

## RESEARCH BRIEF

# Understanding NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area

May 20, 2024 | Sean Monaghan, Katherine Kjellström Elgin, and Sara Bjerg Moller

NATO, the largest and most powerful military alliance in history, turned seventy-five in April. In July, the leaders of NATO will return to the city where its founding document, the Washington Treaty, was signed in 1949. Most people have heard of NATO. Fewer know its most important document is the Strategic Concept, which is updated every decade or so, and sets the Alliance's strategy.<sup>1</sup> An even smaller group know about NATO's "Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area."

The DDA—or the "Deter and Defend" strategy, as it is known in alliance circles—is the centerpiece of NATO's dramatic "back to the future" transformation in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The DDA has helped the Alliance be more forward-leaning in its defense and deterrence missions. For example, before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, several DDA measures were implemented to counter Russian attempts to destabilize Ukraine and undermine Allied cohesion.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2022, the DDA has been the linchpin in NATO's efforts to deter Vladimir Putin from expanding his war of aggression beyond Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> As NATO's website explains, "The DDA Concept provides a single, coherent framework for NATO Allies to contest, deter and defend against the Alliance's main threats."<sup>5</sup>

Yet even for NATO watchers, the DDA is a puzzle in at least three ways. First, despite being "at the center of the Alliance's unprecedented post-Cold War" transformation, there was until recently little information about it.<sup>6</sup> Second, the timing of the DDA was also strange, as it was agreed to two years before the Strategic Concept it technically sits under.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the concept introduces a theory of success for deterring Russia that differs from previous strategies in both method and timing.

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<sup>1</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (Brussels: NATO, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> "Deter And Defend - An Overview," NATO SHAPE Public Affairs Office, September 29, 2022, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2022/deter-and-defend-an-overview>; Sean Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO's New Strategic Concept," *War on the Rocks*, August 23, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-sword-the-shield-and-the-hedgehog-strengthening-deterrence-in-natos-new-strategic-concept/>.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen R. Covington, "NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA)," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, August 2, 2023, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/natos-concept-deterrence-and-defence-euro-atlantic-area-dda>.

<sup>4</sup> Covington, "NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA)."

<sup>5</sup> "Deterrence and defence," What we do, NATO, last updated October 10, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_133127.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Covington, "NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA)."

<sup>7</sup> Both the DDA and the 2022 Strategic Concept were informed by the 2019 military strategy.

These novelties, alongside the political momentum that the writing and Alliance approval of the DDA provided, helped NATO allies respond quickly in 2021 to Russia’s impending full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, the theory behind the DDA is only as useful as the capabilities behind them. Thus, the critical question for NATO in Washington will be a familiar one: can European allies do more for their own defense?

## What is the DDA?

Simply put, the DDA is NATO’s strategic framework for a new era of confrontation with Russia. In the short term, the DDA guided and enabled NATO’s actions before and immediately after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In the longer term, the concept is intended to guide all subsequent decisions regarding posture, plans, command and control, and capabilities as the alliance revitalizes deterrence and defense in the face of Russian revanchism.

The roots of the DDA can be traced back to 2014.<sup>8</sup> After Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, NATO allies agreed to a range of measures in response. Long-term measures centered on raising defense investment to at least 2 percent of GDP by 2024. Short-term efforts included, among others:

- the 2014 “Readiness Action Plan,” which tripled the size of the high readiness NATO Response Force (NRF) to around 40,000 personnel;<sup>9</sup>
- establishing four “Enhanced Forward Presence” (eFP) multinational battlegroups in the Baltic states and Poland in 2016. Four more eFP missions—located in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia—were added in March 2022 after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine;<sup>10</sup>
- and the 2018 “NATO Readiness Initiative” to increase the readiness of existing forces available to deploy at short notice. Specifically, allies committed to having 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 naval combat vessels ready to use within 30 days by 2020.<sup>11</sup>

However, rather than being driven by a top-down strategy, these measures appeared somewhat piecemeal and bottom-up. Part of the reason for the lack of robust political consultations at the time, exemplified by President Macron’s infamous 2019 criticism that the Alliance was “braindead,” was the uncertainty stemming from Trump Administration’s approach to NATO.<sup>12</sup> NATO’s overall approach at the time was still driven by the 2010 strategic concept, which was fast becoming irrelevant—not least because it proposed “a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia.”<sup>13</sup> To deal with the rapidly changing context, NATO’s military authorities agreed on a new classified military strategy in 2019.<sup>14</sup> The DDA, adopted in 2020, was created to implement this strategy and consists of two main elements:

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<sup>8</sup> “NATO Ready for the Future: Adapting the Alliance (2018-2019),” NATO, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2019\\_11/20191129\\_191129-adaptation\\_2018\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_11/20191129_191129-adaptation_2018_2019_en.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> “Readiness Action Plan,” What we do, NATO, last updated September 1, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_119353.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm).

