between saving lives and saving economies.

Unfortunately, threats like COVID-19 might be a blueprint of the future. A rise in environmentally destabilizing human activity and extreme economic inequality, coupled with patchy investments in social safety nets and frail governance, have degraded human security conditions around the world. This combustible combination will likely result in a rise in *non-traditional security threats*. By definition, these threats are transnational, impacting entire regions or continents; systemic, resulting from an accumulation of widespread permissive and causal factors; and outside the realm of traditional military concepts and operations, in that they are normally associated with development issues. Non-traditional security threats include climate change, irregular migration, resource scarcity, criminality, and of course pandemics. Their pattern is similar: in the short-term, they lead to loss of life in catastrophic events; however, more perniciously, they undermine societal functioning and therefore weaken deterrence capabilities in the long-term. In light of this trend, COVID-19 might be just the canary in the coal mine.

Non-traditional threats are particularly complex because they can have a threat-multiplying effect,

leading to cascading economic, political, and security shocks, as COVID-19 has shown. They can also decrease the efficacy of conventional deterrence measures by showing potential adversaries that an attack in the midst of such destabilizing circumstances would achieve more significant destruction. The rise of non-traditional security threats therefore can exacerbate existing conventional challenges, such as those posed by Russia and China. In this world, disruption will become the norm, not the exception.

The scope, scale, and impact of future non-traditional threats require NATO allies to think outside the framework of traditional security concepts and prepare the Alliance for missions that do not neatly fit an Article 5 scenario. To this end, the Alliance should approve a fourth core task focused on resilience, preparing the Alliance to protect the populations of member states against novel threats while reinforcing collective defense.

NATO and the Resilience Challenge

Resilience is enshrined in NATO's DNA through Article 3 of the Washington Treaty,¹ and has been developed through additional guidelines at NATO Summits, namely the 2016 baseline resilience guidelines (and associated 2017 evaluation criteria).² These guidelines are meant to support continuity of government, the provision of essential services in member states, and civil support to the military, in the event of a major shock.³ While initially devised to prepare for traditional military attacks, recent events such as Russian hybrid activities and terrorist attacks have put a greater

1 Article 3 calls for the Allies to "separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." The North Atlantic Treaty, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 4, 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

2 Ibid.

3 "Resilience and Article 3," NATO, March 31, 2020. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

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Allied troops unload 10,000 protective medical suits donated by the Czech Republic to Spain, as part of allied efforts to combat the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. (Source: NATO)



emphasis on civilian preparedness as a key component of resilience.⁴

However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, NATO's current resilience architecture cannot cope with multiple disruptive events, especially those of a non-traditional nature. In response to the pandemic, NATO jolted into action its emergency response capabilities to support allies with logistics and planning, set up field hospitals, transport patients, and disinfect public areas and border crossings.⁵ Allied institutions such as the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) helped to coordinate allied requests for supplies and made military assets available for the pandemic response. Even though NATO's existing mechanisms helped member states respond to the crisis, they failed to achieve the fundamental aims of resilience: minimize damage, restore stability quickly, and catalyze improved strategies for similar challenges.⁶

The pandemic showed that NATO's resilience framework suffers from several shortcomings. First, it is highly state-centric, while effective resilience-building measures should employ extensive cooperation with the private sector. Businesses, not governments, own many of the assets that could be deployed to respond to a major strategic shock. Further, civil society's trust and cooperation is essential for any effective disaster response. Second, NATO's current framework uses a traditional security lens, focuses on states first, and stipulates that the response to a threat should only take place once a certain level of risk has been met. However, the instability created by pandemics, climate change, or cyber-attacks is slow-moving, making long-term prevention a more effective strategy than crisis response. Finally, even though resilience has become increasingly relevant, it is still under-resourced. NATO does little to enforce investment levels or allocation of output, compared to traditional defense spending. Combined, these issues leave NATO with a weak mandate to task allies

4 Wolf-Diether Roepke, Hasit Thanky, "Resilience: The First Line of Defence," NATO Review, February 27, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/02/27/resilience-the-first-line-of-defence/index.html>.

5 "NATO's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," NATO, accessed September 9, 2020, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/200401-factsheet-COVID-19_en.pdf. More recently, the United States donated ventilators for the NATO stockpile in anticipation of a second COVID-19 wave. "Coronavirus response: United States delivers ventilators for NATO stockpile," NATO, September 18, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178096.htm?selectedLocale=en.

6 Resilience is "the capacity of a community or system to meet disruption or shock by minimizing damage and quickly restoring stability, while also using the experience to develop strategies for future challenges and opportunities." Peter Engelke, *Crafting a Resilient World: A Strategy for Navigating Turbulence*, Atlantic Council, 2017, <https://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/crafting-a-resilient-world/>.

to enhance prevention and national preparedness, the inability to mitigate the deep and wide impact of non-traditional security threats, and insufficient capacity to manage and quickly scale a response to upcoming strategic shocks.

