

7-6-2022

## NATO's new world order relies on multilateralism to strengthen its nuclear defense posture

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### Citation of this paper:

Simpson, Erika, "NATO's new world order relies on multilateralism to strengthen its nuclear defense posture" (2022). *Political Science Publications*. 198.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/198>

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GLOBAL

# NATO's new world order relies on multilateralism to strengthen its nuclear defence posture

By ERIKA SIMPSON JULY 6, 2022

The implied message from NATO's summit last week is that the alliance needs to do more to deter risk of nuclear use than just resorting to deterrence by threatening harsh retaliation.



At last week's NATO Summit, the military alliance agreed on a new strategic concept, which NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, pictured on June 30 in Madrid, called 'the blueprint for NATO into the future, more dangerous world.' *Photograph courtesy of NATO*

Last week's NATO Summit in Madrid launched the military alliance's new [strategic concept](#) that focused on Russia's threats to use weapons of mass destruction and on how to deter chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and cyber attacks. NATO

proclaimed in 2010 that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.” The concept repeats that language, including the assertion that NATO’s deterrence and defence posture is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defence capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities.

The implied message in 2022 is that NATO needs to do more to deter risk of nuclear use than resort solely to deterrence by threat of harsh retaliation. The alliance needs to enhance its preparedness and readiness against chemical or biological warfare as well as “create the security environment for [a world without nuclear weapons](#), consistent with the goals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,” the concept said.

Traditional institutions such as NATO, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reflect the post-Second World War European architecture in which countries discuss contentious issues including nuclear proliferation. Global institutions such as the United Nations, although unwieldy, also help by holding larger-scale gatherings including the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) (NPT) conference, scheduled for four weeks in New York City this August.

More than half a century after the NPT entered into force, it is unacceptable that [12,700 nuclear weapons](#) remain usable in the world today. As we look ahead to 2045 and the 100th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, as well as the UN’s establishment, it will be important to strengthen time-bound frameworks and undermine dangerous narratives that threaten human and common security.

The state parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) [first met last month](#) in Vienna, with observers from NATO countries such as Germany and Norway as well as representation from Australia. But the TPNW (otherwise known as the “ban treaty”) is *not* the only pathway to nuclear disarmament. As we march toward important milestones, including the UN’s 2030 agenda embodied in the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#), we need to delegitimize and stigmatize atomic,

biological, and chemical threats. We need to strengthen the taboo against using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, and we need to [minimize the role of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#) in military doctrines.

Diplomats need to talk more about [nuclear risk reduction](#) and ways to promote de-alerting and “no first use” pledges on all sides. Russia’s saber-rattling over Ukraine and NATO, and the antipathy among the world’s nuclear-armed rivals, means that nuclear weapons will almost certainly be used again if not by design then perhaps by accident. With so many [nuclear weapons](#) still in existence, the use of even a [few tactical weapons](#) portends human incineration, nuclear winter, and world famine. Global citizens must commit to do everything we can to eliminate any possibility of proxy wars escalating to assured mutual destruction.

The permanent members of the United Nations Security Council that possess nuclear weapons need to discuss [no-first use](#) in the wake of [Russia’s threats to use nuclear weapons](#), and they must take strong action to safeguard existing and reactivate expired arms control agreements, including [New Start](#), the [Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty](#), the [Biological Weapons Convention](#), and the [Chemical Weapons Convention](#).

The [first truly “global” world order](#) promises to include 30 NATO allies (soon to be 32 as Finland and Sweden will join), Japan, South Korea, the Five Eyes (including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States), as well as smaller Commonwealth countries. The G7 countries, as well as like-minded countries in Africa and the Middle East that voted overwhelmingly to sanction Russia at the UN’s General Assembly, are emphasizing co-operative principles and united action to collaborate against threats like climate change and terrorism. Of course, nuclear arms control must also include understandings among regional powers such as India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.

The world may come up short on [wicked problems](#) that defy easy solutions, such as ending wars, halting nuclear proliferation, and enforcing sanctions against great powers such as Russia or potentially in future, China. However, if we continue to strengthen the stability of multilateral organizations and promote transparency and openness, the new world order will assuredly emerge, despite dangerous narratives that threaten to undermine fragile world peace.

[Ways forward](#) to true security anchored in enlightened self-interest are derived from devoting time, energy, and resources to enforcing mutual survival strategies together with effective multilateral instruments. Mistakes will be made, like [NATO's expansion](#) without due regard to Russian fears of encirclement. It was appropriate to modestly arm and professionally train Ukrainians in the aftermath of the Crimean takeover in 2014, but Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea should have alerted the world back then that stronger enforcement of liberal internationalist norms needed enactment. Hindsight is always 20/20—but sturdy institutions, like NATO, the NATO–Russia Council, and the OSCE need not break apart because of failed past attempts including the Minsk Accord.

Arguably the Minsk agreement fell apart because of [negotiating deficiencies](#), continued [Russian interference](#), [lack of OSCE funding](#), and a single-mindedly anti-Russian stance in the face of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's [wise counsel](#) that varied parties in Ukraine failed to observe the ceasefire and autonomy provisions. In the wake of former U.S. president Donald Trump's [ill-conceived efforts](#) to dismantle international institutions and agreements, NATO should have paid more attention to Russia's war doctrine that sees nuclear weapons as another form of ready-to-use artillery on the evolving battlefield, rather than focus almost all its efforts and attention on culturally- and militarily-questionable approaches to battling the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISIS in far-flung locations such as Afghanistan.

The evolving new world order (not disorder) may eventually be forced to decide whether to enforce or supply an air defence corridor over Ukraine in order to prevent the war and a new central front in Europe from becoming frozen in time. It may be that air defence in Ukraine, either by agreement or joint supply and action, will be necessary in the long-term to credibly protect NATO's territory. Further talks should extend to considering [provocative force deployments](#) in and around sensitive zones such as the Baltics and Poland.

New international contact and crisis groups that facilitate Russian-Ukraine negotiations about ceasefires, [buffer zones](#), mutual air defence, and [zones of peace](#) will be needed. But it will be important throughout such negotiations for the institutions of world order [to refrain from cornering an isolated Russia](#) and pressuring recalcitrant states like China and India.

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*The Hill Times*