<sup>10</sup> “NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance,” What we do, NATO, last updated December 8, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm).

<sup>11</sup> *NATO Readiness Initiative* (Brussels: NATO, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> “NATO is becoming braindead,” *The Economist*, November 7, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> *NATO Strategic Concept* (Brussels: NATO, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> “NATO Chiefs of Defence discuss future Alliance adaptation,” News, NATO, last updated May 22, 2019, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_166244.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_166244.htm).

- a framework of deterrent activities in peacetime, known as SACEUR’s Strategic Directive; and
- a plan for crisis and conflict, known as SACEUR’s area-of-operations wide Strategic Plan.<sup>15</sup>

The Strategic Directive is intended to formalize NATO’s shift to peacetime deterrence and greater emphasis on Alliance preparedness. This is signaled and practiced through what NATO has taken to calling “vigilance activity.”<sup>16</sup> This includes everything from the eFP missions in east and central Europe to increased intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities, multinational exercises, and other tasks which improve strategic awareness and force readiness. Perhaps most significantly, the Strategic Directive gives SACEUR the authority to deploy elements of the NRF in peacetime, without approval by the North Atlantic Council. Since the end of the Cold War, high readiness forces have generally been activated only in a crisis. The DDA has changed this.

The second element of the DDA is about having credible plans in place to defend allies. The DDA “family of plans” includes strategic, operational, and domain-specific plans, all geared toward helping the Alliance prepare for, and respond to, a range of contingencies.<sup>17</sup> The three new regional defense plans—covering northern, central, and southern Europe—were formally approved at last year’s summit in Vilnius. Strategic and domain-specific plans also sit alongside the regional plans and detail issues such as logistics and sustainment across the entire operational theatre.<sup>18</sup> As U.S. Army General Christopher Cavoli, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, has stated: “The DDA family of plans is really the ‘how’ of how the alliance will operate in peace, crisis, and war to provide for our collective defense.”<sup>19</sup>

NATO’s efforts to develop and agree on the DDA paid off when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Guided and enabled by the DDA, NATO’s immediate response to the invasion centered around the activation of its defense plans to place the NATO Response Force—over 40,000 troops plus air and naval assets—under SACEUR’s command: an unprecedented step in NATO’s history.<sup>20</sup> This was complemented by new deployments such as the four new battlegroups in the east, a strengthened maritime posture, enhanced air policing, and a new Air Shielding air defense mission.<sup>21</sup> Allies also stepped up the scale and tempo of multinational exercises.<sup>22</sup> Examples include Air Defender 23—the largest air exercise in NATO’s history, led by Germany—and Steadfast Defender 24, the largest NATO exercise since the end of the Cold War.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept* (Norfolk: Allied Command Transformation, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> “NATO Enhanced Vigilance Activity - EASTERN SHIELD,” News, Joint Force Command Brunssum, October 11, 2023, <https://jfcbs.nato.int/page5964943/2023/nato-enhanced-vigilance-activity-eastern-shield>.

<sup>17</sup> C. Todd Lopez, “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area,” *DOD News*, May 10, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3391802/saceur-provides-update-on-deterrence-defense-of-euro-atlantic-area/>.

<sup>18</sup> Brandi Vincent, “NATO refining domain-specific ‘family of plans’ to guide allies’ cooperation in future contingencies,” *DefenseScoop*, September 27, 2022, <https://defensescoop.com/2022/09/27/nato-refining-domain-specific-family-of-plans-to-guide-allies-cooperation-in-future-contingencies/>.

<sup>19</sup> Lopez, “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area.”

<sup>20</sup> “NATO’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” What we do, NATO, last updated March 21, 2024, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_192648.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm).

<sup>21</sup> “NATO’s military presence in the east of the Alliance,” What we do, NATO, last updated December 8, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm); “NATO’s maritime activities,” What we do, NATO, last updated August 3, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_70759.htm#ukraine](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_70759.htm#ukraine); “NATO Air Policing: securing Allied airspace,” What we do, NATO, last updated January 30, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_132685.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132685.htm); “5 things you should know about NATO’s Air Shielding mission,” NATO Multimedia, August 9, 2022, <https://www.natomultimedia.tv/app/asset/675210>.

<sup>22</sup> “NATO Exercises and Activities,” Exercises and Training, NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, last updated April 2, 2024, <https://shape.nato.int/nato-exercises>.

<sup>23</sup> “Air Defender 23,” Organization, Bundeswehr, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/organization/german-air-force/air-defender-23>; “Steadfast Defender 24,” Exercises, NATO, last updated March 8, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/222847.htm>.