A New Conceptualization of Security

To meet this new security environment, NATO needs to help allies build a functional, forward-looking, and funded resilience architecture. To do so, the next NATO Strategic Concept should approve a fourth core task focused on resilience. This would allow the Alliance to help member states strengthen their resilience at home and acquire national (or NATO-owned) resources to assist each other in an emergency. This would prepare NATO to respond to upcoming non-traditional security threats while also reinforcing conventional defense and deterrence.

The new, strengthened resilience framework should be guided by several principles. NATO should continue to build on the concept of resilience as being on the “left side” of a shock⁷ and shape the security environment before another catastrophic event takes place. Second, this effort should be more holistic, looking beyond existing resilience baseline requirements to the protection of coastal areas, water management systems, etc., and enhancing cooperation with private sector stakeholders and civil society. Finally, NATO should conceptualize resilience as a peacetime effort, which empowers people and societies within member states to work together continuously to address sources of vulnerability, especially those areas below the threshold of the use of force.

In order to move forward, new ministerial guidance must be given to NATO headquarters to evaluate the cascading effects of non-traditional threats and assess NATO’s level of ambition in implementing this fourth core task.⁸ However, properly resourcing this new resilience framework will require the development of resilience capability goals for each ally to meet, at the national and collective level, as part of the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP). These goals should then be tailored to the needs of individual allies, allocated based on fair share and reasonable burden, and reviewed as part of a process that holds allies accountable to their commitments. Common funds can also help allies acquire NATO-owned assets when needed. Finally, the Framework Nations Concept could be used as a model for developing resilience capabilities.⁹

Because non-traditional threats require civil-military coordination, an emphasis on NATO-European Union (EU) cooperation should be at the heart of the Alliance’s efforts to deal with this adapted approach to the security environment. The European Union already has strategies and capabilities to prevent and address the underlying causes of strategic vulnerability, as well as immense civilian regulatory power in sectors ranging from energy to technology. Harnessing that capacity and aligning it with NATO’s goals is essential for a strong resilience framework. Therefore, the NATO-EU Joint Declaration of 2018¹⁰ should be updated to include resilience in the face of non-traditional security threats, developed through cooperation on capability development and operational coordination. The updates might emphasize, among other issues, aligning investments in innovative green technologies (which can be transferred across

7 The concept of “left side” of a shock refers to the building of readiness before a major disruptive event. Wolf-Diether Roepke, Hasit Thankey, “Resilience: The First Line of Defence,” NATO, February 27, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2019/02/27/resilience-the-first-line-of-defence/index.html#:~:text=The%20current%20unpredictable%20security%20environment,impact%20societies%20and%20critical%20infrastructure>.

8 *Analytic Implications of the NATO Defence Planning Process*, NATO, April 2010, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/12fc/08cfbbe9d763f1115ff5d665957a1ec24df5.pdf>.

9 Rainer L. Glatz, Martin Zapfe, “NATO’s Framework Nations Concept,” CSS ETH Zurich, December 2017, <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse218-EN.pdf>

10 “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” NATO, July 10, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm. It must be noted that progress has been made in building resilience against hybrid threats, terrorism and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear threats. See “Fourth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by NATO and EU Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017,” NATO, June 17, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl12014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/190617-4th-Joint-progress-report-EU-NATO-eng.pdf.

the civil-military divide) and implementing common standards for public health trainings.

What would this look like in practice? Consider, for example, climate change—a non-traditional threat whose consequences will occur at far greater frequency than pandemics, and for which the Alliance should start preparing now. NATO should study the impact of climate change and its resulting crises on allied security, following the model of seminal studies like those by the Center for Naval Analysis.¹¹ NATO should also examine its own impact on climate change and how the Alliance could minimize its environmental footprint. Instead of waiting to respond to extreme weather events and drought-enabled conflicts that may take place in allied countries, NATO could leverage its new core task and expanded NDPP to prepare for disaster by acquiring and building stockpiles of emergency equipment and necessary assets. Working alongside the EU and national emergency management agencies, NATO could help European allies plan measures ranging from decentralized energy systems to coastal hazard protection methods to blunt the impact of the next climate disaster. A consistent schedule of natural disaster training exercises would guarantee that when a crisis does occur, clear responsibilities and required information exist within the system, including a defined role for NATO. Finally, a reinforced EADRCC should help coordinate immediate relief efforts, while NATO's Civil Emergency Planning Committee (CEPC) should develop a continuous, dynamic “lessons learned” program. Such a program would integrate the knowledge gathered from NATO's responses to various strategic shocks into existing strategies.

