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Ensuring all NATO members comply with NATO standards

NATO

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Forum: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Issue: Ensuring all NATO members comply with NATO standards

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Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed on the 4th of April 1949 in Washington D.C., United States of America (USA). It was formed by the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Italy. Since then, multiple new members have joined, such as Türkiye, the Netherlands, and Spain, having now 32 members. NATO was created to provide security for Europe in order to defend itself from Eastern communist influences.

In the past 75 years, members of NATO have been involved in multiple conflicts, such as the Gulf War, the Bosnian War in 2010, and the Ukraine War more recently. Since then, many questions have arisen about member states' compliance with NATO standards.

Definition of Key Terms

NATO Standardization Office

The NATO Standardization Office (NSO) initiates, coordinates, supports, and administers NATO standardization activities, which are conducted under the authority of the Committee for Standardization (CS) -- the committee responsible for standardization policy. The NSO assists NATO's Military Committee in developing military operational standards. These activities foster NATO standardization with the goal of enhancing the interoperability and operational effectiveness of Alliance military forces.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the standard measure of the value added created through the production of goods and services in a country during a certain period.

North Atlantic Treaty

The treaty was signed on April 4th, 1949, by Canada, the United States of America, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, forming NATO. The treaty has 14 articles underlining its operation.

Trident Juncture Exercise

A NATO-led exercise designed to test the collective response to an armed attack against one ally, to practice and simulate article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty

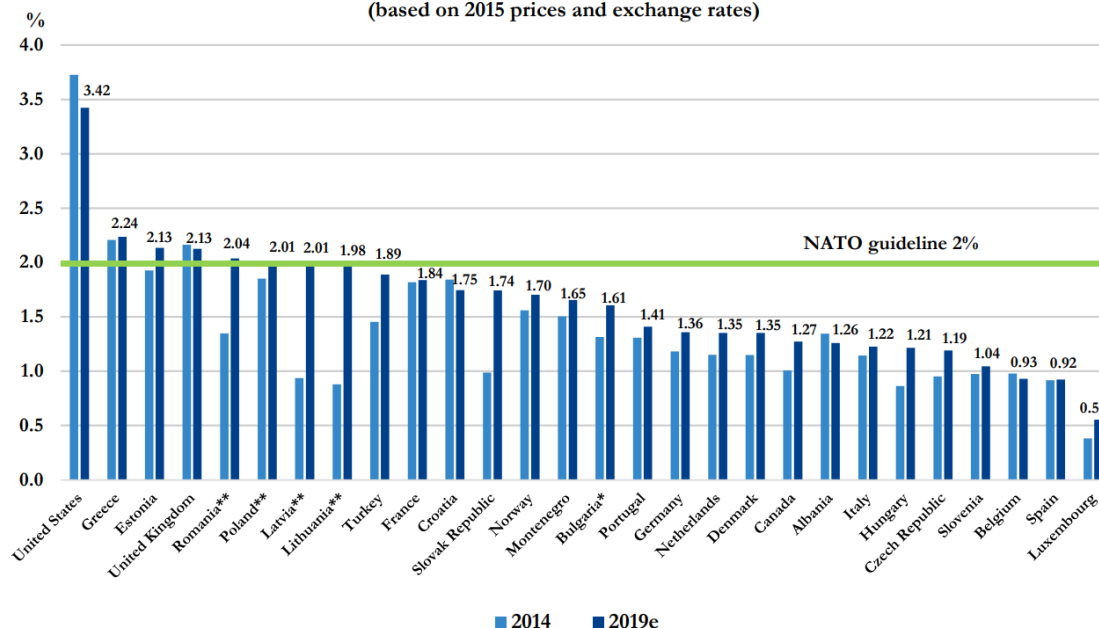
General Overview

To begin, 'NATO standards have to be understood, and their implications include military, political, logistical, and operational standards. This can be done by looking at the NATO Standardization Office (NSO) and the North Atlantic Treaty [1].

