



China as a Security Risk: NATO

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Why in News

The recently held **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit** for the **first time** has explicitly described China as a security risk.

The other two threats identified by the NATO 'declaration' are **Russia** and **terrorism**.

Key Points

- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO):**
 - **Formation:** NATO was established by the **North Atlantic Treaty** (also called the **Washington Treaty**) of **4th April, 1949**, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.

It is **headquartered at Brussels, Belgium**.
 - **Political and Military Alliance:** NATO's primary goals are the **collective defence** of its members and the maintenance of a **democratic peace in the North Atlantic area**.

The collective defence principle enshrined in **NATO's Article V** states that "an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies".
 - **NATO's Forces:** NATO has a **military and civilian headquarters** and an **integrated military command structure** but very few forces or assets are exclusively its own.

Most forces remain under full national command and control until member countries agree to undertake NATO-related tasks.
 - **NATO's Decisions:** A "NATO decision" is the expression of the collective will of **all 30 member countries** since all decisions are taken by consensus.

- **Analysis of NATO's Performance:**

- **Cold War Era:** NATO was completely successful in its mission of protecting the “Euro-Atlantic area” from Soviet expansion and preventing war between the two superpowers.

The formation of NATO, and its Soviet counterpart, the **Warsaw Pact**, in 1955, inaugurated the **Cold War era** (approximately 1945 until 1991).

- **Post-Cold War Era:** When **Soviet Union collapsed in 1991**, NATO witnessed a paradigm shift from collective defence, which implied a known adversary, to collective security, which is open-ended, and might require action against any number of threats, including unknown ones and non-state actors.

When the Balkans conflict broke out in 1999, NATO got the chance to prove its utility in a post-Cold War Europe.

- **Mutually Beneficial Arrangement:**

- **For Europe**, it was an attractive bargain where, in **exchange for a marginal loss in autonomy, it enjoyed absolute security** at a cheap price.

Not having to spend massively on defence allowed Europe to focus on building powerful economies and invest its surplus in a strong welfare state.

- NATO also **offered the added bonus of keeping Germany down**, historically a major factor for peace and stability in the region.
- A collective military force organised and managed by the Europeans themselves may offer a way out of American oversight and occasional bullying.

However, it carried the **danger of one or two of the stronger and wealthier states, such as Germany or France, dictating terms to the smaller ones**, a danger attractively absent in the NATO arrangement.

- **NATO and China:**

- NATO leaders **declared China a constant security challenge** and said the Chinese are working to **undermine global order**.
 - This is **in sync with US President efforts** to get allies to speak out with a more unified voice against China's trade, military and human rights practices.
 - The **US' growing conviction** is that **China is a threat to its global supremacy** and must be contained.
- However, both **France and Germany sought to put some distance between NATO's official position and their own perception** of China.
 - NATO's European member states may view China as an economic rival** and adversary, but they are **unconvinced by the American line that it is an outright security threat**.
- **China's Stand:** It has urged NATO to "view China's development rationally, stop exaggerating various forms of 'China threat theory' and not to use China's legitimate interests and legal rights as excuses for manipulating group politics artificially creating confrontations".

- **NATO and Russia:**

- Tensions with Russia are an inevitable outcome of **NATO's bid to expand eastward into what Russia considers its sphere** of influence.
 - Trying to bring countries such as **Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova** under the NATO umbrella has led to a confrontation with Russia.
- As Russia sought to protect its interests by "annexing" Crimea and stationing troops in Georgia and Moldova, NATO accused it of acting irresponsibly and breaking the "**rules-based international order**".

Conclusion

China's own economy is already deeply integrated into Western markets. China, nonetheless, is perceived as posing a 'threat'. It remains to be seen how far an ageing Europe would be willing to commit itself to a strategic path that prefers confrontation to collaboration, given that NATO is essentially a military alliance, and for all the talk of hybrid and cyberwar, there is zero risk of China invading the Euro-Atlantic area.

Source: TH