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RUSSIA CONFLICT: NATO BUREAUCRACY AND ALLIED CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

Putin's Russia breathed new life in the NATO alliance and encouraged introspection on the part of NATO's members. This paper investigates the organizational structure of the alliance and whether it advances or hinders its ability to compete and defeat Russia in conflict. NATO's collective decision-making process affect response times, but the alliance's "strength in numbers" garners the resources to counter and defeat Russia. In contrast to the NATO alliance with 30 members, Russia often operates alone on the world stage. Russia's lack of allies constrains its operations and presents different challenges than what individual member states face in NATO. Russia's sees the value of alliances and is working to overcome its isolation after 30 years of going it alone.

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NATO BUREAUCRACY

Bureaucracy exists within NATO's processes due to the complexities of the alliance's coordination requirements. In Article 4 of NATO's founding treaty, members can bring any issue of concern, specifically security issues, to the North Atlantic Council, NATO's top political decision-making body. The treaty also authorizes the North Atlantic Council to begin crisis management operations when military violence is desired to compliment diplomacy.¹ NATO's decision-making process is done through consensus with no voting.² NATO's actions, as designed in 1949, require the ratification of all 30 member countries. This consensus driven decision-making process is critical for understanding the organization. Consensus takes times and requires members to retain the ability to operate independently in case the alliance does not meet their security objectives.

Bureaucracies within NATO can aid in a fight against Russia. NATO's most important principle is Collective Defense – Article 5. Collective defense can be defined as “an attack against one ally is considered as an attack against all allies.” Collective defense is what holds its 30 members together. After the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001, the North Atlantic Council needed to understand if the attack was directed from a foreign entity against the United States, then a response would be covered by Article 5. The Council received the results of investigations into the 9/11 attacks on October 2, 2001 and determined the actions were covered by Article 5. Collective defense was invoked for the first time and brought about unity within the alliance.³ NATO's bureaucratic processes in relation to collective defense brings about a shared strategy and the critical resources required in winning a conflict against Russia. NATO's unity through bureaucratic processes gives it the ability to concert a strategic messaging capability within the alliance and its partners, which places diplomatic and economic pressure on Russia.

Under Collective Defense – Article 5, the bureaucratic requirements among NATO members provide benefits to nations whom would not be able to defend themselves alone. Nations may lack the military capabilities but under NATO’s collective defense principle each nation would have the alliance’s support, especially NATO members from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, running along Russia’s borders.

Conversely, NATO bureaucracies can hinder a fight against Russia. RAND wargaming-based analysis assessed a force of 22 to 27 Russian Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs), drawn from the Western Military District and from the exclave in Kaliningrad, could isolate Riga, Latvia and Tallinn, Estonia in 30 to 60 hours.⁴ In comparison, NATO leaders estimated a 15-day minimum timeline to respond to such aggressive actions. The requirement to seek military advice and coordinate with the NATO members delays dynamic responses to an attack. NATO’s chance for success relies upon pre-agreed actions in case of invasion or member state initiative in hopes NATO will come to the rescue weeks into a war. The coordination of political and military views between the council, the military committee, and strategic commanders took time due to the consensus requirements from all NATO members. The bureaucracy of the decision-process would negatively affect any quick response required in a conflict with Russia, especially if an invasion took place along the Baltic states.⁵

Lastly, NATO members share the economic burden and its encompassing bureaucratic requirements to maintain a strong alliance. NATO Defense Ministers in 2006 agreed to commit a minimum of two per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to be allocated to NATO defense. Currently, the alliance lacks credibility and a perceived commitment when only nine members meet the annual minimum GDP requirement.⁶ Issues within NATO’s burden sharing policies render the question, are members really committed to the alliance and its bureaucratic

processes towards the modernization and use of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space assets, hypersonic, and remote sensing capabilities? The impacts in a NATO/Russia conflict could be decisive.

ALLIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

NATO is already a powerful alliance with its 30 formal members. Its strength is bolstered even more by informal allies and partners. NATO non-member partners include the Euro-Atlantic Partnership (20 nations), Mediterranean Region (seven nations), Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (four nations), and the “Partners across the globe” (nine nations). Cooperation exists in security challenges where partners are able to contribute to NATO operations either militarily or diplomatically.⁷ Among partners, NATO developed specific structures for its relationships with Russia, Ukraine and Georgia.⁸ Specific structures attempt to bring about open dialogue and to avoid miscalculations. Should a conflict with Russia and a NATO member occur, enacting NATO’s collective defense principle and partner support would enable the alliance to defeat Russia.

The Russian Constitution recently gave President Vladimir Putin the option to remain in power until 2036. In all likelihood, Russia’s strategic goals will show continuity for the next 15 years.⁹ Putin understands allies provide power with “strength in numbers” and they are needed in order to accomplish their own objectives. He witnessed the European Union and NATO advance power throughout Europe and across the world. Putin’s plans to compete with the European Union (EU) were made with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In 2015, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia officially implemented the agreement and Armenia and Kyrgyzstan have joined since. Russia’s mission is to extend the EAEU to all of the post-Soviet states (excluding Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia who are all members of the EU) giving Russia

the ability to exploit the residual political, military, economic, and bureaucratic connections an economic union would offer.¹⁰ Memberships to EAEU have been offered to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Turkey. With the exception of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, all of the others have also been offered EU memberships as well. In comparison the GDP of the EU is approximately \$19.9 trillion and the GDP of the EAEU is approximately \$4.7 trillion.¹¹ The most interesting EAEU membership offer would be to Turkey, an established member of NATO with the largest GDP of those offered a membership, approximately \$780 billion. Bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey have caused turmoil within the NATO alliance due to Turkey's purchase of the Russian S-400, a mobile surface-to-air missile system, which poses a risk to the NATO alliance and resulted in the blocked sale of F-35 aircraft.¹² In a conflict with Russia, Turkey's commitment to NATO could be questioned.

Russia is also a driving force behind the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) formed in 1992, which is similar to the disbanded Soviet-era Warsaw Pact. The CSTO attempts to mirror NATO's collective defense principle by asserting, "the aggression against CSTO member states is considered by other participants as aggression against everyone." CSTO's mutual defense alliance includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The geographical importance of Belarus, Armenia and Kazakhstan are important for Russia's power projection towards Europe. They also play the role for Russia's strategic military outposts as Belarus and Kazakhstan border Russia and only possess Russian air/missile defense and space programs. Although these countries may feel like the military equipment is at a reduced price, they give Russia an option for military integration. Russian arms sales to neighboring countries also require ties to Russia for future modernization and maintenance services. The purchase of military equipment provides long-term debt dependency

towards Russia as well.¹³ Russia will attempt to leverage the CSTO during a conflict with NATO or with Lithuania, Latvia, or Estonia.

Russia lacks formal alliances or promises between two or more nations to support each other, particularly during war, but not by choice.¹⁴ In 2020, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin claimed they would work to develop a close partnership and the “strategic cooperation between China and Russia can effectively resist any attempt to suppress and divide the two countries.” The far-reaching message had been specifically aimed at the United States. The relationship is mutually beneficial as it provides Russia the ability to trade with China and supports Russia’s industries from sanctions. Russia gives China an important energy supplier bordering its country.¹⁵ The Russian and Chinese partnership currently shows only economic significance, but attention should be placed on whether the bilateral relationship could eventually lead to military cooperation. The NATO alliance’s strength in numbers would be important should a military cooperation ever take place.

Conclusion

NATO promotes Western values of democracy and rule of law, something Russia attempts to devalue. The NATO alliance’s bureaucracy exists because of the decision-making processes and the time it takes for a consensus to be reached by members. Consensus fosters collaboration in order to safeguard freedom and security through the principle of collective defense, the most important principle to former Soviet-states. Issues of burden sharing commitments garner major allies instilling national plans to meet the 2% GDP by 2024.¹⁶ The alliance’s strength in numbers through formal allies and partners keeps Russia from achieving its strategic objectives and expansionist vision. In a time of global competition and aggressive rises to power, the alliance needs to be unified and ready more than ever.

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