Since the ratification and joining of the alliance, certain countries have not always met the standards of the treaty organization, leading to discord within the organization. This means that in those moments, NATO is less capable of attending to other pressing matters due to internal conflict. Other member states can view this as them running the risk of Eastern countries using the opportunity to 'Divide and Conquer' in order to dismantle NATO through either political meddling or armed conflict.

In 2014, NATO Heads of State and Government agreed to commit 2% of their national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spending to fund NATO in order to help ensure the alliance's continuous military readiness. This was done in response to Russia annexing Crimea in 2013 and in the midst of greater political instability in the Middle East, with wars such as the Syrian Civil War threatening to expand closer to Europe. This guideline was also designed to prove countries' commitment to the advancement and success of NATO's defense efforts. This was made a more relevant topic of discussion during Donald Trump's presidency from 2016 to 2020. Donald Trump raised his concerns over the member states' integrity, stating that the United States of America was investing the most money into NATO and that they were responsible for the safety of other European countries that were funding a significantly lower portion of money compared to the United States. He was also unhappy that many countries were not even making the 2% investment guideline and threatened to withdraw from the treaty organization.

Graph 3 : Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%)
(based on 2015 prices and exchange rates)



Notes: Figures for 2019 are estimates.
 * Defence expenditure does not include pensions.
 ** These Allies have national laws and political agreements which call for 2% of GDP to be spent on defence annually, consequently estimates are expected to change accordingly. For the past years, Allies' defence spending was based on the then available GDP data and Allies may, therefore, have met the 2% guideline when using those figures (In 2018, Lithuania met 2% using November 2018 OECD figures).

2019 NATO graph showing each member state's %GDP participation in NATO [III]

Luxembourg was notably the lowest contributor, with a mere 0.55% of its GDP. Ironically, Luxembourg does not have an army and provides NATO with other technologies, such as radars. This helped prove Donald Trump's concerns about integrity within the organization, and since then, there has been a stricter push to meet the investment guidelines.

Ensuring that all NATO members comply with its standards is a complex challenge influenced by political, economic, and technical factors. These barriers often vary across member states, depending on their unique political, economic, and technical circumstances.

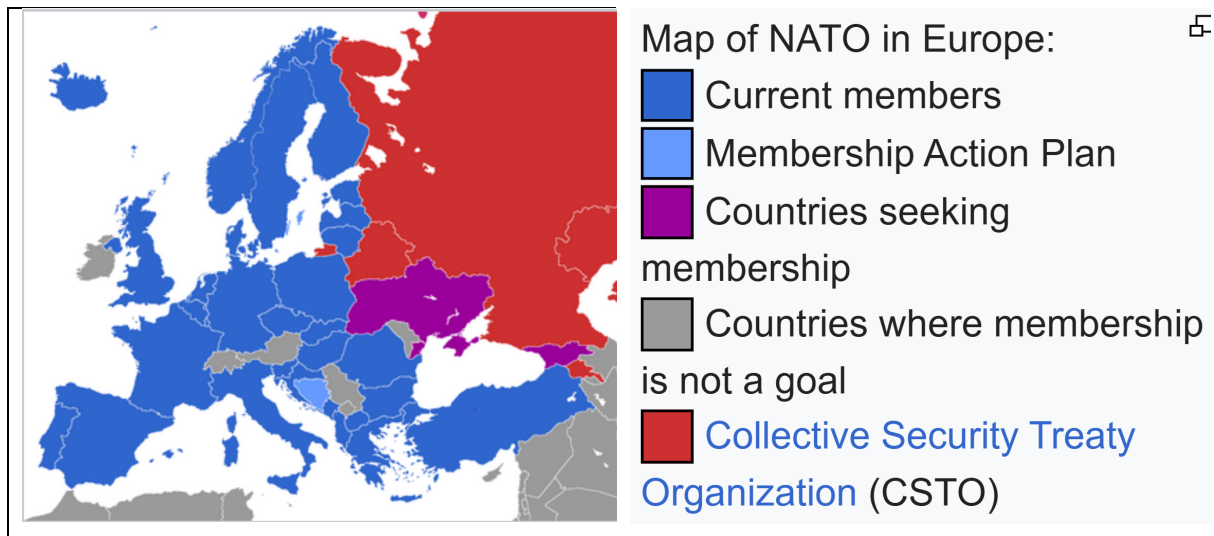
Political dynamics within member states significantly affect compliance with NATO standards. National priorities often diverge from NATO's collective goals, especially when governments prioritize domestic issues over defense spending or modernization. For example, members with less prominent threats to their security may choose to allocate resources to social programs or infrastructure rather than military readiness. Furthermore, politicians' intent to meet the given NATO standards can be inconsistent. Through cycles of presidency and elections, governments with different views and priorities cycle through their positions of power and administration. Therefore, those administrations with anti-military sentiments or those facing public