None of this would have been possible without the DDA. In a recent report by the UK Parliament, Gen. James Everard (Deputy SACEUR 2017-2020) explained how the DDA structures implemented since 2014 meant allies “could just empower SACEUR, under the authority he had in his strategic directive, to get on with it.”<sup>24</sup> Essentially, this change marks a return to the alert system reminiscent of the Cold War era, where SACEUR could count on earmarked forces to be made available in response to changes in the alert level. Talking about NATO’s response to Russia’s invasion, Gen. Cavoli has said: “The DDA strategy is a powerful demonstration of [allied] cohesion.”<sup>25</sup> According to Stephen R. Covington, who is credited with being one of the architects of the concept, “DDA is also at the center of the Alliance’s response to Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine. ... The Alliance’s strengthened posture, built on the key tenets and elements of DDA, has deterred Moscow from expanding or escalating the conflict with Ukraine to a conflict with NATO.”<sup>26</sup>

## What is new and novel about the DDA?

At first look the DDA is straightforward enough: it is a framework for guiding NATO’s adaptation to the new security environment. But a closer inspection reveals three puzzles: a lack of information, unusual sequencing, and a novel approach to deterrence.

The first piece of the DDA puzzle is the relative lack of information about it. Until recently, it was barely mentioned on NATO’s main website and only rarely referred to by senior officials in press briefings and interviews.<sup>27</sup> Compare this to the new Strategic Concept, which was launched to much fanfare at the Madrid Summit, was covered widely in the press, and even has its own website.<sup>28</sup> This difference is puzzling given the apparent leading role of the DDA in enabling NATO’s rapid adaptation following Russia’s invasion. The most comprehensive treatment of the DDA with any credibility is an article published last summer by the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center, written by veteran NATO adviser Stephen Covington.<sup>29</sup> To provide more accessible information about DDA, given that it is the cornerstone of NATO’s approaches to defense and deterrence, NATO should consider releasing a public version of the document, like it already does with the Strategic Concept.

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<sup>24</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons Defense Committee, *Special Relationships? US, UK and NATO* (London: House of Commons Defense Committee, 2023), <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmdfence/184/report.html#footnote-074-backlink>.

<sup>25</sup> Lopez, “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area.”

<sup>26</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>27</sup> Following the 2022 Madrid summit, a range of impressive resources were released on the website and social media channels of NATO SHAPE. However, this was two years after the DDA concept was agreed and implementation began. These resources were somewhat buried given they were not released on NATO’s main website and social media channels. (The video defining DDA has been viewed less than three thousand times.) See, for example: “Deter and Defend,” September 29, 2022, NATO SHAPE Public Affairs Office, <https://shape.nato.int/dda>; “Video: Defining DDA - A Hierarchy Of Integrated Plans,” NATO SHAPE Public Affairs Office, October 26, 2022, <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2022/video-defining-dda-a-hierarchy-of-integrated-plans->; NATO, “Deterrence and defence”; “Media briefing with Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer and SHAPE Deputy Chief of Staff Operations, Major General Matthew Van Wagenen,” Speeches & transcripts, NATO, last updated July 3, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_216728.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_216728.htm); Lopez, “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area.”

<sup>28</sup> “NATO leaders approve new Strategic Concept,” News, NATO, last updated June 30, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_197281.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197281.htm); Sean Monaghan, Colin Wall, and Pierre Morcos, “What Happened at NATO’s Madrid Summit?” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, July 1, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-happened-natos-madrid-summit>; “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” NATO, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>.

<sup>29</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

The second puzzle about the DDA is timing. Historically, NATO’s strategic concepts have been agreed by heads of state before detailed strategic guidance is developed.<sup>30</sup> This time NATO did it backwards: first a classified military strategy was agreed upon in 2019, then two new supporting concepts were accepted—DDA in 2020 and the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept in 2021—before the Strategic Concept was approved in 2022.<sup>31</sup> As two Baltic analysts put it in 2021:

This has led to the irregularity that NATO has updated its military strategy... produced a Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, and developed a twenty-year-forward looking NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept, all without the top-level guidance that an up-to date strategic concept would be expected to provide.<sup>32</sup>

The standard sequencing, in other words, was reversed. The main reason for this back-to-front approach was the failure to agree on a new strategic concept sooner, which led to the “stopgap” measure of the DDA. Even though allies were conscious the 2010 concept was outdated in 2014, they could not agree to develop a new strategic concept until the Brussels summit in 2021.<sup>33</sup> This may be because the strategic concept is NATO’s most important document—and therefore its most political. The election of U.S. President Donald Trump, an avowed NATO skeptic, in 2016 made most allies hesitant to embark on a new strategic concept during his tenure. The need to update thinking about the new strategic environment inside NATO headquarters and in each of the allies’ capitals may have also contributed to the delay of the document, which requires unanimous approval.

