

DEFENSE & SECURITY

The Main Difference Between NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept And Its Previous Strategic Concepts

OCTOBER 25, 2022

The [NATO 2022 Strategic Concept](#), which was adopted at the NATO summit held in Madrid on June 29-30, 2022, is intended to guide NATO's activities for the next 10 years. The document describes not only NATO's enduring purpose and character but also its core security missions, the potential difficulties and opportunities that may arise in a constantly evolving security environment, and the principles upon which decisions about political and military adaptation will be based. In terms of global significance, the Strategic Concept document is second only to the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed in Washington on April 4, 1949.

Adoption of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept could not have been more timely, coming as it did on the heels of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the adoption of the [European Union Strategic Compass](#) (which will guide the EU's defense and security policies) in March 2022. The EU Strategic Compass identified the return to power politics and armed aggression as the most significant changes to international relations in the era of strategic competition and complex security threats. How did these threats affect the content of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept?

NATO Strategic Concepts: 1949-2022

From its establishment in 1949 until the end of the Cold War in 1962, NATO maintained a strategy that was characterized primarily by defense and deterrence. The intent was to prevent belligerent acts between the world's two main power blocs: the Soviet Union and the United States. When Cold War tensions emerged in the early 1970s, NATO shifted its strategy to one that focused on dialogue and détente. NATO strategy shifted again with the dissolution

of the Soviet Union in 1991 and focused on a broader approach that included dialogue and cooperation, and other new ways of contributing to peace and stability, such as multinational crisis management operations

In the decades that followed the dissolution of the once formidable Soviet Union, Russia and other countries previously under communist control became NATO partners and, in many cases, NATO members. For NATO, the period was characterized by dialogue and cooperation and other new ways of contributing to peace and stability around the world, such as multinational crisis-management operations and the issuance of three nonclassified strategic-concept documents that advocated a broader approach to security, one each in [1991](#), [1999](#), and [2010](#).

The 2010 Strategic Concept, known as “active engagement, modern defence,” was adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010. The document was a clear and resolute statement of NATO’s values and purpose and focused on **three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security**. A collective assessment of the security environment at the time, including the identification of threats such as the proliferation of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, terrorism, cyberattacks, and fundamental environmental issues, also was included.

For the next 12 years, NATO used the document to adapt and guide its short-term and mid-term goals for political and military development. The 2010 strategic concept affirmed NATO’s aim to promote international security through cooperation by reinforcing arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation efforts emphasizing NATO’s open-door policy for all European countries and enhancing partnerships in the broad sense of the term. The Strategic Concept also emphasized alliance solidarity, the importance of transatlantic consultation, and the need to engage in a continuous process of reform and transformation.

The 2022 Strategic Concept was designed to prepare NATO for the continuation of a deteriorating security environment characterized by renewed strategic competition arising from Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and the rise of China on the world stage. It differs substantially from the previous Strategic Concept published in 2010. The 2022 Strategic

Concept describes an environment of “strategic competition” in which “the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace, is recurrent and widespread, and the ability to maintain security is “uncertain.” Amid this global competition the 2022 Strategic Concept notes, NATO serves as a “bulwark of rules-based international order” by continuing to focus on its three core tasks (i.e., collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security).

NATO allies are aware of the possibility of losing their military superiority because of China’s large, all-encompassing investment in new technologies and Russia’s niche capabilities in hypersonic weapons. For these reasons, the 2022 Strategic Concept requires all NATO members to “encourage innovation and enhance our investments in emerging and disruptive technologies to maintain our interoperability and military edge” and calls such actions a key collective defense mission. The Strategic Concept also explicitly states that Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty will be invoked in the event of hostile activities in cyberspace, space, or hybrid operations that have the same effects as an armed attack and that preserving freedom of navigation, maintaining maritime trade routes, and ensuring the security of vital communication routes are essential for global security.

Sentiment analysis of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept

A sentiment analysis of the 2022 Strategic Concept with natural language processing techniques^[1] found that *contribute*, *ensure*, and *enhance* are the verbs used most often in the document, while the nouns used most often are *security*, *capability*, and *threat* (see Figure 1). The most frequently used verbs and nouns, such as “contribute,” “ensure,” “enhance,” “security,” “capability,” “threat,” and “partner” in the strategic concept reveal the jargon that dominates the document. The document’s language shows that NATO should develop new capacities and capabilities to deal with risks and threats posed by emerging powers with the spirit of cooperation and to take a firm and reassuring stance in protecting the rules-based international system.