dissent to an increased amount of defense spending often do not prioritize their country's compliance. This is particularly evident in nations where defense investments are viewed as unnecessary or politically unpopular.

In addition, geopolitical considerations can complicate compliance. For example, although Türkiye is currently not popular with other member state governments due to its alleged undemocratic elections, its unique and advantageous geographic position near Russia sometimes results in policies that do not comply with NATO norms. Political tensions among members, such as disputes over shared defense strategies, can further undermine collective efforts to ensure uniform adherence to standards.

Economic constraints are among the most significant reasons for non-compliance. NATO's 2% GDP defense spending guideline can be difficult for economically weaker nations, like Slovenia and Albania, to achieve. For smaller member states, such as Montenegro, limited budgets constrain their ability to invest in the 20% budget goal of modernization, interoperability, and cyber defense. Countries facing economic instability, high public debt, or recession may struggle to prioritize defense spending over pressing domestic needs. Even wealthier NATO members face budgetary challenges, particularly when governments allocate defense funds to other sectors. For example, Greece in the past has struggled with many devastating forest fires and internal destruction, preventing it from being able to utilize that money elsewhere. Additionally, unexpected crises, such as economic downturns or public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, can divert resources away from defense expenditures. [11]

Technological differences between NATO members present another barrier to compliance. While leading nations like the United States and Germany possess cutting-edge military technology, smaller or less developed members often lack the resources to procure and maintain comparable equipment. Furthermore, technical expertise is unevenly distributed within Europe. Countries lacking strong defense industries face difficulty in adopting NATO standards, as they must rely on external suppliers or training programs to bridge the gap. Addressing these challenges requires targeted support from NATO, including financial assistance, training, and collaboration to promote standardization across all member states.



Wikipedia map chart of Europe and NATO member states

It is, however, extremely important to note that not a single NATO member state has left the treaty organization since NATO's founding. Moreover, of all the territories that have joined NATO as of 1990, all of them were previously part of the Warsaw Pact, except for Sweden and Finland. These are historic achievements for NATO in their attempt to maintain and preserve European and Western ideologies and policies in place. Having countries with previous communist ideologies and policies inside NATO means that strict controls and regulations supervising their funding and commitment overall to the organization have to be put in place in order to protect NATO's integrity.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
4 th April 1949	North Atlantic Treaty signed, NATO formed
18 th February 1952	Accession of Greece and Türkiye
6 th May 1955	Accession of Germany
May 1982	Accession of Spain
1999	First wave of post-Cold war enlargement
2004	Second wave of post-Cold war enlargement
1 st April 2009	Accession of Albania and Croatia
5 th September 2014	NATO heads of state agree to commit 2% of GDP towards NATO at the 2014 Wales Summit
28 th April 2017	Accession of Montenegro
12 th July 2018	Donald Trump threatens to leave NATO

27th March 2020	Accession of North Macedonia
4th April 2023	Accession of Finland
7th March 2024	Accession of Sweden

Major Parties Involved

Although not all member states are mentioned in this section, it is important to understand how countries have joined the alliance and their reasons behind it. It is also important to understand why other countries are in the process of applying and have stated their interest. [IV]

Belgium

The NATO headquarters and base of operations are based in Brussels. It is the political and administrative center of the alliance. It is where representatives from all the member states come together to make decisions on a consensus basis. It is, therefore, in Brussels where it is the delegations' responsibility to ensure all members are working to meet the standards agreed upon and what actions to take next, if otherwise.