In the meantime, allies needed a new framework to cohere their evolving approach to strengthening defense and deterrence in the face of Russian aggression, which had ramped up since 2014. Necessity is the mother of invention, so the DDA was created to fill this gap. This also explains why information on the DDA is hard to find: it is more akin to classified military guidance for internal use by allied planners than a document for public consumption, like the Strategic Concept.

The question is whether the back-to-front sequencing of the DDA and strategic concept matters to NATO. On the one hand, doing things in reverse was beneficial: the DDA process helped cohere allies and led to a more unified and powerful strategic concept. On the other hand, the timing calls into question whether the 2019 military strategy and 2020 DDA accurately reflect the new strategic concept and strategic environment. As Ed Arnold of RUSI points out, the drastic events of 2022 may justify revising the DDA and revisiting its “core assumptions.”<sup>34</sup>

This brings us to the third—and largest—piece of the DDA puzzle: deterrence.

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory Pedlow, “The Evolution of NATO Strategy,” in *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, edited by Gregory Pedlow (Brussels: National Information Service, 1997), xxii.

<sup>31</sup> NATO, “NATO Chiefs of Defence discuss future Alliance adaptation”; Allied Command Transformation, *NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept*.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Hurt and Tony Lawrence, *NATO’s New Strategic Concept: Balancing Responses to Multiple Threats* (Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 2021), <https://icds.ee/en/natos-new-strategic-concept-balancing-responses-to-multiple-threats/>.

<sup>33</sup> *NATO 2010 Strategic Concept*; “Brussels Summit Communiqué,” News, NATO, last updated July 1, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm).

<sup>34</sup> Edward Arnold, “New Concepts but Old Problems: NATO’s New Strategic Concept,” RUSI, July 1, 2022, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/new-concepts-old-problems-natos-new-strategic-concept>.

Deterrence has always been at the heart of NATO's purpose and strategy. The first strategic concept in 1949 confirmed the alliance was designed to create "a powerful deterrent" to Soviet aggression and expansion.<sup>35</sup> For example, it stipulated, "The two principal goals of NATO defense are the deterrence of any kind of aggression by Warsaw Pact forces upon NATO countries, and the response to and containment of such aggression should NATO fail to deter it."<sup>36</sup> Debates about NATO strategy have often been framed under the rubric of "Deterrent or Defense?" or "NATO: Deterrent or Shield?"<sup>37</sup> That both functions overlap was recognized by the political scientist Glenn H. Snyder when he distinguished between "deterrence by denial" and "deterrence by punishment."<sup>38</sup>

During the Cold War, denial and punishment were implemented by two types of NATO forces: conventional "shield" forces (forward deployed) and the U.S. nuclear "sword" (the ultimate deterrence by punishment, even if conventional defeat was also a form of punishment).<sup>39</sup> NATO's fourth SACEUR, Gen. Lauris Norstad, described this two-pronged approach during the Cold War as "our Shield of defense, our Sword of retaliation."<sup>40</sup> Both prongs were also mutually reinforcing: sword forces supported denial and defense (through the potential for nuclear use in wartime), while shield forces provided the pause for thought which made punishment more credible (and contributed to the nuclear mission).<sup>41</sup>

The extent to which NATO strategy relied on shield or sword forces ebbed and flowed throughout the Cold War.<sup>42</sup> Beginning in 1991, a new focus on disarmament and dialogue saw the role of nuclear deterrence downplayed while conventional forces were now home-based but prepared to "reinforce any area at risk."<sup>43</sup> This all changed again when Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 caused NATO to hit the reset button. Forward-based shield forces were bolstered to strengthen conventional defense and deterrence against the risk of escalation.<sup>44</sup> The Alliance is also facing renewed calls to strengthen its nuclear sword to deter Russian nuclear use—including in the context of the Ukraine war.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> DC 6/1, "The Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area," in *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, edited by Gregory Pedlow (Brussels: National Information Service, 1997), 62.

<sup>36</sup> David N. Schwartz, "The Role of Deterrence in NATO Defense Strategy: Implications for Doctrine and Posture," *World Politics* 28, no. 1 (October 1975): 118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010032>.

<sup>37</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Deterrent or Defense: a fresh look at the West's Military Position* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960); Malcolm W. Hoag, "Nato: Deterrent or Shield?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 1958, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/nato-deterrent-or-shield>.

<sup>38</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence by Denial and Punishment*, Princeton, N.J.: Center of International Studies, January 1959.

<sup>39</sup> Sean Monaghan, *Resetting NATO's Defense and Deterrence: The Sword and the Shield Redux* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2022), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/resetting-natos-defense-and-deterrence-sword-and-shield-redux#:~:text=Resetting%20NATO%3A%20The%20Sword%20and%20the%20Shield%20Redux&text=NATO's%20defense%20and%20deterrence%20reset,NATO%20through%20this%20testing%20time..>

<sup>40</sup> "NATO Leaders," NATO Declassified, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_157649.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_157649.htm).