This shift in the Alliance's culture and architecture would yield several benefits. First, by adding an adequately resourced fourth core task focused on resilience, NATO could effectively conceptualize how to address non-traditional security threats, and do so in time to prevent and mitigate future COVID-like scenarios. Threats like climate change are a certainty; the only unknown is the level of damage they will cause. This variable depends on current efforts to adapt and bolster allies' resilience, a capacity thus far underutilized at NATO headquarters.¹² By starting now and using an improved and expanded resilience framework, NATO will be better prepared for *and* better able to bounce “forward” from future non-traditional threats.

Second, improving resilience is essential across the entire threat spectrum and reinforces traditional defense and deterrence.¹³ Proactive investments in community resilience are helpful not only in preventing non-traditional threats, but also in ensuring societal and state continuity and resistance in the case of an armed attack. Such measures can also serve to deter aggression by convincing adversaries their plans will not have the desired impact. In this new security environment, civilian and military components are intrinsically connected. As an ETH Zurich report notes, “solutions that mix military and non-military elements,” and cooperation across silos are necessary to achieve a “whole-of-society approach to security.”¹⁴

Finally, investing in resilience saves significant taxpayer money. Estimated savings resulting from the implementation of resilience frameworks vary between \$4 to \$6 in return for every \$1 invested.¹⁵ The alternative, as COVID-19 has shown, is untenable. According to estimates, the pandemic will “end up costing between \$8.1

11 CNA Military Advisory Board, “National Security and the Accelerating Risks of Climate Change,” *Center for Naval Analysis*, 2014, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/pdf/MAB_5-8-14.pdf. Recent efforts at NATO HQ seem to suggest the Alliance is moving to consider the operational impacts of climate change. For more context, see “Secretary General participates in NATO seminar on security and the environment”, September 17, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178028.htm?selectedLocale=en.

12 Rickard Söder, “NATO in a Climate of Change,” SIPRI, February 14, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2020/nato-climate-change>.

13 Roepke, Thankey, “Resilience: The First Line of Defence.”

14 Tim Prior, “NATO: Pushing Boundaries for Resilience,” CSS ETH Zurich, September 2017, <https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse213-EN.pdf>.

15 “\$4.2 Trillion Can Be Saved by Investing in More Resilient Infrastructure, New World Bank Report Finds,” World Bank, June 19, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/06/19/42-trillion-can-be-saved-by-investing-in-more-resilient-infrastructure-new-world-bank-report-finds>; Benjamin Schneider, “Disaster Resilience Saves Six Times as Much as It Costs,” *Bloomberg*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-17/disaster-mitigation-saves-even-more-than-we-thought>.

and \$15.8 trillion globally—roughly 500 times as costly as what it would take to invest in proposed preventive measures.”¹⁶ The conclusion is clear: responding to crises instead of preventing them is exceptionally more expensive. While this holds true in any economic environment, it is particularly relevant in the post-COVID-19 world defined by slumping economic growth, ballooning debt, and decreasing defense budgets.¹⁷ While nearly incalculable, these numbers do not consider intangible losses, such as strained NATO political cohesion or waning public support for the Alliance when it cannot adequately handle a crisis. When every dollar counts, the smart investment is resilience.

In a complex environment where it must grapple with multiple, interrelated strategic shocks and a combination of traditional and non-traditional threats, NATO has only one option: transform to meet the moment. As the Alliance considers how to adapt today for tomorrow’s challenges as part of the NATO 2030 process,¹⁸ one solution can help it “stay strong militarily, be more united politically, and take a broader approach globally”¹⁹: including resilience as a fourth core task.

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16 Jeremy Shwab, “Fighting COVID-19 Could Cost 500 Times as Much as Pandemic Prevention Measures,” WEFForum, August 3, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/pandemic-fight-costs-500x-more-than-preventing-one-future/>.

17 Doug Berenson, Dominik Kimla, and Alix Leboulanger, “Defense Spending and COVID-19: Implications On Government Finance and National Security,” Avascent, April 15, 2020, <https://www.avascent.com/news-insights/white-papers/defense-spending-and-covid-19-implications-on-government-finance-and-national-security/>.

18 In June 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg launched NATO 2030, an ambitious new effort to transform the alliance for the future (see “Secretary General Launches NATO 2030 to Make Our Strong Alliance Even Stronger” NATO, June 8, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176193.htm). In recent speeches on the effort, the Secretary General has emphasized the importance of resilience in an environment dominated by unpredictability (see “NATO Secretary General highlights the importance of resilience”, NATO, October 7, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178624.htm?selectedLocale=en%20-%E2%80%93resilience).

19 David A. Wemer, “NATO Secretary General Unveils His Vision for the Alliance’s Future,” *New Atlanticist*, Atlantic Council, June 8, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nato-secretary-general-unveils-his-vision-for-the-alliances-future/>.