Spain

Spain did not join until 1982 because of its dictatorship. However, as soon as the dictatorship ended, Spain served as a geographically advantageous territory, seeing as they had military bases in Spanish territories in Africa, the Canary Islands near Morocco, and Western Sahara, and they controlled the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea. However, due to multiple instances of corruption within the Spanish government, NATO has not been funded, and a current pro-Moroccan president has meant that Spain has been excluded from confidential intelligence for operation due to its critical lack of following NATO standards of compliance and collaboration.

Türkiye

Türkiye has been a controversial member of NATO since its ratification. It has been an autocratic state with rigged elections for decades and has disregarded many of NATO's principles and policies. NATO requires all armament to be equal to maintain compatibility and be able to cooperate with other armed forces in NATO, but Türkiye has bought weapons from numerous places such as Russia, which fundamentally disobeys NATO's principles, not to mention the rest of Europe's inability to operate those weapons. More recently, for example, Türkiye has been funding the supposed Syrian 'rebels' that dismantled Assad's government and has been invading northern parts

of Syria in attempts to gain control of Syrian territory. Above that, the Turkish government has been discriminating heavily against the Kurdish ethnic minority, driving them out of their homes. In 2022, Erdogan declared a self-inflicted Coup d'états, imprisoning many Turkish military personnel, which meant that Turkish troops working in Brussels and representing NATO did not know if they would be imprisoned when returning to Türkiye or what country they were representing and if they were still working for NATO. This meant that Turkish troops were unable to participate in NATO meetings.

Existing attempts for solutions

NATO relies on diplomacy to evaluate members' compliance through regular internal reviews, particularly the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP). This framework enables member states to assess their defense capabilities and identify gaps in alignment with NATO standards. The NDPP operates in five stages, beginning with setting political and military priorities and ending with assessing implementation. Through diplomacy and discussion, the treaty agrees on specific goals for each member state in order to improve their commitment, increase spending, and evaluate the areas of spending. This key point is underlined in Article 9 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Hereby, member states engage in periodic evaluations of each other's defense efforts. These reviews create a platform for accountability, transparency, and shared learning. For example, during the Annual Defense Review, nations report on their progress toward meeting the 2% GDP defense spending guideline and other targets. Peer reviews also facilitate collaboration, allowing states with more advanced capabilities to mentor and assist less developed members. NATO also encourages states' compliance with the goals by publishing annual economic reports of each member state to promote transparency and fairness.

NATO has also developed various support mechanisms to assist member states. Capacity-building programs are at the forefront of these efforts, offering training, expertise, and resources to help nations modernize their defense capabilities. For instance, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Estonia provides specialized training and resources to enhance cybersecurity capabilities among member states.

Financial assistance is another key support mechanism. NATO allocates funds outside of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB) through initiatives like the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP), which assists in the financing of essential infrastructure projects, such as command-and-control centers, airfields, communication systems, and other

military equipment. These investments aim to reduce disparities among members, ensuring that smaller or economically weaker states can meet operational standards. This is precisely what Donald Trump was against, as he felt that if a member state was unable to meet the standards, it was not the United States' responsibility to make up for other countries' shortcomings and that other countries were benefitting more than the USA.