<sup>41</sup> General Lauris D. Norstad, "The Task of NATO," Der Übersee-Club, April 21, 1961, <https://www.ueberseeclub.de/resources/Server/pdf-Dateien/1960-1969/vortrag-1961-04-21General%20Lauris%20D.%20Norstad.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Monaghan, "Resetting NATO's Defense and Deterrence: The Sword and the Shield Redux."

<sup>43</sup> "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991) agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council," Official texts (Chronological), NATO, last updated July 1, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23847.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm).

<sup>44</sup> Sean Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO's New Strategic Concept," *War on the Rocks*, August 23, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-sword-the-shield-and-the-hedgehog-strengthening-deterrence-in-natos-new-strategic-concept/>; Richard Milne and Marton Duna, "Russia Could Attack a Nato Country Within 3 to 5 years, Denmark Warns," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/b3101099-9516-4b0b-92c6-179997d7e4cf>.

<sup>45</sup> Eric S. Edelman and Franklin C. Miller, *An Ongoing and Necessary Renaissance: NATO's Nuclear Posture* (Washington, DC: CSBA, January 2024), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/an-ongoing-and-necessary-renaissance-natos-nuclear-posture>; Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog:"

As the name suggests, the DDA is concerned with both defense and deterrence. However, the concept—at least according to Covington’s description—goes beyond NATO’s traditional strategy of shield and sword forces deterring by denial and punishment.<sup>46</sup> While NATO’s strategic and operational concepts have traditionally been focused on the employment of allied forces in preparation for and during war, the DDA emphasizes “military activities in peacetime.” Covington includes this feature alongside deterrence and defense in the trio of strategies which underpin the concept: “DDA guides Alliance peacetime deterrence activities, military responses in crisis to deter aggression, and military operations to defend all Allies.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, NATO has added a concern for peacetime competition to its previous focus on deterrence and defense through shield and sword forces which were prepared for war, but otherwise inactive.

This emphasis on peacetime activities is the core innovation of the DDA. The strategy reportedly reflects lessons learned from, among other inputs, previous SACEUR dialogues with Russian Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Valery Gerasimov and was designed to counter Russian concepts of war regarding speed, scale, force, and weapons deployment.<sup>48</sup>

This new emphasis on peacetime deterrence activities became clear at the 2021 Brussels summit. As the summit communiqué stated: “We will emphasize persistent activities in peacetime to support deterrence.”<sup>49</sup> As the communiqué also spelled out, this approach was driven by the need to counter Russian aggression short of war. Threats included military measures such as a “more assertive posture, novel military capabilities, and provocative activities, including near NATO borders, as well as its large-scale no-notice and snap exercises... and repeated violations of NATO Allied airspace,” as well as “hybrid actions against NATO Allies and partners.”<sup>50</sup> This followed the expansion of Article 5 to include cyber and hybrid attacks in 2014 and 2016 respectively.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, the idea of NATO peacetime deterrence activity is not new. During the Cold War NATO’s sword and shield forces were also complemented by “all measures short of war” to counter Soviet political warfare.<sup>52</sup> These measures were often political, economic, and covert rather than military in nature.<sup>53</sup>

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Strengthening Deterrence in NATO’s New Strategic Concept”; Heather Williams, Kelsey Hartigan, Lachlan MacKenzie, and Reja Younis, *Russian Nuclear Calibration in the War in Ukraine* (Washington, DC: CSIS, February 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-nuclear-calibration-war-ukraine>.

<sup>46</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).” The concept certainly allows for these traditional approaches: Covington explains the DDA is “a forward defense strategy designed to secure and defend every inch of Alliance territory” while if “deterrence fails, mutually reinforcing operational-strategic scale, multi-domain operations would be conducted to defend all Allies.” But it goes further, emphasizing military activities in peacetime.

<sup>47</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>48</sup> “NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Scaparrotti meets with Russian Chief of General Staff General Gerasimov,” SHAPE Public Affairs Office, 2018. <https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2018/nato-supreme-allied-commander-europe--general-scaparrotti-meets-with-russian-chief-of-general-staff--general-gerasimov>.

<sup>49</sup> NATO, “Brussels Summit Communiqué.”

<sup>50</sup> The latter included election interference, economic pressure, disinformation, cyber-attacks, and threats to critical infrastructure.

<sup>51</sup> “Wales Summit Declaration,” Official Texts, last updated July 4, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm); “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” Official Texts, last updated July 1, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>52</sup> DC 13, “North Atlantic Treaty Organization Medium Term Plan,” in *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, edited by Gregory Pedlow (Brussels: National Information Service, 1997), 117.