NATO also fosters interoperability through joint exercises and training programs. These activities, such as the annual Trident Juncture exercise, test and enhance member states' ability to operate seamlessly in a collective defense scenario. By providing these opportunities, NATO helps members align their military practices with alliance standards. While NATO does not impose strict penalties for non-compliance, it employs softer mechanisms to encourage adherence. Political pressure is a significant tool, as non-compliance can lead to reputational damage and reduced influence within the alliance. For instance, nations that fail to meet the 2% defense spending target are often subject to public criticism during summits and reviews. Incentives are also used to promote compliance. NATO rewards committed members with increased leadership roles in decision-making processes, as well as greater opportunities to host key alliance operations or facilities. For example, nations that excel in cybersecurity or military readiness may be chosen to lead specialized task forces or host NATO's advanced training centers.

NATO's approach to compliance focuses more on collaboration and mutual support than punitive measures. The alliance prioritizes unity and collective defense over enforcing rigid penalties, reflecting its foundational principle of cooperative security. However, ongoing discussions about accountability mechanisms suggest that NATO may consider more formalized incentives or consequences in the future to ensure all members meet their obligations. By combining reviews, support programs, and strategic incentives, NATO creates a comprehensive framework to enhance compliance and strengthen the alliance. These mechanisms not only address existing disparities but also promote trust and cooperation, ensuring that all members contribute effectively to NATO's collective goals.

Possible solutions

Enhancing accountability within NATO requires reforms in monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. One approach is to refine the NATO Defense Planning Process (NDPP) by introducing more stringent assessment criteria and timelines. Implementing regular, transparent evaluations can

help identify non-compliance early and facilitate timely corrective actions. Additionally, establishing a centralized compliance monitoring body within NATO could provide consistent oversight and ensure that all member states adhere to agreed standards.

Incorporating a system of graduated responses to non-compliance may also prove effective. This system could range from diplomatic engagement and peer consultations to more formal measures, such as temporary restrictions on participation in certain NATO activities. By clearly defining the consequences of non-compliance, NATO can incentivize member states to prioritize adherence to alliance standards. Fostering deeper cooperation among NATO members is vital for achieving uniform compliance. Joint initiatives, shared funding, and strategic partnerships can bridge capability gaps and promote standardization.

One potential solution is the expansion of NATO's joint funding arrangements. By increasing contributions to common funding pools, such as the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP), member states can collectively finance critical infrastructure and capability development projects. This approach allows economically constrained nations to benefit from shared resources, facilitating compliance with NATO standards.

Additionally, NATO could enhance cooperative initiatives by promoting multinational development and procurement programs. Collaborative projects, such as the joint development of defense technologies or combined training exercises, can lead to cost savings and ensure interoperability among member forces. For example, NATO's efforts to standardize munitions across member states aim to reduce costs and enhance battlefield efficiency. Furthermore, establishing regional centers of excellence can facilitate the sharing of best practices and provide targeted support to member states facing specific challenges. These centers can offer specialized training, research, and development assistance tailored to the unique needs of different regions within the alliance. Strengthening partnerships with external organizations, such as the European Union, can also contribute to improved compliance. Collaborative efforts in areas like cyber defense, counter-terrorism, and crisis management can provide additional resources and expertise, supporting NATO members in meeting alliance standards.

In conclusion, by implementing reforms that strengthen accountability and fostering enhanced cooperation through joint initiatives, funding mechanisms, and strategic partnerships, NATO can address current compliance challenges. These future solutions will promote uniform adherence to alliance standards, ensuring that NATO remains a cohesive and effective force in maintaining international security.

Further Reading

[I] https://www.nato.int/cps/cz/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm

This link is the official declaration of all the NATO articles. This can be very helpful when understanding the 'standards' that NATO requires nations to meet

[II] https://www.nato.int/cps/ro/natohq/topics_67655.htm

This link explains NATO funding

[III] https://www.nato.int/cps/is/natohq/topics_49198.htm

This link holds statistics for almost all years of member states funding % GDP

[IV] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm

This link describes how different member states joined NATO

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