<sup>53</sup> On measures short of war, see: Giles D. Harlow and George C. Maerz (eds.), *Measures Short of War: The George F. Kennan Lectures at the National War College 1946-1947* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (revised edition) (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2005).

The DDA seems to place a greater emphasis on NATO allies using military forces short of war than its Cold War equivalents, through a range of “vigilance and purpose-driven deterrence military activities.”<sup>54</sup> This focus on peacetime military activity is based on the logic that “21<sup>st</sup> century deterrence requires collectively contesting in peacetime (including resilience),” alongside the capabilities to deal with short-notice and protracted conflicts.<sup>55</sup> More specifically, as Covington explains:

DDA organizes Allied vigilance activities to contest and deny a potential adversary the advantages it requires to conduct offensive military operations on any scale in any geographic area. Built on dynamic force readiness and executed across all of the Alliance area, these demonstrations of military capability, strengthen deterrence by posing tactical, operational, and strategic dilemmas to potential adversaries’ calculations of advantage against the Alliance. This approach to deterrence prevents an adversary from attaining an advantage in peacetime, that could be expanded in crisis, and subsequently exploited in conflict. In so doing, the Alliance preserves a stable and balanced peace, and prevents crisis and conflict.<sup>56</sup>

This definition of “military activities in peacetime” is less distinct from defense and deterrence than Covington seems to imply, given that it overlaps with many of the purposes of deterrence by denial and punishment.<sup>57</sup> Even so, the description above also highlights another novel way in which the DDA strengthens deterrence: by designing peacetime military activities to create latent advantages in any subsequent wartime scenarios.<sup>58</sup> For example, the vigilance activities seek both to signal military strength for traditional deterrence but also to impose “tactical, operational, and strategic dilemmas” on adversaries and to deny challengers the “advantages it requires to conduct offensive military operations at any scale.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet another novelty in the DDA’s approach to deterrence is the application of “gray zone” thinking about deterrence.<sup>60</sup> This reflected wider thinking at the time of the DDA’s development. For example, the U.S. *National Defense Strategy* emphasized “gray zone campaigns” while the UK’s *Integrated Review* set out “a force structure that principally deters through ‘persistent engagement’ below the threshold of war.”<sup>61</sup> The same trend towards gray zone and “hybrid threats” was apparent across many other nations.<sup>62</sup> The DDA leans on the idea that persistent presence, surveillance, precision, cyber, and space capabilities can achieve decisive effects

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<sup>54</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>55</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>56</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>57</sup> As described by Snyder: “In military affairs deterrence by denial is accomplished by having military forces which can block the enemy’s military forces from making territorial gains. Deterrence by punishment grants him the gain but deters by posing the prospect of war costs greater than the gain.” See Glenn H. Snyder, “Deterrence and Power,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 4, no. 2 (June 1960), 163.

<sup>58</sup> Becca Wasser, *Campaign of Denial: Strengthening Simultaneous Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific and Europe* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2023), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/campaign-of-denial>.

<sup>59</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>60</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2015), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/428/>.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2022), 5; UK Cabinet Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (London: Cabinet Office, 2021), 73.

<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Rauta and Sean Monaghan, “Global Britain in the Grey Zone: Between Stagecraft and Statecraft,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 42, no. 4 (September 2021): 475-497, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1980984>; Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Becca Wasser, *Competing in the Gray Zone: Russian Tactics and Western Responses* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2019), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2791.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2791.html).

during peacetime or competition.<sup>63</sup> As Covington puts it, “DDA’s vigilance activities are organized to deny domain, geographic, and readiness advantages, prevent destabilization and intimidation, and maintain balance and stability.”<sup>64</sup> However, the extent to which allies can deter gray zone activities in practice, and the resources NATO should allocate, are debated.<sup>65</sup> Implementing the DDA will therefore require clarifying how NATO intends to balance the attention and resources dedicated to “vigilance activities” with the attention and resources dedicated directly to warfighting readiness.

Much of the DDA covers the familiar ground for NATO strategy of defense and deterrence: denial and punishment. But the renewed emphasis on “military activities in peacetime” seems to represent a new and novel force employment strategy for NATO. To work out the implications of this shift, at least three questions must be asked. The first is: What is the theory of success? Are “deterrence activities in peacetime” designed to deter armed attack and war, gray zone competition, or something else? The second question is: Which forces should be dedicated to this mission: shield, sword, or something else? For example, the potential for a “hedgehog” force, short of full-scale denial, has been raised elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> This implies a third question about trade-offs: namely, how to strike a balance between the resources allocated for shield and sword forces, given constraints on defense spending, and the resulting impact of this balance on deterrence.

## Concepts Alone Do Not Win Wars

The process of developing and implementing the DDA since 2014 enabled a smooth and effective response within NATO to Russia’s invasion on a scale unprecedented since the end of the Cold War. This strong, unified response was contrary to what many observers had expected before the invasion—including, perhaps, Vladimir Putin. Yet, the DDA also provided a more fundamental and far-reaching effect on NATO allies, which is still playing out: it paved the way for a renewed focus on modernizing the alliance for a new generation of confrontation with Russia in a more dangerous world.

The DDA concept and the process of its development helped signal to allies that change was coming. This meant that when the updated Strategic Concept was agreed in 2022, the journey towards stronger defense, deterrence, and force modernization was already well underway. The DDA will continue to guide these efforts in future. As Gen. Cavoli explains: “The plans that come out of DDA, the strategic plans as well as the regional plans—these will drive our structure, our operations, our activities, and importantly ... our investments into the future.”<sup>67</sup>

Though avoiding war is the goal, strengthening deterrence means preparing for war. This works by boosting the credibility of deterrence, which depends on having the concepts, capabilities, and capacity to follow through, along with the political will to use them. Defense investments and acquisition, exercises, command

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<sup>63</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>64</sup> Covington, “NATO’s Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).”

<sup>65</sup> Sean Monaghan, *Hybrid CoE Paper 12: Deterring hybrid threats: Towards a fifth wave of deterrence theory and practice* (Hybrid CoE, March 2022), <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/publications/hybrid-coe-paper-12-deterring-hybrid-threats-towards-a-fifth-wave-of-deterrence-theory-and-practice/>; Sean Monaghan, “Bad Idea: Winning the Gray Zone,” *Defense360*, December 17, 2021, <https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-winning-the-gray-zone/>.

<sup>66</sup> Monaghan, “The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO’s New Strategic Concept.”

<sup>67</sup> Lopez, “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area.”

and control arrangements, doctrine, and public support all contribute to credibility. As the Romans said: *Si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you want peace, prepare for war.

Herein lies the main challenge for NATO: preparing for war. While the DDA provides a new intellectual backbone for the alliance’s approach to deterrence and defense across competition, crisis, and conflict, allies must have the capabilities to back it up.

The problem is that for the last three decades, NATO has not been preparing for the kind of war that Russia now threatens. As the conflict in Ukraine shows, although aspects of war in the twenty first century are new and novel (think of drones and cyber warfare), much is familiar. Mass and firepower remain as decisive on the frontlines in Ukraine as they were over a century ago in the Somme and Ypres. Yet decades of focus on out of area operations and crisis management has left NATO ground forces too small, lacking in firepower, stockpiles insufficient, command arrangements unclear, and readiness for protracted war inadequate.<sup>68</sup>

This is particularly the case among European allies.<sup>69</sup> Despite drastic recent hikes in defense spending—which rose by a third since 2014 to around \$380 billion in 2024—Europe has still has an entrenched dependence on the United States to conduct a range of high-end collective defense missions.<sup>70</sup> The Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, has openly acknowledged that implementing the new DDA regional plans will require “more troops, at higher readiness.”<sup>71</sup> On top of shortfalls in land forces, European militaries also suffer from significant gaps in naval forces, air enablers, air defense, and “battle-decisive ammunition.”<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, European industry has been slower to adapt to meet the demands of protracted war and the firepower-intensive nature of modern combat.<sup>73</sup>

This means NATO’s deterrence strategy—which relies on European allies to provide most of the forward based forces and much of the reinforcements which may be required in a serious contingency—is also in peril.<sup>74</sup> While allies agreed to a range of military reforms at the 2022 Madrid summit to strengthen deterrence and defense, many of them lack sufficient personnel, equipment (much of which has gone to help Ukraine), and industrial

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<sup>68</sup> Ben Barry, Henry Boyd, Bastian Giegerich, Michael Gjerstad, James Hackett, Yohann Michel, Ben Schreer, and Michael Tong, *The Future of NATO’s European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects* (London: IISS, 2023), <https://www.iiss.org/en/research-paper/2023/06/the-future-of-natos-european-land-forces/>.

<sup>69</sup> Max Bergmann, Sean Monaghan, and Mathieu Droin, *Why the Washington Summit Should Focus on Europe* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-washington-summit-should-focus-europe>.

<sup>70</sup> “Secretary General welcomes unprecedented rise in NATO defence spending,” News, NATO, last updated February 15, 2024, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_222664.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_222664.htm); Seth G. Jones, Colin Wall, and Rachel Ellehuus, *Europe’s High-End Military Challenges: The Future of European Capabilities and Missions* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2021), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/europes-high-end-military-challenges-future-european-capabilities-and-missions>.

<sup>71</sup> “NATO Chiefs of Defence discuss executability of Regional Plans,” News, NATO, last updated September 18, 2023, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_218538.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_218538.htm).

<sup>72</sup> Mathieu Droin, Courtney Stiles Herdt, and Gabriella Bolstad, *Are European Navies Ready to Navigate an Ever More Contested Maritime Domain?* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/are-european-navies-ready-navigate-ever-more-contested-maritime-domain>; Colin Wall and John Christianson, *Europe’s Missing Piece: The Case for Air Domain Enablers* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/europes-missing-piece-case-air-domain-enablers>; Sean Monaghan and John Christianson, *Making the Most of the European Sky Shield Initiative* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/making-most-european-sky-shield-initiative>; Kaja Kallas, “Let’s build a combat-effective Europe,” Politico, June 29, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-nato-defense-spending-ammunition-combat-effective/>.

<sup>73</sup> Sam Skove, “The Goal of 100k Artillery Shells Per Month is Back in Sight, Army Says,” *Defense One*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.defenseone.com/business/2024/04/goal-100k-artillery-shells-month-sight-army-says/396047/>; Katherine Kjellström Elgin and Tyler Hacker, “NATO Has a Munitions Problem, and Europe Needs to Step Up,” *DefenseNews*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/2024/02/01/nato-has-a-munitions-problem-and-europe-needs-to-step-up/>; Tyler Hacker, *Beyond Precision: Maintaining America’s Strike Advantage in Great Power Conflict* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2023), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/beyond-precision-maintaining-americas-strike-advantage-in-great-power-conflict>.

<sup>74</sup> Sara Bjerg Moller, “NATO at 75: The Perils of Empty Promises,” *Survival* 65, no. 6 (December 2023): 91-118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2285606>.

capacity—especially compared to Russia, which is now on a war footing and has had plenty of help from its friends.<sup>75</sup> This may be one reason why the forces along NATO’s eastern front are so small (battlegroup sized), particularly when compared to the forces that Russia could bring to bear in the region.<sup>76</sup> If NATO allies do not have the available combat power to shore up forward defense in the east to move beyond “a slightly thicker tripwire,” either the concepts or the capabilities need to change.<sup>77</sup>

In many ways the key question is the same one NATO has faced for decades: “Can Europe fend off a Russian attack on its own?”<sup>78</sup> The DDA has a key role to play here. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, NATO planners identifying requirements for national investment can base capability targets on actual war requirements according to the regional plans. NATO can also move from exercises to “mission rehearsal,” using the same plans they would use in a crisis, increasing their effectiveness, credibility, and deterrent effect.<sup>79</sup> While more work could be done to clarify for publics and capitals NATO’s theory of victory to defeat—and therefore deter—Russian aggression, the DDA provides an enduring framework for allies to optimize current and future defense investment and capability development.

The DDA is important, but it cannot work miracles. Concepts are vital, but deterrence still relies on nations having the capabilities to put them into practice. Ultimately, this requires more spending that is laser-focused on NATO’s shortfalls and capability gaps. As the UK Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps, put it to the House of Commons last year: “NATO has woken up. ... The question for NATO will be how to defend Europe from Russia and what part we all have to play in it. ... Fundamentally, we will all have to invest.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Monaghan, Wall, and Morcos, “What Happened at NATO’s Madrid Summit?”; Moller, “NATO at 75: The Perils of Empty Promises,”; Elgin and Hacker, “NATO Has a Munitions Problem, and Europe Needs to Step Up”; Katie Bo Lillis, Natasha Bertrand, Oren Liebermann, and Haley Britzky, “Exclusive: Russia producing three times more artillery shells than US and Europe for Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 11, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/10/politics/russia-artillery-shell-production-us-europe-ukraine/index.html>; Maria Snegovaya, Max Bergmann, Tina Dolbaia, Nick Fenton, and Samuel Bendett, *Back in Stock? The State of Russia’s Defense Industry after Two Years of the War* (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2024), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/back-stock-state-russias-defense-industry-after-two-years-war>.

<sup>76</sup> For a study of deterrence and defense in the region, see: Jan van Tol, Chris Bassler, Katherine Kjellström Elgin, and Tyler Hacker, *Deterrence and Defense in the Baltic Region* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2022), <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/deterrence-and-defense-in-the-baltic-region>.

<sup>77</sup> Monaghan, “The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO’s New Strategic Concept.”

<sup>78</sup> Laura Kayali, “Europe’s Trump challenge: Is it ready to fight Vladimir Putin alone?” *Politico*, January 24, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-trump-ukraine-war-russia-nato-vladimir-putin/>.

<sup>79</sup> The authors are grateful to Ed Arnold for this point.

<sup>80</sup> House of Commons Defense Committee, *Special Relationships? US, UK and NATO*, 21.

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